

What do we do about Smith Foundry?

By Luke Gannon



The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have failed East Phillips and Minneapolis residents by allowing Smith Foundry to pollute beyond the state-permitted emission levels.

Smith Foundry, an iron manufacturer located in East Phillips has been polluting the neighborhood since its inception 100 years ago. In May of 2023, the EPA conducted an unannounced inspection of Smith Foundry and found that the Foundry has been violating the Clean Air Act since 2018. The EPA's Notice of Finding and Violation stated that Smith has been "emitting double the amount of air pollutants allowed by state permits for the 5 years that they are required to keep records."

The East Phillips community has known our air is dirty long before these findings were released. At a recent protest outside of Smith Foundry, longtime East Phillips resident and Executive Director of Tamales y Bicycletas, Jose Luis Villasenor said, "You don't really need scientists or engineers to say there's a problem behind us. My children are telling me there's a problem. Our children have been telling us forever there's a problem."

Now, both East Phillips residents and the EPA are telling us that Smith Foundry is emitting lead and particulate matter into our air at excessive levels. The Notice stated that "Particulate Matter, especially fine particulates, contains microscopic solids or liquid droplets, which can get deep into the lungs and cause serious health problems." The health problems listed include aggravated asthma, irritation in the airways, decreased lung function, chronic bronchitis, irregular heartbeat, among others. In addition, Smith Foundry has failed to: maintain air pollution control devices; prevent particulate matter from becoming airborne; maintain pollution control equipment; and keep required daily records of emissions.

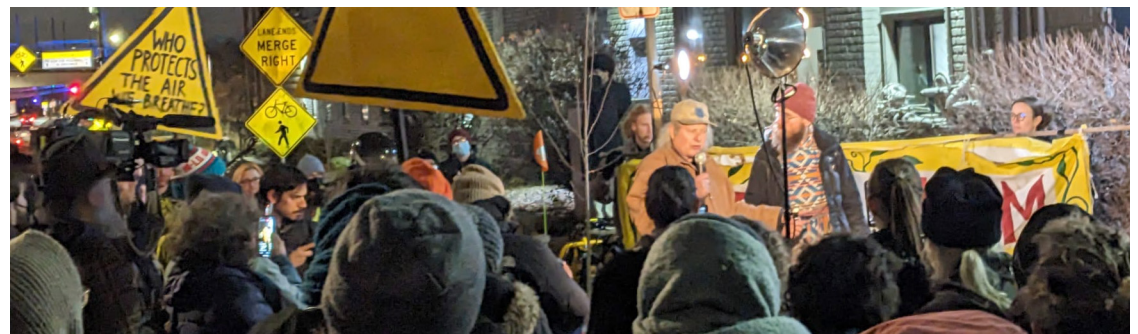
For five years, the state and federal agencies legally mandated to safeguard our state's health have not protected the community. Not only has Smith Foundry evaded all accountability, but our state and federal environmental agencies have as well.

Unfortunately, a paycheck or a settlement won't heal the long-term health issues that Smith has inflicted on the East Phillips community. Peter

Mulonar who worked at Smith for 30 years said, "I walk with a limp and I have damaged lungs. The list of people who have died prematurely, workers who have died before their time, is pretty long. For the sake of profit this foundry is going to harm Mother Earth and we have to take a stand."

A common climate justice protest chant rings truer than ever "Who protects us? We protect us." Residents of East Phillips have faced historical disinvestment, redlining, and excessive pollution, among a long list of other racist tactics that the city, state, and federal governments have used to further marginalize this community. Despite these challenges, the community has continuously demonstrated resilience in advocating for its own protection. We need to keep pressuring our government agencies to hold polluting industries like Smith Foundry accountable for their heinous actions.

- Luke Gannon is an East Phillips resident.



New EPIC & Midtown Community Meeting Schedule Starting February 2024

Second Tuesday of every month at 6:00

Location: 2433 Bloomington Ave & On Zoom (see website)

In Spanish & English | En Español y Ingles

In January, EPIC & Midtown are engaging youth from Midtown and East Phillips to collaborate on the redesign of East Phillips Park. We are looking for people between the ages of 14-16. They will be enrolled in a series of three workshops with community leaders and urban design planners from the University of Minnesota. Reach out to collective-staff@eastphillips.org for details.