

Oct. 24, 2023

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Northern Iron LLC fined \$41,500 for air quality violations at iron foundry facility in St. Paul

According to a Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) enforcement investigation, Northern Iron LLC removed, modified, or replaced pollution control equipment throughout its iron foundry facility without seeking required amendments to its air quality permits before making the changes. The violations occurred over 15 years, during which the MPCA conducted five separate inspections of the facility — and each time, the company failed to disclose updates or changes made to equipment, as required by its permit.

MPCA staff inspections confirmed that the company removed and replaced emission units and control equipment, failed to recertify hoods after making the changes, and was operating some of its pollution control equipment out of permitted ranges. In previous permit applications, the company also failed to fully list the facility's activities that would have required it to conduct ambient air modeling.

These kinds of violations carry a risk of potential harmful effects because:

- Removing and replacing equipment without seeking amendments does not allow the agency the opportunity to ensure the changes will not increase emissions or put certain conditions into a permit to ensure compliance.
- Failure to recertify hoods could lead to less efficiency in capturing particulate matter. A hood certification is conducted by a third party to ensure it conforms to standards and will operate function appropriately.
- Modeling is important to demonstrate compliance with ambient air quality standards.

In addition to paying the \$41,500 civil penalty, Northern Iron completed a series of corrective actions including:

- Submitting a plan to ensure initial and annual hood certifications are completed on time.
- Seeking appropriate permit amendments when determining need to replace or remove equipment.
- Operating all air quality control equipment according to current permit requirements, its updated operation and maintenance plan, and manufacturer specifications.
- Submitting a complete major permit amendment, an ambient air modeling protocol and modeling results.
- Keeping track of and submitting daily operating hours for furnace melting, metal casting, and metal finishing operations. In addition to operating hours, the company must also track production throughput for the furnace melting and metal casting operations.

MPCA rules and regulations are designed to protect human health and the environment by limiting pollution emissions and discharges from facilities. When companies do not fully comply with regulatory requirements, the resulting pollution can be harmful to people and the environment.

When calculating penalties, the MPCA takes into account how seriously the violations affected or could have affected the environment, and whether they were first-time or repeat violations. The agency also attempts to recover the economic benefit the company gained by failing to comply with environmental laws in a timely manner.

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About the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA)

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency is a state agency committed to ensuring that every Minnesotan has healthy air, sustainable lands, clean water, and a better climate.