



Southeast Environmental Task Force

Working with Chicago's Southeast Side and south suburban communities to improve the Calumet region

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October 14, 2017

Julie Morita, MD
Commissioner of Health
Department of Health
Chicago, IL

Dear Doctor Morita,

This is to inform you that the Southeast Environmental Task Force (SETF) is opposed to the Department of Health granting a variance request to Watco Companies located at 2926 E 126th Street. We believe the City instituted regulations for bulk storage and bulk handling with the intention of protecting its citizens from potentially harmful pollution. Following substantial publicity and furor over the petcoke dust that menaced the southeast side, the City initiated stricter regulations. The community's hope was that these measures would help alleviate dust problems and air pollution. Companies should not be allowed to sidestep those regulations.

Watco's handling of bulk materials is guaranteed to generate particulate matter. Its location across the road from two Little League fields (see attached Google map) is of particular concern to us. Those fields are used by children engaged in sports that require physical activity that elevates their breathing and heart rates. And, because the fields are open, the space is often utilized year round by residents engaged in walking their dogs, exercising, and other outdoor activity (attached photo).

As a resident of Southeast Chicago, and someone who was directly affected by the coal and petcoke dust, I am familiar with the possible range of how far air borne dust can travel. As such, SETF is concerned about the community that exists a few blocks south of the Watco facility (see Google map 2) and Grissom Elementary School. A few years ago, Grissom was selected to participate in the *Space to Grow* program and was the recipient of funding from the Healthy Schools Campaign to transform its playground into a more sustainable one to benefit the students, community and environment. The updated design includes permeable pavement, new equipment and both a flower and vegetable garden (see attached photos). The success of the project can be verified by the increased use of the space both during and after school. Allowing Watco to operate without the safeguard of the air monitors could jeopardize the healthiness of the playground and food garden.

The operation in question is one of those cited by the USEPA as violating air pollution regulations and should be monitored to insure that they are in compliance.

Sincerely,

Peggy Salazar
Executive Director
Southeast Environmental Task Force