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West Berkeley Residents Monitor Pacific Steel Emissions

By Riya Bhattacharjee (04-24-07)

A group of West Berkeley residents have set up an air monitor to detect emissions from Pacific Steel Casting (PSC) Monday.

Setting up an air monitor has been the goal of community members for a long time. Denny Larson, director of the non-profit Global Community Monitor (GCM)—an organization that promotes environmental justice and human rights for communities—helped acquire funds for the project from the Bay Area Air Quality District (BAAQMD).

He was joined in his effort to install the monitor by environmental activists including Steven Ingraham, LA Wood and Peter Guerrero.

"We are putting it up to verify what is in the air," said Ingraham, a Berkeley resident who tested the equipment. "The community has a right to know."

Located at 1333 Second St., PSC produces steel castings that are used in different industries. Area residents have complained for years about noxious odors and emissions which they feel impose a health risk.

Ingraham added that the exact location of the air monitor would not be disclosed because it might be tampered with.

"This is an Airmetrics, Mini-vol monitor. It's state-of-the-art battery-powered and has an electronic programming model which was recommended by the district," he told the Planet Monday.

"The grant's collaboration parameters have given Denny information on the use, and some of their staff came by to check out our site this morning. We have a rooftop platform which the unit is mounted into and the program was set to begin catching a sample for lab analysis."

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The group hopes to get definite data over the next six months and carry out surveys of illnesses in West Berkeley that have been linked to long-term exposure to chemicals. They are currently looking for more funding.

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