



West Berkeley Alliance for Clean Air and Safe Jobs

Media Release

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Independent Tests of Dust Fallout Point to Toxic Fingerprint of Troubled Berkeley Steel Plant

Berkeley, CA - New independent tests of dust fallout from the West Berkeley neighborhood surrounding Pacific Steel Casting Company (PSC) point to the known toxic fingerprint of the troubled facility. Frustrated by the company's failure to release a legally mandated Health Risk Assessment, which required tests of pollution sources at PSC, community members decided to do their own tests.

The West Berkeley Alliance for Clean Air and Safe Jobs (WBA) brought testing equipment and trainers to the community, helping neighbors who are impacted by the noxious emissions from Pacific Steel to conduct EPA standard tests for toxic dust. "I am a health educator and parent who suffers physical symptoms when I am exposed to Pacific Steel's emissions. It is deeply troubling, but not surprising, to learn of toxic fallout in neighborhoods around the industry. It's past time to protect the community, especially children, pregnant women, and elders who are most vulnerable to the pollution," said Janice Schroeder of the WBA. The dust testing follows a 2005 WBA air test near Pacific Steel, which found levels of toxic Formaldehyde 24 times above the safe level (EPA region VI screening threshold).

WBA, the Ecology Center, and community members continue to urge the City of Berkeley, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District and PSC to protect workers and the community by cleaning up their practices, substituting non-toxic materials in place of toxic chemicals, and preventing toxic chemicals from entering the community. A community protest is planned for November 11, 2006 at 11am, meeting at 9th St and Gilman St in Berkeley.

According to Denny Larson of Global Community Monitor, a non-profit that trains communities to do their own toxics tests: "We tested for 11 metals known to come from PSC at 6 residential locations. In 5 of 6 samples, the tests found 3 or more target metals. In 4 of 6 samples the tests found 4 or more metals. In two samples, the tests found 7 and 8 metals that comprise PSC's emission fingerprint. This is credible evidence of toxic fallout of a serious nature."

Mark Cherniak, of Science for Citizens in Eugene, Oregon commented: "Analysis of dust on outdoor surfaces found unsafe levels of lead near the Pacific Steel Casting facility. Dust lead levels exceeded the amount deemed safe by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Children exposed to these surfaces would have an increased risk of IQ deficits and other neurological impacts of lead exposure; adults exposed to these surfaces may have an increased risk of cardiovascular disease (heart attack and stroke) associated with the effects of lead on blood pressure. Dust lead levels were associated with elevated dust manganese levels and proximity to the Pacific Steel Casting facility, pointing to that facility as the source of lead contamination."

The dust tests found toxic metals such as lead and manganese - metals in PSC's pollution, which has increased, according to data the industry reported to the Bay Area Air Quality Management District.

According to an analysis by Michael P. Wilson, Ph.D, MPH, Assistant Research Scientist at UC Berkeley's Center for Occupational and Environmental Health, PSC reported increases in emissions of nickel, lead, zinc, and manganese during the period 2002-2004. Nickel and lead are listed under Proposition 65 in California.

Wilson explains, "These emissions consist of a number of highly toxic heavy metals that persist in the environment, accumulate in human tissues, and are uniquely hazardous to children. Manganese, lead, and nickel fall into this group; they are toxic to the human neurological system, they are hazardous to fetal development, and/or they produce a range of other toxic effects. The lead findings are of particular concern and warrant immediate follow-up and action."

Although PSC has recently installed carbon filters on Plant 3 that they claim will decrease odorous emissions, the WBA challenges PSC to also prevent all toxic emissions, and prove their pollution has been eliminated.

West Berkeley Alliance for Clean Air and Safe Jobs, www.westberkeleyalliance.org

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