



Public Comments

A critique of Pacific Steel's flawed HRA

To:

Scott Lutz, Air Quality Engineering Manager
Bay Area Air Quality Management District
939 Ellis St.
San Francisco, CA 94109

Cc:

Jack Broadbent, APCO
Brian Bateman, Director of Engineering

Subject:

Public Comments re: Pacific Steel Casting Company's HRA

January 27, 2008

Dear Mr.Lutz,

The following are the public comments addressed to the Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD) submitted by the West Berkeley Alliance for Clean Air and Safe Jobs (Alliance) regarding the recent Health Risk Assessment (HRA) for Pacific Steel Casting Company (PSC):

- The HRA in its entirety should be written in language easily accessible to the general public (8th grade reading level) as one can find in journalism or business publications.
- Pacific Steel Casting's HRA (especially appendices) was not easy for the average person to access due to the use of dense, user-unfriendly, multi-megabyte page images rather than pages of well-laid-out, searchable text. An accessible, concise yet comprehensive point-by-point explanation in lay terms, in addition to the executive summary, should have been made easily available to the public.
- While PSC appears to have done what is legally mandated, because the HRA only examines a limited list of chemicals the company has submitted an HRA that is not comprehensive.
- 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.”

- Industry pays private consulting firms to develop the modeling, protocols and the final report so consultants stay in business delivering HRA test results at or below acceptable threshold levels.
- How are capture efficiency/fugitive assumptions determined? Do they assume no custom use of equipment; just manufacturers’ optimistic efficiency estimates? Only one baghouse was tested for control efficiency. The other baghouses may vary in mechanics and configuration, which may result in different control efficiencies. It is necessary to test at all baghouses and other sources.
- The PAH Methodology should be based on stack data, not ambient data which was then used in the HARP model.
- Source test data from 1989 was used along with 2005-2006 data, even though the Alliance raised this concern in public comments submitted to the BAAQMD previously; those previous comments are incorporated by reference, in their entirety, into these public comments. Over a 15-year period, raw materials, operations and chemistry changes could have led to changes in the emissions. Comprehensive source testing should have been conducted in 2005-2006.
- Detailed explanations should be included in the HRA to address variations in PSC’s seasonal operations. What are the differences in seasonal operations and how could they impact the modeling and thus impact the health risk evaluation?
- ENVIRON did not use the Air Resources Board’s program to convert AERMOD files into text files that can be inputted into HARP. How could ENVIRON’s custom methodology alter the final HRA results?
- Maximum exposure for PSC workers who are also exposed by living near PSC is not factored into the HRA calculations. According to industry, 85% of employees live within 15 miles of the workplace. The HRA methodology should not include the assumption that workers and residents living near the facility are entirely separate populations.
- In the HRA calculations, maximum exposure for sensitive receptors does not include a produce pathway (West Berkeley day care providers, schools, and family day cares often have small vegetable gardens; children eat produce, as well as soil, containing emissions). Also, it is unclear if vegetables other than root and leafy vegetables (including exposed and protected vegetables) were evaluated. This requires clarification.
- According to the online California Air Resources Board “Hot Spots” Program District Prioritization Scores and Risk Threshold Values, last updated July 17, 2007, the BAAQMD sets a non-cancer notification level of >10 unlike many other Air Districts in California; most other Air Districts in California have a notification level of 1 or 0.5. The level >10 is arbitrary and not sufficiently health protective.

- There are inherent flaws in the HRA process, including the following:
 - All chemicals are not measured. For instance, the HRA does not sample mobile sources and particulate matter (PM); the HRA is used to estimate levels of Toxic Air Contaminants (TAC's).
 - There is not analysis of cumulative and synergistic interactions between chemicals from PSC's sources as well as between chemicals from PSC's sources and other sources in the community.
 - Comprehensive Toxic Use Reduction (TUR) is not incorporated into the HRA process; limited remediation is only necessary if emissions exceed thresholds. Since emission levels were not found to be above thresholds set by the BAAQMD, no cleanup is required.
 - There is not continuous monitoring of emissions at all of PSC's pollution sources throughout the entire facility (including Plants 1, 2, and 3).

- Manganese levels from PSC actually may present an adverse health impact to neighbors. Global Community Monitor, with funding from the BAAQMD, has conducted community air testing and found alarmingly high levels of nickel and manganese in the vicinity of PSC in the West Berkeley community. OEHHA's proposed change in the non-cancer health risk standards for long-term exposure to manganese – from 0.2 microgram per cubic meter of air to 0.03 microgram per cubic meter – and OEHHA's proposal to set the REL 8-hour standard at 0.05 ug/m³ would impact PSC's HRA results. The BAAQMD should analyze PSC's HRA using the OEHHA proposed manganese risk level changes.

In conclusion, the West Berkeley Alliance for Clean Air and Safe Jobs strongly urges the BAAQMD not to simply approve Pacific Steel Casting Company's Health Risk Assessment, but to instead regulate aggressively. In the past ten years, the BAAQMD's implementation of the HRA process has only required some drycleaners to abate emissions. It is past time for the BAAQMD to regulate large industry in a way that guarantees toxic use reduction and protects community health.

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