



U.S. EPA Pollution Work Advances in Neighborhoods

Pilsen/Little Village Environmental Projects

Chicago, Illinois

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For more information

For questions, comments or for more information about U.S. EPA's environmental work in the Pilsen and Little Village neighborhoods you can contact:

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Neighborhood groups

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Little Village Environmental Justice
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The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is busy this year working on four environmental projects that will protect the health and safety of residents in the Pilsen and Little Village neighborhoods of Chicago. In the most pressing matter, U.S. EPA plans to take emergency action this spring to clean up high lead levels in the soil at the former Loewenthal Metals site at 947 W. Cullerton St. Also tackling the soil lead problem, the federal Agency will be seeking permission to take yard samples to test for lead in properties around West Cermak Road in the Pilsen neighborhood.

In another environmental project, U.S. EPA is supervising the removal of pollution at a former manufactured gas plant (MGP) in Little Village and is discussing with Peoples Gas to speed up the investigation of the utility's 22nd Street MGP site. U.S. EPA also measured dust and radiation levels around Midwest Generation's closed Fisk and Crawford generating stations. Here's a summary about each of these projects:

Loewenthal Metals cleanup

The site just west of Interstate 90/94 operated as a lead and zinc smelter during the 1940s. The now-empty lot contains dangerous levels of lead that could make people sick if they were exposed to the contamination. The city of Chicago erected a fence around the property last year. Due to the imminent health threat, U.S. EPA can use its authority under federal law to conduct what's called a "time-critical removal action." The property owner has not cooperated, forcing the federal Agency to go to court to obtain access for sampling and cleanup work. U.S. EPA will also sample soil at some properties next to Loewenthal Metals to determine the extent of the pollution.

Lead testing in Pilsen

U.S. EPA wants to know if industries over the years polluted Pilsen yards with lead or other hazardous metals. The federal Agency this spring and summer will be asking property owners to sign access agreements so inspectors can take dirt samples from their yards. The target area is centered on South Throop Street and West Cermak Road in the vicinity of Perez Elementary School and Benito Juarez Community Academy. Most of the properties of interest lie north of West Cermak Road. Not all properties will be sampled, but U.S. EPA needs signed access agreements from owners before investigators can enter. Sampling is done at no charge to the property owner and involves digging a few small holes in the ground to pick up some soil for laboratory testing. The ground will be restored after the samples are taken. Property owners and tenants will receive a copy of the sampling results. If lead or other pollution is found at unsafe levels the federal Agency will recommend follow-up action.

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Peoples Gas sites

Manufactured gas plants produced gas from coal in the 19th and early 20th centuries before natural gas came into widespread use for cooking and heating. The trouble is, the plants left behind hazardous waste and byproducts including tar, sludge and oil. Several of these substances could potentially cause cancer if people were exposed to them over long periods. Fortunately, the pollution has remained buried for many years, but U.S. EPA is making an effort to find and clean up the old MGP sites. The Peoples Gas Crawford Station at 3500 S. Pulaski Road in Little Village and Peoples' 22nd Street Station at 2200 S. Racine Ave. in Pilsen are two of 11 identified MGP sites in Chicago.

U.S. EPA has already supervised the removal of more than 350,000 tons of pollutants from the Crawford Station MGP. Cleanup work on another section of the site began this year and will continue through summer 2014.

The 22nd Street Station underwent cleanup activities focused on the ComEd-owned portion of the site. However, additional field investigation is needed to determine the extent of contamination elsewhere on the site. The federal Agency and responsible party Peoples Gas / Integrys are discussing how to speed up the investigation which will help Peoples Gas design a cleanup plan for the site.

Air and radiation testing

Pilsen and Little Village residents expressed a lot of concern about possible lingering pollution issues from Midwest Generation's coal-fired generating plants that closed last year. The Fisk Station is at 1111 W. Cermak road while the Crawford Station is located at 3501 S. Pulaski Road. Both sites contain large buildings and electrical generating infrastructure.

To answer the concerns, U.S. EPA tested for dust and radiation in and around both power plants. The air monitoring determined dust concentrations were at levels typical for Chicago. Radiation levels measured around houses near the facilities were also at expected normal background concentrations for a Chicago residential neighborhood.

Community outreach

U.S. EPA employees have maintained ongoing contact and discussions with Pilsen and Little Village representatives and residents. The federal Agency holds meetings and open houses to discuss the environmental work, publishes fact sheets like this one, and posts information on the Internet. See the shaded boxes on the front and this page for names of people you can contact for questions, comments or for more information.

U.S. EPA project managers

For technical questions or information about the Pilsen and Little Village environmental work, you can contact these team members:

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