



Kristin Bender, Staff Writer  
Oakland Tribune

**Feb. 15, 2006**

BERKELEY — A community meeting is slated today to review a settlement agreement between a West Berkeley steel factory and the Bay Area Air Quality Management district, which has ordered the company to install a system to reduce odor emissions.

Following nine notices of violations from the air district last year, Pacific Steel will install a \$2 million odor-reduction system and pay \$17,500 in fines.

The legal settlement followed at least two decades of complaints from residents and businesspeople about the smell of burning plastic in the air, headaches, nausea and a tightness in their chests because of the persistent outside odor.

A Pacific Steel representative said the company wants to work with the community on the best possible solution.

But some, including grass-roots groups West Berkeley Alliance for Clean Air and Safe Jobs and the [cleanaircoalition.net](http://cleanaircoalition.net), say the agreement does not go far enough. They want a more complete plan for reducing the odors.

To bring various groups together, City Councilmember Linda Maio's office has pulled together a meeting from 7 to 8:30 p.m. today at the West Berkeley Senior Center, 1900 Sixth St.

The meeting will include a discussion of the settlement agreement and how the air district's health-risk assessment will address emissions from the site and potential source reductions, according to a news release from Maio's office.

Representatives from the air-quality district and Pacific Steel Casting will attend, as will the city's toxic management specialist, Maio's office said. Representatives from the [cleanaircoalition.net](http://cleanaircoalition.net) also plan to be there.

In a Jan. 30 letter, the coalition asked Pacific Steel to devise a plan to abate the nuisance or face a lawsuit in small claims court.

The letter says the plant's "overpowering vapors" prohibit residents from being outside, opening windows, gardening or allowing their children to play outside.

"We can never anticipate when our day will be spoiled by your company's discharges, only that it will be borne on the wind and we will be subjected to it or spared from it depending on which way the wind is blowing," the letter states.

The group has contracted with Neighborhood Solutions, the same group that helped neighbors win a small claims lawsuit against the troubled Le Chateau cooperative housing facility in Berkeley last year, Executive Director Grace Neufeld said.

Kristin Bender, Staff Writer  
Oakland Tribune  
**Jan. 31, 2006**

BERKELEY — A West Berkeley clean-air watchdog group wants Pacific Steel to use recent fines levied by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District for air testing and community education about the plants' potential health and environmental risks.

Last month, the air district and Pacific Steel, a family-owned business that has operated in West Berkeley for 75 years, reached a legal settlement that requires the plant to install a \$2 million system to reduce odor emissions.

Pacific Steel also must pay \$17,500 in penalties because of nine notices of violations from the air district last year.

The settlement followed at least two decades of complaints from residents and business people about the smell of burning plastic in the air, headaches, nausea and a tightness in their chests because of the odor.

But the West Berkeley Alliance for Clean Air and Safe Jobs, a grass-roots group, says the agreement does not go far enough. Alliance members say the factory's emissions are not just an odor problem but a threat to public health.

The group wants lower permitted odorous and odorless emissions, and a more permanent solution to the problem by eliminating toxic emissions, alliance member Janice Schroeder said.

To garner support, the alliance is to hold a community meeting tonight to discuss what it calls the "ongoing air hazard and odor nuisance caused by Pacific Steel Casting Company."

Representatives from the air district, Pacific Steel and City Councilmember Linda Maio's office will attend.

Pacific Steel Casting, with headquarters at 1333 Second St., has two other plants nearby. The company believes the odors are coming from Plant 3, "which has been operating with greater frequency this year to meet the rising demand for high-quality steel castings," according to a news release.

To control the odor, the company is to install a carbon absorption system in Plant 3. The company installed similar carbon filters in Plants 1 and 2 in 1991 and 1985, respectively, reducing odor complaints significantly. The alliance wants to ensure all plants have technology for controlling — or eliminating — emissions and odors.

Kristin Bender, Staff Writer  
Oakland Tribune  
**Aug. 15, 2005**

BERKELEY — After years of complaints about a smell of burning plastic, a regional air-quality board has ordered a West Berkeley steel factory to study what is causing the foul odor.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District has issued three violation notices to Pacific Steel Casting since March, district spokeswoman Emily Hopkins said.

"There have been a number of complaints, and certainly we recognize there are odors coming out of that plant, and it is a nuisance," Hopkins said.

Residents complain the burning pot-handle smell causes headaches, nausea and a tightness in their chests.

The air district wants the decades-old plant not only to find out exactly what is causing the odor but also to do something about it. While the smell is an annoyance to residents, an environmental study could determine whether it is actually toxic and poses a health risk.

"That is what the toxins evaluation is going to determine," Hopkins said.

Pacific Steel Casting will spend about \$200,000 for environmental consultants to conduct the study, a company spokeswoman said Tuesday.

"That will lead to mitigations, which we are very excited about," said City Councilmember Linda Maio, who represents the Northwest Berkeley area and has called a meeting tonight to discuss the problem.

Company spokeswoman Elisabeth Jewel said Tuesday the company is "looking for a way to work out the problems. ... Pacific Steel will comply with whatever the regulatory agencies request."

Pacific Steel Casting, with headquarters at 1333 Second St., has been making large, stainless-steel castings for the automotive, construction and mining industries for more than 70 years. There are two other plants nearby.

And for 25 years, Janice Schroeder, who lives about a mile away from one of the plants, has complained of a foul smell wafting into her garden and through the windows of her home.

"It's very acrid, and once you smell it you can really identify it. It's different from other odors," said Schroeder, who said her husband and 23-year-old son also complain of headaches and other problems from the smell.

Michele Pred, a West Berkeley artist, has lived in the area for three years and is also sickened by the smell.

"It smells like burned brakes or burning plastic. People describe it as a burning pot-handle smell," Pred said. "I smell it, not all the time, but when I smell it, it's gagging. ... my chest gets tight, it's bad."

Pred is among the new breed of West Berkeley residents who recently formed the West Berkeley Alliance for Clean Air and Safe Jobs, a grass-roots group of about 150 people trying to preserve safe jobs and prevent noxious pollution.

Members say they don't want to push industry out of West Berkeley because it's a vital part of the regional economy, but they want the smell gone.

"We want to make clear that we do not want to move the factory, and we do not want to shut it down," Pred said. "We want to keep industry here. Most of us moved in after they were already here."

Tonight's community meeting starts at 7 at the James Kenney Recreation Center, 1720 Eighth St. It is open to the public but will not include a representative from Pacific Steel Casting, said Jewel, a public relations specialist whose firm, AJE Partners of Berkeley, was hired by Pacific Steel about a month ago.

"This is an opportunity for their neighbors to come and communicate their concerns about the odors that they perceive are coming from the plant," Jewel said.

Once the health-risk study is completed, Pacific Steel will work with residents on their complaints, Jewel said.

"(Pacific Steel) understands that there have been complaints, and they have responded to those complaints in the past. What's happened is there are more people living in West Berkeley in an area that has traditionally been an industrial area."

From January 1998 through this March, about 330 odor complaints about Pacific Steel were logged, said air district spokeswoman Hopkins.

Between 1985 and 2000, Pacific Steel had an "unconditional order of abatement" in place, meaning complaints about foul odors could lead to a shutdown. The order was lifted in 2000.

"It worked for a time (before)," Hopkins said. "There has been an increase in production, so it's possible that they are having more emissions than they had before. Perhaps they need to look at that and install some additional equipment."