

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

November 25, 2019

## VIA ELECTRONIC DELIVERY

Ms. Cathy Stepp  
Regional Administrator for EPA Region 5  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
77 West Jackson Boulevard  
Chicago, IL 60604-3590

Dear Administrator Stepp:

We write to request that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) address the cumulative risks posed by soil contamination to Chicago Southeast Side residents living near the S.H. Bell and Watco facilities. Specifically, we are asking that EPA take swift action to remediate soil contaminated with manganese using the State of Illinois' manganese clean-up threshold, and remediate lead-contaminated soil.

The public health challenge posed by the presence of industrial operations on the Southeast Side requires a comprehensive approach. EPA recently determined that elevated levels of manganese had contaminated the soil found in residents' yards. EPA also found latent lead dust in the soil at levels of over 400 ppm at homes and over 1200 ppm at a smaller set of sites. These metals are known neurotoxins and must be removed to protect the health of area residents, in particular the many young children and women of childbearing age who live in the exposed community.

We are deeply disappointed in EPA's announcement that it will only remediate soil at Southeast Side homes with manganese levels over 5,500 ppm. We urge EPA to exercise its discretion to use more protective thresholds for soil clean-up given the potential exposure of sensitive populations, including young children and pregnant women. The two census tracts near S.H. Bell are home to nearly 10,000 people, of which 15 to 16 percent are children ages 0 to 9, a percentage more than 20 percent higher than in Cook County as a whole.

By selecting a dangerously high threshold, EPA is risking the public health and well-being of our constituents. We strongly urge EPA to adopt the Illinois State remediation level of 1,800 ppm, which has been applied in clean-ups in DePue, Illinois and other exposed areas. We also strongly urge EPA to commit to removing soil contaminated with lead above 400 ppm, the remediation standard for lead in soil used by both US EPA Region 5 (*for example*, USS Lead Superfund site) and Illinois EPA (*for example*, the DePue Superfund site).

By taking these two steps, EPA can provide confidence to residents on the Southeast side of Chicago that their government is acting with urgency to do everything it can to protect them from suffering harmful exposure to dangerous metals.

Letter to EPA Region 5 Administrator  
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As the Regional Administrator of EPA Region 5, you have an opportunity to demonstrate leadership by bringing together EPA's dedicated civil servants with appropriate State and local officials to effectively safeguard the public health of the families you serve. Thank you in advance for your consideration of our urgent request for EPA assistance.

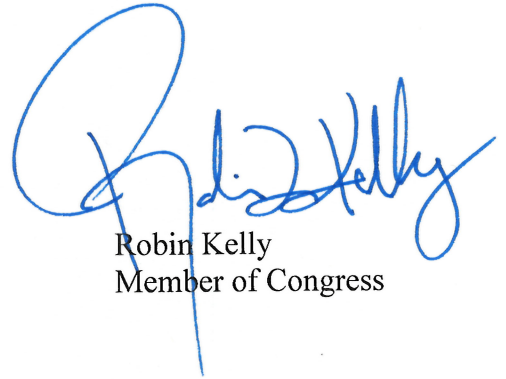
Sincerely,



Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator



Robin Kelly  
Member of Congress