

U.S. EPA investigating ‘petcoke’ matter

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CBS Chicago (chicago.cbslocal.com)

As the ordered Chicago’s public health department to draft regulations for dusty refinery waste from sites along the Calumet River, a group of protesters was taking their concerns to the head of the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency.

WBBM Newsradio’s Regine Schlesinger reports a group of about a dozen protesters wanted Illinois EPA Director Lisa Bonnett to listen to their concerns about KCBX Terminals, a company that stores petroleum coke – or petcoke – a thick black dust that is a waste product from the oil refining process.

KCBX stores petcoke from the nearby BP refinery in Whiting, Ind., at two sites on the Southeast Side.

Tom Shepherd, president of the Southeast Environmental Task Force, said those who live near the KCBX sites have found, when the wind is blowing hard – as it was one day last summer – petcoke gets all over everything in the area.

“Folks that had been picnicking, they’ve sent us pictures of their fruit salads with all specks, look like pepper, all inside their fruit salad. They had to pick up their picnic and go back inside. Young children who were at a Little League field playing ball had to scurry away, and get indoors,” Shepherd said.

The Illinois Attorney General’s office has sued KCBX, which is already the target of Illinois EPA and U.S. EPA investigations.

Mayor Rahm Emanuel has ordered the Chicago Department of Public Health to draft “strict regulations on the maintenance and storage” of petcoke, which is stored in huge uncovered piles along the Calumet River, at the two KCBX sites, and a third site owned by Hammond-based Beemsterboer Slag Co.

Before officially adopting any rules on petcoke, the city would first hold a 30-day public comment period after the regulations are drafted. The mayor’s office said the rules would require companies that store petcoke to take new steps to prevent the emission of petcoke particles onto neighboring property, and to prevent it from getting into the river or other waterways.

