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# Walter Coke sued, accused of allowing environmentally hazardous discharges

Published: Wednesday, May 04, 2011, 5:30 AM

By Russell Hubbard -- The Birmingham News
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WALTER ENERGY

Walter Coke has been sued in a putative class-action case, accused of hazardous environmental discharges from the North Birmingham plant purported to include arsenic and carcinogens.

The suit was filed last week in U.S. District Court in Birmingham by a resident of North Birmingham, on behalf of property owners in a similar situation. The suit says the plant has harmed property by discharging wastes which become airborne or conducted by waterways.

"Property has been and is being damaged in that it has lessened in value," the suit says. "The plaintiff is in need of remediation to remove the hazardous substances."

The plant is on 35th Avenue North, was formerly known as Sloss Industries, and was established in 1907, according to the 2011 Alabama Manufacturers Register. It employs about 300 people, according to the registry.

It makes coke, or baked coal used in the blast furnaces of steelmakers. The coke industry is a major employer in the metro area, with Tarrant's ABC Coke, a unit of coal miner Drummond Co., providing jobs for another 400 people.

A spokesman for Walter Energy, the Tampa-based parent of Walter Coke, declined to comment on the suit. The lawsuit was filed by property owner Louise Moore, represented by the Birmingham law firm of Wiggins Childs Quinn & Pantazis.

The suit says the coke plant's discharges into the air and water include benzo(a)pyrene, classified as a carcinogen by the federal government. The suit asks the court to certify a class of all property owners harmed by Walter Coke's operation in Jefferson County.

In 2009, 78 properties in three neighborhoods near the plant were examined by Walter Coke as part of the EPA sampling program. Some properties, the report found, contained higher-than recommended levels of arsenic and carcinogenic polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons.

The report attributed the levels to the long industrial history of the metro area, household chemicals, historical use of coal as a heating fuel and open-pit mining that had been conducted on what later became residential property.

"On the basis of the data and their evaluation, there is no clear indication that the arsenic and

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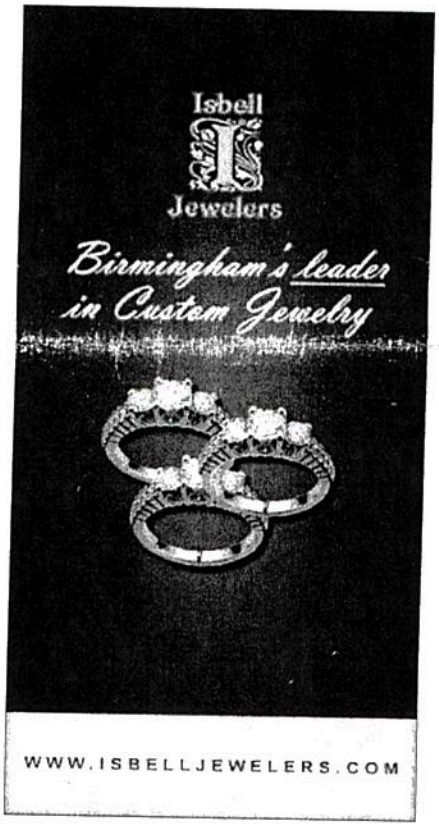


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carcinogenic polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons found in the neighborhoods are attributable to historic or current operations of the Walter Coke facility," the report concluded.

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# 95% UCLs for Mean Benzene Concentrations Monitored at Schools Located Near Coke Plants

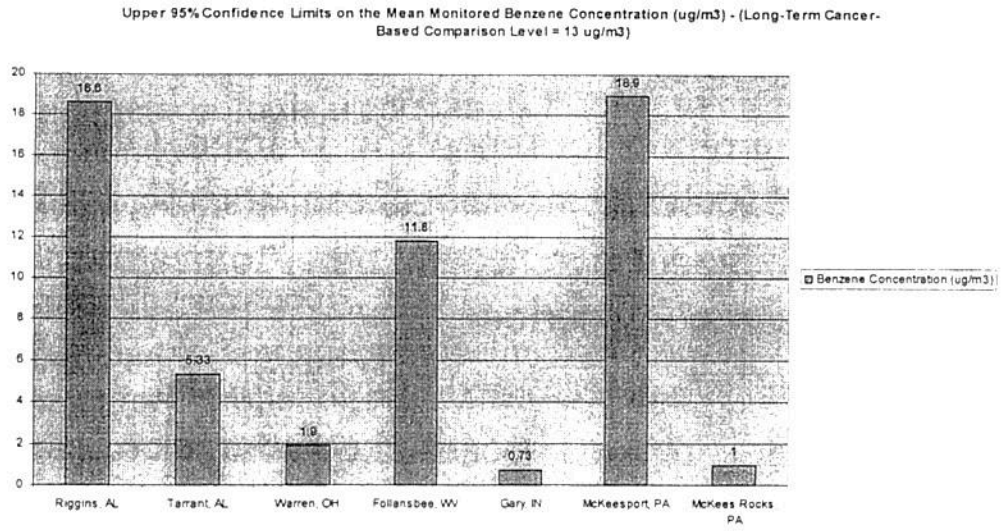

TABLE 47. DISTRIBUTION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF TARS PRODUCED IN A COKE PLANT

| Source of tar | Collector Hydraulic and suction mains | Primary coolers * | Electrical precipitators exhausters | Mixed-tar storage |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Proportion of tar recovered, % by volume | 70 | 21 | 9 | 100 |
| Sp gr, 15.5°C (60°F) | 1.216 | 1.152 | 1.133 | 1.195 |
| Sp viscosity, Engler, 50 cc at 40°C (104°F) | 81.0 | 2.6 | 2.0 | 15.5 |
| Benzene-insoluble material, % by weight | 7.8 | 3.8 | 2.6 | 7.1 |
| Distillation, % by weight: | | | | |
| To 200°C (392°F) | 0.5 | 2.5 | 6.6 | 1.3 |
| 200–270°C (518°F) | 9.0 | 33.2 | 37.6 | 19.5 |
| 270–355°C (671°F) | 27.3 | 47.3 | 51.0 | 36.8 |
| Residue | 72.3 | 52.4 | 48.5 | 62.8 |
| Softening point of distillation residue, cube in air, °C | 71.6 | 78.6 | 77.0 | 74.3 |
| °F | 160.7 | 173.5 | 170.6 | 165.7 |
| Tar acids, % by volume | 1.61 | 2.5 | 2.0 | 1.25 |
| Naphthalene, % by weight | 7.0 | 26.0 | 28.0 | 13.0 |

* E. O. Rhodes, "Chemistry of Coal Utilization," p. 1317, ed. by H. H. Lowry, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., New York, 1945.

troublesome during distillation, or combustion of the tar as a fuel. Vaporization of the water consumes heat, and a high moisture content in the tar may cause serious foaming in the still. Ammonium chloride, which is usually dissolved in the entrained droplets of water, has been responsible for serious corrosion difficulties in some stills. Tar with a moisture content not in excess of 2 percent is usually demanded. This concentration can commonly be attained by settling the tar in the flushing-liquor and primary-cooler-liquor decanters and in the storage tanks. In older plants, which are often not equipped with efficient decanters, auxiliary decanters in the form of large, steam-heated storage tanks are sometimes provided. After a period of settling, tar low in moisture is withdrawn at intervals from the bottom, and liquor is removed at the top.

Tar is dehydrated by heating with steam, either in tanks equipped with steam coils or in double-pipe coils through which the tar is pumped continuously. The steam flows through the annular spaces. Water has also been removed from the tar by centrifugal action. Figure 12–2 shows a machine which embodies this principle, the Sharples Autojector. It has been used to dehydrate tar containing up to 16 percent free-carbon content and as high as 10 percent water. The tar, the water, and also the carbonaceous deposit which collects on the disks are each discharged separately.

* Separation between gen tar and light tar

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