

For Immediate Release

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BP's Neighbors Catch Toxic Chemicals in Bucket Brigade Air Sample

East Chicago-- An air sample taken near BP Whiting Refinery detected 14 toxic chemicals in the air, with five chemicals higher than health based screening levels established in other states.

Bessie Dent and volunteers from the Coalition for a Clean Environment recently teamed up with Denny Larson of the Global Community Monitor to form the Calumet Project Bucket Brigade. The bucket monitors can detect up to 87 different toxic gases, using a sampling method approved by the Environmental Protection Agency. The data can be used as evidence in court.

BP, which recently received EPA and IDEM permission to increase their toxic releases into Lake Michigan, still needs an air permit for their planned expansion. The hearing for the air permit is scheduled at the IDEM offices in Merrillville, IN at 1:00 PM on August 9th. The Calumet Project Bucket Brigade will be there to share data with concerned area residents and Indiana regulators.

The Coalition for a Clean Environment has long been concerned about the construction of a Confined Disposal Facility (CDF) intended to hold toxic materials dredged from the East Chicago Ship Canal. The proposed navigational dredge would benefit local industries such as BP, but would expose East Chicago residents, including students at 2 nearby schools, to toxic releases. Under pressure from the community, the Army Corps of Engineers has installed some fixed air monitors around the CDF site. However, the Bucket Brigade is mobile. Samplers can take the light-weight device where ever residents believe – because of odor or eye irritation – that chemicals have been released.

The idea for the bucket originated in 1995 with Edward Masry, the attorney who worked with environmental activist Erin Brockovich. Angry about a release of toxic fumes from an oil refinery in Contra Costa County, Calif., he sought a way for ordinary people to document air pollution. The result: a user-friendly device, housed inside a plastic bucket, that can grab and store air samples for analysis.

Denny Larson, who trained Northwest Indiana group, said that the method can help hold companies accountable for chemicals that escape beyond the boundaries of their plants. Larson's group works with communities in 17 countries and 22 US states to train them to take their own air samples and encourage industry to reduce their pollution.

Larson was shocked to see the number of chemicals in the sample. "The sample taken near BP Whiting is comparable to samples taken in developing countries that have little to no air pollution regulations."