



Media Release

Health Risk Assessment or Toxic Use Reduction?

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Janice Schroeder: (510) 524-2724/ (510) 644-6130

Beck Cowles: (510) 548-2220 x233

West Berkeley Alliance for Clean Air and Safe Jobs volunteer Janice Schroeder is concerned that "Pacific Steel Casting's Health Risk Assessment will do little more than provide risk number mumbo-jumbo without compelling cleanup. The Alliance urges Pacific Steel to implement a comprehensive Toxic Use Reduction program, which requires the industry to become fully transparent and accountable to the community, to use best housekeeping practices in all operations, and to fully modernize the facility. It's time for cleanup, not just guesstimates."

Dr. Michael Wilson of the University of California at Berkeley School of Public Health has said that Health Risk Assessment is not an effective tool, while Toxic Use Reduction has proven much more promising. A Toxic Use Reduction bill was recently introduced in the State Assembly and is under consideration.

Phyllis Fox, a pro-bono City of Berkeley consultant to City Councilwoman Maio and Mayor Tom Bates, said that the Health Risk Assessment process is "a sham." Ms. Fox was an industry environmental engineer who turned environmentalist. She says that industry can tweak equipment until emissions numbers are abnormally low, and then run official source tests that show numbers at or below allowable thresholds. The normal emissions numbers are not recorded, and the low-balled numbers show that the toxics measured are within legally "acceptable levels." Then industry need not do anything to clean up! On top of that, industries pay contractors to perform Health Risk Assessments; if the contractors were not providing risk assessments satisfactory to industry, would they remain in business? Recall that tobacco industry scientists were unable to find smoking health risks....

Under pressure from the community, Pacific Steel Casting installed a carbon adsorption system at Plant 3 this past October 2006, but odor complaints continue to be made by community members to the Bay Area Air Quality Management District (Air District). Finally, all three plants have carbon adsorption systems operating, but the pollution problem has not been solved. The Air District has issued three Notices of Violation (NOV) to Pacific Steel Casting; one in March, one in June and one in July of 2007. According to the Air District's March 2007 NOV report, the inability of the pollution controls to resolve community complaints left Pacific Steel's environmental engineer Christina Chan, "disappointed there were odors from Plant 3." The NOV's issued in June and July were attributed to Pacific Steel's Plants 1 and 2. The noxious odors emanating from all three plants at Pacific Steel Casting remain a problem, and other toxics emitted by the facility do not have an odor. When people inhale particulates from Pacific Steel Casting, even at levels that can't be smelled, it can contribute to asthma and other serious problems. The community is very concerned and upset by the lack of effective action taken by Pacific Steel Casting, the City of Berkeley and the Air District to finally solve this three-decade-old pollution problem.

The organization Global Community Monitor has used some of the \$25,000 grant it received from the Air District to conduct particulate air testing in the community surrounding Pacific Steel. The preliminary test results are very alarming, especially regarding the very high levels of nickel and manganese found in the first 22 tests analyzed. More tests are underway now.

The City of Berkeley has adopted the precautionary principle, which means the City is supposed to first do no harm rather than wait and see how people are affected by hazards. Considering the thousands of community complaints against Pacific Steel's pollution called in to the Air District over the past three decades, the large number of Notices of Violation issued to Pacific Steel, the Chemicals of Potential Concern listed in Pacific Steel's own emissions inventory report and the health complaints (physical and nuisance) many community members have when exposed to Pacific Steel's toxic emissions, it is past time to protect the community and workers. Children, pregnant women, the elderly and environmentally sensitive people are the most vulnerable to these toxics; they live, work and attend school/daycare in close

proximity to the three Pacific Steel plants. Will Pacific Steel, the City of Berkeley and the Air District continue to hide behind the flawed Health Risk Assessment process to avoid resolving this serious pollution problem?

Government regulators have been doing a poor job protecting the community. The Alliance urges the Berkeley City Council to hold a public hearing regarding Pacific Steel Casting, to review Pacific Steel Casting's use permits, to enforce existing City codes in response to all violations, and to conduct air testing for Pacific Steel Casting's signature heavy metals and other toxic chemicals in the community (all measures which the council voted for in March of 2007). The Air District needs to move from a Health Risk Assessment approach to a Toxic Use Reduction approach for known industrial polluters, to reform the ineffective Air District complaint guidelines, and to have Air District inspectors respond to all complaints 24/7 in West Berkeley and surrounding areas.

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The West Berkeley Alliance for Clean Air and Safe Jobs is a network of neighbors; businesses; and environmental, social justice, and children's organizations in Berkeley, Albany, El Cerrito, and Kensington allied to preserve safe jobs in West Berkeley and the East Bay while preventing noxious pollution.

<http://www.westberkeleyalliance.org>

westberkeleyalliance@yahoo.com