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ILLINOIS

ASSISTANT MAJORITY LEADER

United States Senate

Washington, DC 20510–1304

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

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COMMITTEE ON RULES AND ADMINISTRATION

November 12, 2013

The Honorable Gina McCarthy
Administrator
US Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator McCarthy:

I am writing to call your attention to a serious environmental hazard in Illinois and to ask your immediate response to it.

According to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) records, there are almost twenty facilities in Illinois with permits to handle petroleum coke. Many Illinoisans living around these facilities are regularly being exposed to pollution that contains heavy metals and carcinogenic materials.

The Chicago Tribune and other news outlets have published articles highlighting the harmful public health and environmental effects being caused by the large mounds of petroleum coke that are stored at shipping facilities near the Calumet River. The articles report that residents in Southeast Chicago have seen clouds of black dust swirling above the piles and invading their neighborhoods—forcing many in the area to keep their children inside with the windows closed to avoid breathing in the toxic particles.

Air quality monitors in the areas surrounding petroleum coke facilities often register record high levels of particulate matter—which is known to aggravate asthma, lead to premature deaths in people with heart or lung disease, and cause nonfatal heart attacks.

In light of these extraordinarily dangerous environmental impacts associated with petroleum coke in Illinois, I am calling on you to respond as quickly as possible and tell me the authorities USEPA has to monitor and regulate petroleum coke and the actions you are taking. Specifically, what steps has USEPA taken to ensure that facilities handling petroleum coke are complying with Clean Air Act regulations—including the National Ambient Air Quality Standards—and mitigating any potential health and safety issues? Working with the state Attorney General's office, the Illinois EPA has issued violation notices to several facilities with fugitive dust emissions. Has USEPA taken any similar actions on the Federal level?

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It is clear that public exposure to petroleum coke dust particles can lead to serious health, safety, and environmental issues. Therefore, I am calling on the USEPA to exercise all available authorities to limit Illinoisans' exposure to petroleum coke.

Sincerely,

Richard J. Durbin
U.S. Senator