

Residents File Suit Against South Side Waste Carriers

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Homeowners in two Chicago neighborhoods are filing a class action lawsuit against a South Side company they allege is contaminating their property with hazardous coal and petroleum coke.

Several residents in the South Deering and East Side neighborhoods have filed suit against KCBX Terminals Co., owned by the Koch brothers, and George J. Beemsterboer Inc., which stockpile petroleum coke, or “petcoke,” along the Calumet River.

According to a release from Zimmerman Law Offices, the residents claim the companies store the petcoke in incovered mounds up to five-stories high and winds “blow black clouds of coal and petcoke dust into the air and onto homes, businesses, yards, and streets in the neighborhood.”

The suit claims the dusty air prevents residents from enjoying outdoor activities and alleges the companies have refused and continue to refuse to take measures to stop the migration of the material into the surrounding neighborhoods.

“The lawsuit seeks an immediate injunction to force the defendants to enclose the mounds, and stop the defendants from contaminating the neighborhoods with hazardous coal and petcoke dust,” said Thomas Zimmerman.

NBC Chicago’s request for comment from Beemsterboer has not been returned.

Earlier this week, the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency issued a notice of air pollution violation to Beemsterboer Slag Corp.

The state EPA has reportedly demanded the company reduce the pollution at the site, apply for necessary permits and file pollution reduction plans.

Congresswoman Robin Kelly also threw her support behind the agency’s decision.

“We need to better track and regulate petcoke,” Kelly said in a statement. “I look forward to working with state and local officials in formulating new national environmental safety regulations on petcoke.”

Kelly is a co-sponsor of legislation calling for testing of the health and environmental effects of petcoke, a black, pebbly byproduct of oil refineries that is left over from oil extracted from the Canadian “tar sands.”

The material is dirtier and dustier than coal and as such contains more air and water pollutants, according to a release from Kelly’s office.

