Health Risk Facts

West Berkeley Alliance for Clean Air and Safe Jobs

The West Berkeley Alliance for Clean Air and Safe Jobs is focused on getting Pacific Steel Casting Company (PSC) to clean up. PSC says its operations are safe, and that the Health Risk Assessment (HRA) they are producing will say so too. But the consultants that designed the HRA were paid by PSC, and PSC was allowed weeks to remove "trade secrets" before turning over only partial HRA data to the Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD). PSC and BAAQMD also signed a backroom, no-public-input-allowed settlement agreement allowing PSC to add "odor neutralizers" to emissions, masking PSC's odor but not removing toxics.

What is Pacific Steel Doing to Our Air?

PSC Second Worst Cancer Risk

A Pacific Institute analysis shows that, of all Bay Area TRI (Toxic Release Inventory) facilities ranked for carcinogen risk-related impacts in 1997, Pacific Steel Casting Company ranked 2nd highest for carcinogen risk out of 30 industries.1 In 1997, Pacific Steel was far from peak production. According to Pacific Steel, their production levels have been dramatically increasing since 2000.

EPA Shows PSC in Worst 1% of Health Risks

Dr. Michael Wilson of the University of California Berkeley's School of Public Health states in a 2006 report that from 2002 - 2003 Pacific Steel Casting showed a 38% increase of criteria air pollutants and an 84% increase of toxic air pollutants, and that the U.S. EPA stationary source risk ratings for 2,171 industrial sites in six Bay Area counties ranked Pacific Steel Casting as the 12th highest risk.2

Got Asthma?

A 2004 report by the Oakland/Berkeley Asthma Coalition states that Berkeley has an asthma hospitalization rate 250% the national Healthy People 2000 objective, disproportionately among people of color. The study also states that West Berkeley has the highest rate of asthma emergency room visits in all of Berkeley, in part because, "These areas are more heavily impacted by industry that releases a multitude of pollutants into the air…."3

PSC Must Come Clean and Clean Up

PSC's carbon adsorption device will filter out odors if used properly, but not all toxic pollution. It's time for PSC to be a good neighbor by implementing comprehensive Toxic Use Reduction (re-engineering to use few toxic chemicals to begin with), Continuous Emissions Monitoring with easy public access (to prove PSC reduced toxics and to continuously check that PSC is still clean), and full disclosure of all pollution data.


2 Michael Wilson, Ph.D. March 30, 2006 document about Pacific Steel Casting and Toxic Use Reduction. Document redistributed on request by Alliance (see contact information below).

Dear Director Henderson,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment on the proposed regulation 23-003 Statewide Notification of Agricultural Use of Restricted Materials. The undersigned 133 signatories, representing a broad coalition of environmental, EJ and sustainable agriculture groups, community-based organizations, farmers, unions, and academics applaud the Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) for this welcome step toward transparency in agricultural pesticide use, for which highly impacted agricultural communities have long advocated.

Thank you for incorporating community feedback into DPR’s “Spray Days” pilot notification program. The program includes many features that we would like to see included in the statewide program. We ask that DPR's regulation include sufficient detail to guarantee the adoption in the statewide program of these essential components, including: 1) a fully public and transparent website that does not require registration of any kind to access; 2) the chemical and product names associated with pesticide applications covered by the regulation, along with links to potential health impacts from exposure to those pesticides; 3) a visual representation of upcoming applications on a map of the state, with the ability to zoom in for greater granularity; 4) an option for visitors to sign up to receive alerts by text or email; 5) additional information on pesticides and community health and 6) provision of all information in the notification system in at least English and Spanish, with flexibility to add additional languages.

However, we are united in calling for the proposal to be amended to include:

1. The exact location of applications of restricted material pesticides, and

2. An annual and enforceable community review and revision process to make changes as needed.

Despite extensive feedback from environmental justice stakeholders, this draft does not provide the exact location of planned pesticide applications, only the Public Land Survey (PLS) square mile section. As DPR has heard repeatedly from residents of four communities that hosted notification pilots in 2022, this type of notice is insufficient. It does not provide the information that would enable community residents to take steps to protect themselves and their families.
Residents of the pilot communities reported receiving so many notices that they either ignored the notifications, or became too afraid to leave the house. People understand that the closer they are to a pesticide application, the higher the risk of harm. They are justifiably even more concerned about pesticide drift from the field next door than from a field a mile across town. Residents of agricultural communities, especially pregnant women, also want to know the exact location in order to avoid application sites. The applications may be many miles away, but could be near or on the route to work or school or a favorite family park. If all the public knows is the PLS section, they simply do not have enough information to take appropriate safety precautions.

County agricultural commissioners already know the exact locations of restricted material pesticide applications in advance; this information should not be withheld from the public. We know of no other public health alert system that deliberately excludes known location information.

DPR has stated that the exact location cannot be provided because this information is not standardized in the Notices of Intent (NOI), the forms that growers are required to submit to the county agricultural commissioner prior to use of a Restricted Material pesticide. DPR has the authority to standardize this information during the rulemaking. Indeed, DPR will be adding the new requirement that growers submit their NOIs online. This is the time to amend those online NOIs to include the same location information as is already included in the permits to which the NOIs refer. If DPR will not standardize location information, they should commit to publishing the location information in whatever non-standardized format is provided, or to publishing the permits along with the NOIs.

This proposal is, as your Department has noted in meetings with environmental justice stakeholders, just a first step. Much more needs to be done to ensure that Californians are aware of nearby hazardous chemical use. In meetings with CalEPA and DPR, environmental justice groups have been told that the regulation will include an iterative review and revision process based on community feedback. However, this draft includes no such commitment to review and revise, only a report by DPR staff after three years.

This is not good enough. It is vital that DPR keeps the promise it made to communities that this small step toward transparency will be accompanied by an enforceable commitment to make improvements in the future.
The lack of an iterative review and revision process in the regulation is particularly concerning given the lack of exact location information, and the likelihood that this deficit will harm the program’s effectiveness.

In conclusion, we urge DPR to include the exact location of applications of restricted material pesticides, and to commit to establishing and convening an annual community advisory panel, composed of impacted community members tasked with making enforceable recommendations for improvements to the program. We also call on DPR to include the necessary level of detail in the regulation to ensure that those components that are critical to a robust notification system, as modeled in the Spray Days pilot, are incorporated into the statewide system.

Sincerely,

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Californians for Pesticide Reform

And the following cosignatories:

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