

# Smelter plans fixes for Pilsen emissions

By Michael Hawthorne

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Owners of a Pilsen smelter that is the largest source of toxic lead in the Chicago area will spend at least a half-million dollars to curb air pollution in the neighborhood.

H. Kramer and Co. agreed Thursday to settle a complaint from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency by installing new pollution controls at the plant. The company also will pay a \$10,000 fine.

New ductwork and equipment should help reduce the clouds of lead-laden dust that frequently billow out of doors and windows around the smelter, which has been recycling scrap metal at 21st and Throop Streets since the 1920s.

EPA officials inspected the plant last year under pressure from community activists. Organized into a group called the Pilsen Environmental Rights and Reform Organization, the activists collected soil samples from yards near the smelter and found lead levels that have triggered cleanups in other cities.

An investigation by the Illinois EPA confirmed the results, finding lead levels up to seven times higher than the amount federal authorities consider too dangerous, especially for children.

Company officials said their tests found that lead levels in Pilsen are no different than other parts of the city.

The agreement announced Thursday did not directly involve lead emissions from H. Kramer. Overall pollution levels from the smelter are low enough that its lead emissions aren't regulated under the Clean Air Act. Still, federal records show the plant released 3,400 pounds of the toxic metal into the air during 2003—more than twice the amount of the next highest lead source in Cook County and the five collar counties.

The agreement instead stems from allegations that the company failed to conduct proper tests and file necessary paperwork after installing new furnaces that melt scrap metal into brass and bronze ingots.

But as part of the pact between H. Kramer and the EPA, new pollution controls will be installed that are expected to reduce lead emissions.

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