

## **Illinois officials under fire for pet coke issue**

**November 15, 2013**

WBEZ 91.5 (wbez.org) - Michael Puente

Carrying protest signs and chanting “move the piles,” more than a hundred Southeast Side and South Deering residents arrived at East Side United Methodist Church on Thursday evening to demand action from the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency.

They want the IEPA to force the shutdown of KCBX Terminal Inc. and other related companies for their involvement in the handling, storage and processing of tons of pet coke and coal ash.

The substances have been blowing around the neighborhood in recent months, damaging homes and affecting health, residents say.

The coal ash is transported to the KCBX site off the Calumet River from local steel companies. The pet coke, meanwhile, is transported to the site from Whiting, Indiana, the home of oil giant BP.

BP generates about two thousand tons of petroleum coke every day, but by early next year, that is expected to increase to six thousand tons of pet coke every day. Much of it will be transported by truck and rail to KCBX, a company owned by the wealthy Koch Brothers.

BP has a contract with KCBX to store the pet coke, which is later shipped by barge to countries like China and Mexico as a cheap fuel alternative.

Southeast Chicago resident Carol Bernatis says the pet coke should stay with BP in Whiting.

“We need state laws to keep Indiana from transporting that stuff into Illinois,” Bernatis said. “Keep this stuff in Indiana where it belongs.”

Ken Page, Environmental Justice Officer for the IEPA, says despite recent media reports of blowing and drifting pet coke, the state agency has yet to receive one documented complaint about it.

That drew jeers from the crowd, as did Page’s announcement that the IEPA has until next week to decide whether to grant KCBX a permit to operate.

“You have to give them an answer in one week?” asked an incredulous Guillermo Rodriguez. “Where were you when this all started, when this all began, where were you then?”

Page says it’s likely a decision about KCBX’s permit will be delayed beyond next week.

KCBX also contracts with other local companies for assistance, such as Beemsterboer Slag Company, of Hammond, Indiana. The Illinois EPA has filed a complaint with Beemsterboer for allegedly violating environmental laws. BP does not have a contract with Beemsterboer.

The Illinois Attorney General's office filed a lawsuit against KCBX last week on behalf of the Illinois EPA. KCBX is also facing a lawsuit by four residents who say they're suffering health issues because of the blowing pet coke. **NOTE:** The residents in the class action lawsuit are being represented by attorney Tom Zimmerman of the Zimmerman Law Offices, in Chicago.

Although it did not send anyone to attend Thursday night's meeting, a KCBX spokesman says it is working to correct the problem.

"The pending permit with IEPA is part of our efforts to enhance operations at the site since we purchased it in December 2012. This coincides with more than \$10 million in upgrades currently being implemented to improve the site's dust suppression capabilities. The permit does not include any increase in the amount of material to be handled on-site nor does it change currently permitted emissions levels," stated KCBX spokesman Paul Baltzer.

"We have a long history of working cooperatively with the EPA and the IEPA on assets we've purchased, making significant investments to upgrade the operations," Baltzer said. "This demonstrates that we put a priority on regulatory compliance and managing operations in a manner that protects the health and safety of employees, the community, and the environment."

10th Ward Alderman John Pope says the city and state are both considering forcing KCBX to enclose its facility so that the pet coke cannot escape. Enclosed facilities are the norm in Detroit and in California where pet coke dust has also been an issue.

"We're trying to work with the IEPA and the attorney general to make the most immediate action to stop the action that is occurring right now — which is the dust emissions and activities which is not in compliance with the law," Pope said.

"Long term folks don't want the piles here. We have to figure out what we really can do to either not get them in but if they are going to remain here how they can be controlled and not produce the kinds of problems that everyone is concerned about."