Chicago Greens

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For Information: Charles Paidock (312) 842-5036 [cpaidock@hotmail.com](mailto:cpaidock@hotmail.com)

Robert Rudner (312) 719-5719 [robertrudner@gmail.com](mailto:robertrudner@gmail.com)

Wes Green (773) 306-5402 [wesgreen@ripco.com](mailto:wesgreen@ripco.com)

Eco-Group Seek Stronger Ordinance on Petcoke Piles

While he Chicago Greens support an ordinance before the Zoning Committee, scheduled to vote on Tuesday, which prohibits the siting of new petroleum coke facilities, the group maintains that proposal does little to address existing ones, such as presently on the southeast side.  And the ordinance makes exception they state for cement plants which emit tons of carbon dioxide and other pollutants.

Petcoke is a refining byproduct of tar sands oil, and when burned is substantially dirtier than coal and contributes significantly to greenhouse gas pollution. This Canadian oil that is thicker and dirtier than many other grades, and has to be heated to 900 degrees F. BP will produce more than 2.2 million tons of petcoke a year at Whiting.

All of the petcoke from Whiting eventually is sent by train, truck or barge to sites on Chicago's Southeast Side owned by KCBX Terminals. The company is controlled by Charles and David Koch, wealthy conservative industrialists who back groups that challenge the science behind climate change, and oppose many environmental regulations.

Chicago Green Charles Paidock said: “We stand with the community, and the Southeast Environmental Task Force (SETF) in wanting the petcoke piles removed and a total ban on such facilities. These types of businesses do not belong in residential areas.”

Last year, the company bought the larger of the two sites - between 108th and 111th streets on the east side of the Calumet River. As part of the deal, the company obtained exclusive rights to store petcoke from the nearby BP refinery. The other storage site is across the river just south of 100th Street.

The problem is likely to get worse, as BP has plans to triple the amount in the city by the end of the year.

“It’s growing by leaps and bounds,” said SETFk Force member Tom Shepherd.. “It’s coming at a breathtaking rate.”

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