



Alfredo Romo
Executive Director
Neighbors for Environmental Justice
3700 South Iron St.
Chicago, IL 60609

March 14, 2025

Don Brown, Clerk
Illinois Pollution Control Board
60 E. Van Buren St., Suite 630
Chicago, Illinois 60605

Re: Public Comment, in the Matter of: Proposed Clean Car and Truck Standards: Proposed
Section 35 Ill. Admin. Code 242, and R2024-017

Via email: don.brown@illinois.gov and PCB.Clerks@illinois.gov

Dear Mr. Brown:

I am writing to express my serious concerns regarding diesel and truck pollution in my community of McKinley Park in Chicago, IL. McKinley Park is situated in the middle of the city and is surrounded by very active industrial corridors as well as the traffic emissions from the congestion on I-55 and heavy arterial roads on a daily basis.

My previous professional experience in heavy industry and warehousing exposed me to daily truck pollution from the constant deliveries and pickups at these facilities. At the time, I was unaware of the pollution risks from these trucks, and I can only imagine that workers today experience the same lack of knowledge. Even if they are aware of these hazardous exposures, the need for employment and livelihood often takes priority over health concerns. Workers should not have to choose between their health and their ability to provide for their families.

I worked in industry for over 10 years and in 2006 I was diagnosed with cancer. I was 28 years old. I underwent a very complex surgical procedure and aggressive chemotherapy and radiation treatment. I had a 4% survival rate after the surgery and 20-25% after 5 years. During my chemotherapy and radiation, McKinley Park became my healing sanctuary. It was hard to be



stuck indoors going through this treatment and taking walks in McKinley Park was my way of escaping to a green space that reminded me of the life I still yearned for ahead.

While I don't know the direct cause of my illness, I can only imagine it is connected to the exposures I've endured in my lifetime. This is why I feel the need to address this disparity in communities like mine and advocate for better solutions for all. I don't want anyone to experience what I have endured, and I hope that, with the help of this board, we can move toward creating more just and sustainable solutions for future generations.

I am currently the Executive Director and a co-founding member of Neighbors for Environmental Justice¹ (N4EJ), a community-based 501(c)3 organization that advocates for environmental justice (EJ) in the McKinley Park neighborhood of Chicago. Our mission is to educate, advocate, and organize with the community to accomplish EJ throughout the southwest side of Chicago. N4EJ believes EJ cannot be separated from racial justice and aligns and advocates to support the larger struggle for justice in all its forms. N4EJ was formed in 2018 because our elected officials and public agencies failed to notify and meaningfully engage the community before and after the MAT Asphalt plant was built².

MAT Asphalt is a hot-mix asphalt plant, which is located between 2 schools, across the street from a 69 acre park, and less than 1000 feet from the nearest homes. Not only is the plant operating on an expired construction permit (which expired in July 2019), but the considerable amount of toxins from frequent diesel trucks traveling to and from the facility are omitted from the site's total emissions - down-playing the facility's daily emissions.

McKinley Park and other industrial corridors of Chicago's southwest side are surrounded by railyards, transportation, warehousing, manufacturing, waste handling facilities, construction and demolition (C&D) reprocessing facilities, etc.

About 25% of U.S. freight trains pass through the Chicago region, which has 18 intermodal rail yards, where giant containers from across the country — and the world — are transferred between trains and trucks. The environmental concern here is that sensitive populations and vulnerable neighborhoods of the southwest side are being encapsulated by diesel pollution on a daily basis. Chicago's intermodal rail yards are of particular concern for environmental advocates. Both trucks and trains emit diesel exhaust, as does some equipment, and trains are

¹ Neighbors for Environmental Justice website: <https://n4ej.org/>

² Tony Briscoe, "Asphalt plant brings worry to neighbors in McKinley Park," *Chicago Tribune*, April 2018. https://digitaledition.chicagotribune.com/tribune/article_popover.aspx?guid=c654969f-cfec-46a6-a792-7215ba349380



reassembled using older, more polluting “switcher” engines. The switcher engines tend to park for days in the rail yard, adding to local pollution.

One of N4EJ’s main campaigns has been the Cumulative Impacts Assessment with the city of Chicago, specifically, the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH). The purpose of this assessment has been to provide data on the environmental burdens and other stressors that vary in impact across the city and to create policy change via a city ordinance to protect these impacted communities.

This assessment helped to expose the environmental impacts that harm sacrifice zones on a daily basis. One of the primary environmental hazards that vulnerable communities face is diesel pollution from heavy and medium-duty trucks going to and from warehouses in these sacrifice zones.

MAT Asphalt is just one of many heavy polluting-industries that are weakening community members living on the southwest and southeast sides of the city. The air pollution from diesel trucks entering and exiting the MAT Asphalt facility and the site’s asphalt operations, continue to detrimentally impact the residents living in McKinley Park.

The following quotes provide insight into the lived experiences of McKinley Park residents dealing with heavy air pollution from MAT Asphalt and other neighboring industries:

“I used to be able to smell the beauty of the park across the street. Now I only smell diesel and asphalt.” - *A resident complaint to the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) on December 13, 2019*

“Bad smell, students/staff complaining about headaches, feeling dizzy. 8:00 - 8:45 during morning recess outside of school and at the Namaste Park on 37th and Ashland.” - *A complaint filed by a school’s staff member that is .5 miles from MAT Asphalt*

“There is so much increased noisy traffic from the asphalt plant. 100-200 asphalt trucks come down Pershing Road by my house every day. The trucks are noisy, and smelly. While walking in McKinley Park, I’ve smelled a nasty burning odor. This should not be near our park or homes. They stated it would be a mile from any residential areas in the zoning recommendation - this is not the case. It is 1/2 mile from my home.” - *A resident complaint*



“Uncovered trucks are coming and going from MAT Asphalt spreading dust around the park across the street.” - *A 311 air pollution complaint from a resident on June 3, 2020*

“As a resident of McKinley Park who lives about 1,700 ft (.3 miles) from MAT Asphalt as the crow flies, it is impossible to shut the fumes of MAT Asphalt’s operation out of my house. When they are producing asphalt, I can often smell noxious fumes even when my apartment windows are closed (depending on the direction of the wind). I know they are operating when I first wake up, as I can smell these fumes from my bedroom in the early morning hours, which gives me a headache and respiratory discomfort. When I am outdoors, the fumes are often so strong that it burns my eyes and sometimes makes me nauseous. There is also a greasy fine dust that accumulates on my car and in my window sills when they are operating. These conditions have persisted even after they made their facility improvements, which they claim are the absolute best they can be doing to prevent noxious odors. When I have contacted MAT Asphalt facility management about these fumes on days when they are especially bad, their response is that their emissions and odor control devices were functioning properly that day. If they are doing the best they can possibly do to prevent noxious emissions, they are clearly not able to operate this facility in a way that is healthy for residents and the vulnerable populations that have to deal with breathing asphalt fumes regularly. MAT Asphalt’s operations should no longer be permitted anywhere near this close to residents, schools, and a well-used park.” - *A Resident complaint on March 6, 2025*

These unpleasant odors that result from nearby industrial and trucking activities have not only been documented and experienced by residents, but also by City of Chicago officials responding to air pollution complaints in the area:

“Ticket issued to MAT Asphalt for odors. Detected noxious, asphalt odors in the air at Pershing road and Damen avenue. Odors detected at this time were strong and noxious. While at Pershing Road and Damen Avenue, I immediately felt tingling in my nostrils and develop[ed] a slight headache reaction to the asphalt odors. Issued tickets to the facility manager for air pollution and nuisance.” - *A CDPH inspector’s report responding to an air pollution complaint on August 23, 2024*

These resident grievances provide just a glimpse into the daily lives of those living near industries, arterial roads and highways, and warehouses, all of which bring high amounts of diesel pollution and exposure, as trucking activities are prominent throughout the day. One truly cannot understand this and many other communities' lived experience because it impacts them



more than on a surface level. These high pollution exposures impact them on deeper levels that affect their mental and physical health and wellbeing long-term.

The McKinley Park community, along with every community, deserves clean air, clean water, and an environment where they do not have to worry about being outside too long for fear of being exposed to diesel or other pollutants. Everyone deserves to live freely and enjoy what their communities have to offer them - and that should never include environmental toxins.

N4EJ fights for our community to achieve environmental justice everyday, and now we are depending on the Pollution Control Board to help all communities in Illinois become environmentally safe and protected .

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alfredo Romo', is written over a faint, light blue circular background.

Alfredo Romo
Executive Director
Neighbors for Environmental Justice

From: [Madalynn Benavides](#)
To: [Brown, Don](#)
Cc: [Melanie Minuche](#); [Alfredo Romo](#)
Subject: [External] R24-17 Public Comment
Date: Friday, March 14, 2025 12:03:52 PM
Attachments: [IPCB Public Comments.pdf](#)

Dear Don Brown.

I am writing to you on behalf of Neighbors for Environmental Justice (N4EJ), an environmental justice organization based on the southwest side of Chicago, as we submit our public comments to the Illinois Pollution Control Board.

These public comments are regarding the proposed Clean Car and Truck Standards. Please see the PDF of our public comments attached below.

Thank you for your time.

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Best,
Madalynn Benavides (she/her) | Policy Organizer
Phone: (773)-458-3175
Neighbors for Environmental Justice



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