

Press Release

Pilsen Environmental Rights and Reform Organization

For Immediate Release

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****UPDATE: Updated with Quotes from experts in the field****

Pilsen residents demand cleanup of toxic lead in the air near local schools

**PERRO, community groups and residents demand EPA cleanup area's largest lead emitters:
H. Kramer & Co. and the Fisk coal-fired power plant**

CHICAGO, April 4th – [PERRO](#) (the Pilsen Environmental Rights and Reform Organization) and community allies including the [Pilsen Alliance](#) and the Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago as well as national environmental organizations like the Sierra Club are demanding that the EPA clean up the recently reported sources of high levels of toxic [lead](#) in the air around area schools. In particular, PERRO and others call on the EPA and local, state and federal lawmakers to force the area's largest lead emitters, H. Kramer & Co. and the Fisk coal-fired power plant to clean up their lead emissions. PERRO, Sierra Club, community groups such as the Pilsen Alliance and residents will hold a press conference outside the Perez Elementary School at 1241 West 19th Street.

PERRO organizer Jerry Mead-Lucero explains, "Pilsen is one of the most polluted communities in the city of Chicago. We believe that this fact stems from Pilsen's industrial legacy and the fact that working class communities of color like Pilsen have long been dis-empowered in this city. It's time our elected officials and local leaders demanded a cleaner, safer environment in Pilsen." "As if Pilsen didn't have enough problems, our air is also being poisoned," said Maria Torres, Pilsen Alliance organizer. "Certain things are not tolerable, toxic air is one of them; enough is enough."

Lead is a toxic heavy metal and is one of the most dangerous forms of environmental pollution, especially for children and pregnant women. Lead contamination causes nerve damage and can effect almost all systems within the body. The effects of lead exposure on young children can be especially severe, including developmental delays, lower IQ levels, and increased behavioral problems.

"The high airborne levels of lead prove yet again that the Fisk and Crawford coal plants are deadly sources of pollution for Chicagoans. The city can not stall anymore on addressing this public health crisis." argues Christine Nannicelli of the Sierra Club.

The USEPA has setup a web page related to these recent violations at <http://www.epa.gov/reg50air/enforce/pilsen>

These recent findings about lead air pollution in Pilsen come at a time when national clean air health protections are in danger of being taken away. "While we're seeing a tragic situation unfolding with lead in Chicago's neighborhoods, the new Congress is busy at work erasing as many of our health protections as possible," Said Brian Urbaszewski, director of environmental health for Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago. "Senators Kirk and Durbin must now protect us and our children by preventing any roll back of the Clean Air Act protections that now ensure our safety and future health." He noted that in

the last month the U.S. House of Representatives has passed legislation to roll back toxic air pollution rules from industry, repeal global warming regulations that would save lives, and has prohibited the Environmental Protection Agency from enacting health standards for particulate matter air pollution. The fate of these health protection roll backs now lies with the U.S. Senate.

PERRO (the Pilsen Environmental Rights and Reform Organization), an environmental justice organization based in the Pilsen neighborhood, has worked since 2004 to investigate sources of pollution in the community. PERRO has led a community campaigns and investigations that resulted in the 2006 EPA fining H. Kramer and Co. for clean-air violations at the company's brass and bronze manufacturing plant at 1339 W. 21st St.. H. Kramer was forced to invest in over \$500,000 in new pollution controls. But Kramer continues to be the largest source of lead pollution in Pilsen. The nearby Fisk coal-fired power plant is the second largest produce of lead contamination according to the USEPA.

In 2009 the EPA announced their intention to setup air monitors around the State of Illinois to test for possible air pollution. The EPA initially had not included Pilsen as a site for an air monitor. PERRO member Maria Chavez contacted the EPA to point out that a densely populated community like Pilsen with a long history of polluted air should be included. After considerable pressure by PERRO members, the EPA reversed their decision and set-up an air monitor on top of Perez Elementary School. The air monitor has since found that Pilsen has the second highest lead pollution levels in the state. The only monitor to record higher lead levels is situated next to a steel mill.

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