



Payne-Phalen
COMMUNITY COUNCIL

As Neighbors Struggle with Pollution, Northern Iron Moves to Sanction State Regulator

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Saint Paul, MN — In a move that Eastside Saint Paul residents are calling “a slap in the face,” attorneys for Northern Iron LLC have filed a motion requesting sanctions against the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), the agency tasked with protecting the public from dangerous industrial pollution.

“This motion is nothing more than a last-ditch effort to evade Northern Iron’s own duties to comply with the law,” **stated Melissa Lorentz, an environmental attorney and Eastside resident.** “It’s a distraction from ongoing pollution, including visible soot with heavy metals, in a neighborhood burdened with disproportionately high blood lead levels, respiratory issues, and cancer risk.”

A sanctions motion is a rare and aggressive legal maneuver that accuses a party of misconduct during litigation. If granted, it could result in fines or other penalties against the state agency. Community members see this as a retaliatory tactic aimed at shifting blame, intimidating regulators, and delaying accountability.

Northern Iron’s effort to avoid MPCA enforcement comes after years of noncompliance and mounting evidence that Northern Iron has emitted harmful pollutants, including lead and fine particulate matter, into the Payne-Phalen neighborhood. Payne Phalen is of Saint Paul’s most racially and economically diverse neighborhoods, also deemed an Environmental Justice area under Minnesota law.

Despite multiple violations, public health concerns, and an ongoing enforcement action, Northern Iron continues to operate near homes, schools, and parks without a valid amended air permit. Residents living near the foundry have reported black soot coating their homes, worsening respiratory conditions, and a complete lack of transparency about the risks they've been exposed to.

Following months of wrangling with Northern Iron to address the soot and other longstanding violations, the MPCA announced it would begin the process of revoking Northern Iron's permit if the facility continued refusing to cooperate in a required permit amendment process. Northern Iron responded with the sanctions motion.

"I am appalled to see Northern Iron play the victim card. The neighbors are the actual victims in this case," **said Patricia Enstad, a resident and Payne Phalen Community Council board member.** "Attacking the MPCA for doing its job is therefore an attack on our community."

"Northern Iron is the largest emitter of lead in Ramsey County," **said Ramsey County Commissioner Mai Chong Xiong.** "There needs to be more proactive oversight and accountability measures taken to ensure Northern Iron is not only compliant, but that it's not harming our communities."

Northern Iron has repeatedly failed to submit information necessary to fix the problems causing the soot. In court and in the community, the company has downplayed its impact while resisting stricter enforcement.

Community members, led by grassroots organizations like Eastside Environmental Justice (ESEJ), have demanded full disclosure of information necessary to ensure a strong revised permit. In a letter submitted to the MPCA in March, residents called for multilingual outreach, full disclosure of testing and modeling data, and an end to what they describe as neglect of their community. The MPCA agreed to provide testing and modeling data.

The court will hear the sanctions motion on May 23rd.

"Northern Iron's motion is an insult to its neighbors," **said Lorentz.** "We have a right to know why this soot problem is occurring and to live without fear of harmful emissions."

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Eastside Environmental Justice is a cross-cultural neighborhood movement to lift the disproportionate pollution burdens harming our community, advocate for a just transition, and create access to green resources.

The Payne-Phalen Community Council exists to promote the physical, social and economic development and human dignity of people of all ages, backgrounds, cultures, and communities within its geographic boundaries, and is the largest of Saint Paul's 17 citizen participation districts established in 1975. Our mission is to improve Payne-Phalen neighborhoods by engaging, educating and empowering all residents in our diverse community.