

## **Southeast Side residents vent about petcoke at IEPA meeting**

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Chicago Sun-Times (suntimes.com) – Tina Sfondeles

Hundreds of Southeast Side residents screamed, pounded church pews and demanded answers Thursday night from the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency about the growing mounds of black dust “petcoke” coming into their neighborhood.

Agency officials met with residents at the Eastside United Methodist Church at 110th and Ewing to inform the community of KCBX Terminals Co.’s request for a permit revision to add conveyors and equipment to its facility near 107th and Burley.

But residents — who have seen mountains of refinery waste called petcoke grow as tall as five stories high near the Calumet River — were out of patience. They say KCBX and other nearby companies are affecting their health and their everyday lives.

“Everybody here is against it,” one resident shouted just 10 minutes into the two-hour meeting. “It is very simple. We don’t like it. We don’t want it. It’s making us sick. What else do you need?”

Brad Frost, a community relations representative for the IEPA, first stood up to request formal complaints about specific incidents from residents to aid in the agency’s investigation of KCBX. But residents were fed up.

“We are breathing this stuff every single day. That’s the incident,” said Sue Garza, a nearby resident who interrupted Frost. “And no one asked us if we wanted to have these piles dumped in the first place . . . We have been a toxic dumping ground here for over 100 years. We don’t want it anymore.”

On Nov. 4, Attorney General Lisa Madigan filed suit against KCBX for alleged air pollution caused by petcoke and coal at its location along the Calumet River. The suit alleges the growing mounds are sending clouds of black dust into nearby neighborhoods.

Homeowners filed a class-action lawsuit on Oct. 31 targeting the owners and the operators of three storage sites for coal and petcoke in the 2900 block of East 106th, the 3200 block of East 100th and the 10700 block of South Burley, including KCBX, KMR, Beemsterboer, DTE, Calumet Transload and Koch Carbon. **NOTE:** The homeowners in the class-action lawsuit are being represented by attorney Tom Zimmerman of the Zimmerman Law Offices, in Chicago.

Frost told the crowd the agency has a week to decide whether to allow KCBX to renew its permit.

But residents wanted a more immediate solution.

Ald. John Pope (10th) tried to calm the crowd and described the importance of the legal proceedings.

But the screams from the audience continued.

Many shouted “move the piles.” Others held signs that read “Petcoke is toxic.”

Olga Bautista stood up to ask the IEPA representatives and lawyers from the attorney general’s office to “set a precedent” and explore an emergency injunction to shut down the plants.

“We sound very angry, but we’re really here for the love of our families and our neighbors and our community,” Bautista said. “Can you be our champions?”