



January 14, 2021

Email: [envcomments@cityofchicago.org](mailto:envcomments@cityofchicago.org)

Re: RMG RECYCLING PERMIT

To whom it may concern:

The Alliance of the Southeast (ASE) stands in solidarity with 10th ward South East Side residents against General Iron. We urge you to deny the permit for General Iron.

The Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) and Public Health Commissioner Dr. Allison Arwady has a duty and the authority to protect the public's health. Therefore, I demand that CDPH and Dr. Arwady protect the public's health by exercising their duty, due diligence, and authority to deny General Iron the permit to operate a Large Recycling facility on the Southeast Side.

**CDPH should consider more than “visible” particulate matter, but all the pollution released by RMG’s recycling facility (and co-located facilities), including PM 10 and PM2.5 emissions. CDPH should also assess the air quality impacts of emissions from trucks idling (and how long they are idling in front of and around the facility) and new truck traffic that will move through local communities to access the General III facility.** RMG is putting our communities at risk by allowing dangerous pollution (PM 10 & PM 2.5) to be released so close to residences, schools, and parks.

- Particulate matter (PM 10 & PM 2.5) will be released into our environment from RMG/General Iron and go into our lungs and further compromise the immune system of 10th Ward residents. Just because we cannot see it does not mean it is not there.
- Both the US EPA & World Health Organization (WHO) recognize PM 2.5 as more dangerous than PM10. Current regulations ban visible dust leaving the property, but place no restrictions on PM 2.5. This needs to change.
- A study conducted by George Washington High School, the high school directly across the road from RMG/General Iron, found winds from RMG’s location to blow Southwest to Northeast. With the wind pattern present, wind will carry pollutants directly to the learning environment of students and negatively impact their health.
- Both the WHO and the European Union Environmental Protection Agency recognize concentrations above 50µg/L as beyond both hourly and annual limit values, which are set to protect human health. By RMG/GII’s own estimation, their PM10 emissions could create an environment where the background PM10 in and around GWHS is as high as 106µg/L.
- The expansion of RMG’s operations would greatly increase truck traffic and significantly increase air pollutant emissions from diesel trucks. Traffic would increase from 200 trucks to 1400 trucks a week on local roads (based on comparison of current truck traffic near the RMG site to truck traffic at the General Iron’s Lincoln Park site), according to a survey by the Southeast Environmental Task Force (SETF).
- The expansion would greatly increase the number of trucks idling, which is one of the worst sources of air-born pollutants, because it’s not an efficient burn on the fuel. CDPH needs to look at the amount of diesel truck fumes and how long the trucks are idling at and around the General Iron III facility
- According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the World Health Organization (WHO), chronic exposure to particulate matter and air pollutants results in:
  - higher asthma rates amongst adolescents,



- higher lung cancer rates,
- depression,
- lower academic performance, and a decreased life span.

*Please see Chicago Air Quality and Health Index (Slide 10)*

*Please see attached Chicago Asthma, Cancer, and Chronic Disease maps (Slides 7, 8, & 9).*

*Please see Chicago Low Child Opportunity Area Index (Slide 11).*

**CDPH needs to expand the impact area for air pollution, to reflect the actual impact, taking into consideration how far particulate matter travels, weather conditions (including wind directions), and truck traffic.** A facility like this should not be down the street from vulnerable schools, parks, and homes. The current permitting process allows 650 feet, which is less than 1/8 of a mile (1 city block). Air does not stay in a box. Just because something may follow city ordinance, does not mean it is safe. George Washington High School is less than 1 mile away. The nearest residence is ¼ mile away (2 city blocks). Finkl Steel, another company displaced from Lincoln Park and moved to the SE side, had an explosion in 2019, and set a nearby house on fire. That house was almost a 1/2 mile away. If burning slag can fly a 1/2 mile, surely asthma-causing pollutants can travel at least that far.

**CDPH should assess the cumulative impacts of several related, co-located facilities.** The permit application is based on an incorrect source determination that does not include all pollutant-emitting activities that are part of a single source. General III and the other facilities co-located at 11600 S. Burley are a single source, but are being segmented into constituent operations for permitting purposes.

**ASE urges CDPH to conduct an environmental justice analysis as part of its permitting process.** This analysis should address whether the environmental consequences of the applicant's facility, viewed comprehensively and in the context of where it will operate, will cause or contribute to significant, adverse and disproportionate risks for local communities. **ASE agrees with SETF's assertion that the city's history of ignoring the risks of significant, adverse and disproportionate harm in already susceptible, overburdened Chicago communities must be remedied beginning with CDPH's review of the present permit application.**

- 1. We urge the City to stop the environmental racism of putting toxic developments in minority and overburdened communities.** Moving an industrial facility's operations from a gentrified mostly white neighborhood to a mostly working-class community of color (majority Black, Latino, immigrant) that is already overcrowded with polluting industry is a prime example of environmental racism. RMG's proposed facility expansion will also disproportionately affect vulnerable populations (including children, pregnant women, elderly, and groups with high asthma and cancer rates). Policies are environmentally racist if they result in disparate outcomes, which is happening on Chicago's southeast side.

*Please see attached maps for disparities along racial/ethnic lines,*

*Please see attached Cumulative Burden of Environmental Exposures map (Slide 3).*

*Please see attached Racial and Ethnic Composition Map (Slide 12)*

**CDPH must deny the permit if it is to be in compliance with the US Fair Housing Act. The City has a duty to foster integration and equitable development, as part of its agreements with US Dept. of Housing and Urban Development to receive block grants.**

- The City is prohibited from engaging in actions that have the effect of discriminating on the basis of race, color and national origin. Pursuant to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, no person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin,



be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity which receives federal financial assistance.

- ASE supports the complainants in the pending HUD action regarding the City's participation in facilitating the transfer of this operation from the northside to the southside.

**2. The southeast side is already environmentally overburdened, and is a recognized Environmental Justice community. The limitations on visible air pollution do not address the cumulative environmental and health burdens the community already faces.**

- Chicago's southeast side has 3 of the top 5 air polluting companies. Finkl Steel is the #1 air polluter in Cook County. Finkl Steel relocated to the SE side, after being displaced by the Lincoln Yards development. Soon after moving to the southeast side, a southside house caught on fire, as a result of an explosion at Finkl.
- The area is already environmentally overburdened. The 10<sup>th</sup> ward has 8 landfills, many of them toxic. In recent years, Chicago's southeast side has suffered from numerous health and environmental hazards, including contamination from petcoke, manganese, lead, and other metals and pollutants, on top of an even longer history of industrial contamination.
- There is no reason that a company with a history of air pollution violations (cited by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, as well as the City of Chicago), should be considered for an already environmentally overburdened community.

*Please see attached Hazardous Air Pollutants map (Slides 4 & 5).*

**CDPH should expressly state its reservation of rights to revoke the permit based on evidence of non-compliance. Many of the same people who ran General Iron in Lincoln Park would run RMG's proposed facility, and the proposed facility poses many of the same types of impacts that the General Iron facility has created at its current location.** CDPH should require the permit applicant to anticipate and have a fully realized plan to address non-compliance, and CDPH should be prepared to revoke the permit if noncompliance persists.

**Additionally, CDPH should not issue a permit without answers on whether the pollution control equipment that is being transferred to the General III worked effectively at General Iron, esp. when the General Iron's facility has already had an explosion and a fire in the last year.**

- RMG has owned and operated the General Iron facility in Lincoln Park for more than a year now. During that time, General Iron has experienced explosions that caused the City to shut the operation down for several months, led to dozens of citations for violations, and just last month experienced fires in outdoor piles of waste that required the Chicago Fire Department's involvement to put them out.
- The City's own inspection reports also show that RMG has for years failed to keep its facilities properly paved (with issues noted as recently as this October), posing risks of heavy metals getting into the soil and water and contaminated dust getting into the air. It also pled liable for an air quality violation at its barge area last summer.
- Illinois EPA cited RMG last fall with flying under the radar without proper permits and approvals; RMG also lacked City approvals for some of its equipment and activities, such as torch cutting massive rail cars in the open air, an activity which produces clouds of black smoke. And RMG pled liable and paid a fine for illegal industrial dust at its barge area in June of 2019; the City's inspection report for this incident notes that the company was employing no dust control measures during active barge loading.



**We, as part of Chicago's southeast side, are tired of being the dumping ground for the City of Chicago.** This is not just an environmental justice issue, but also a racial justice issue. Lincoln Park residents have complained for years about the pollution from General Iron. Lincoln Park residents were able to downgrade their manufacturing corridor. But, on the southeast side, despite community opposing RMG's new recycling facility, and other polluting companies, these companies are continuing to move here.

**We can't both recognize Chicago southeast side communities as environmental justice communities, and still allow polluting companies and with environmental violations, like RMG/General Iron, to move here.** What we need are environmentally sustainable developments that promote the health of our communities (includes social, economic, environmental) and racial equity. RMG does not meet these goals. (For reference on community priorities, see Good Neighbor Policy at: [www.asechicago.org/good-neighbor](http://www.asechicago.org/good-neighbor).)

**We need policies to take into account the cumulative burden to the community, previous violations/citations issued, community complaints, and whether the development will be in an environmental justice community.** And, these need to apply to RMG's permitting process. There's no reason that a company with a history of air pollution violations should EVER be considered for an overburdened community.

**Moreover, with Covid-19, it's more important than ever that our communities are not left behind and that developments help our recovery, not worsen our health and enable environmental racism.** The same southeast side communities that are environmentally overburdened, are the same communities more negatively impacted by Covid-19. Companies, like RMG, who pollute our air, land, and water, make the population less able to fight and survive when health challenges come up, like Covid-19, which disproportionately affect people with pre-existing conditions (like asthma, COPD, cancer, heart disease).

*Please see Covid-19 Racial Disparities, Chicago Covid-19 Case Counts and Test Positivity, Chicago Mortality Rate (Slides 13-15)*

**Deny RMG/General Iron's permit to operate a Large Recycling Facility. We deserve clean air.** If you all do not deny this permit, you all are signing away valuable years of our lives at the expense of another scrap metal yard.

The Alliance of the SouthEast (ASE) is a multicultural, interfaith, and intergenerational alliance consisting of churches, schools, businesses, and community organizations that prioritize grassroots participation to address the challenges facing the neighborhoods of southeast Chicago. ASE's mission is to build the capacity of leaders, organizers, and associations in order to carry out community and social change.

If you have any questions or follow up, I can be reached at 773-800-0322.

Sincerely,

  
Amalia Nieto Gomez  
Executive Director

**Enclosed:** ASE Supporting docs on General Iron permit 01-14-2021