

Emanuel vows crackdown on air pollution from refinery waste Mayor seeking tougher regulations on petroleum coke storage

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Breaking weeks of silence amid a flurry of action by state and federal officials, Mayor Rahm Emanuel vowed Monday to crack down on air pollution from dusty piles of refinery waste on the Southeast Side.

The mayor's office announced in an email that Emanuel is ordering the Department of Public Health to adopt "strict regulations on the maintenance and storage of petroleum coke stored in massive uncovered piles along the Calumet River just south of the Chicago Skyway bridge.

The email was short on specifics but promised that three storage terminals will be required to take more aggressive action to tamp down thick black dust that blows into surrounding neighborhoods and washes into the river.

All of the petroleum coke from the nearby BP refinery in Whiting is stored by KCBX Terminals, a company controlled by industrialists Charles and David Koch. The company owns two sites on the river, one along 100th Street and the other between 108th and 111th streets.

A third terminal at 106th Street and the river is owned by Hammond-based Beemsterboer Slag Co.

Residents in the East Side and South Deering neighborhoods say chronic dust problems at the facilities have worsened since the owners started storing more petroleum coke, also known as petcoke.

Emanuel's announcement comes after the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency last week ordered monitors erected around the three sites to measure lung-damaging particulate matter. Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan has sued KCBX and the Illinois EPA has filed a similar complaint against Beemsterboer.

More petcoke is on the way. By the end of the year, BP is expected to complete an overhaul of the Whiting refinery that will increase its output of the high-sulfur, high-carbon waste to 2.2 million tons from 700,000 tons a year.

Beemsterboer officials have not responded to interview requests. KCBX says it is spending \$10 million to overhaul its storage terminals and improve its "dust suppression capabilities."