
Update on the Carus Chemical Fire

Testing by IEPA, Carus Contractor and Sierra Club raises concerns about chemicals released by the fire

What happened?

On January 11, a fire at the Carus Chemical plant in La Salle, Illinois, spewed colored ash onto the community. There are ongoing concerns about the chemicals in the ash and the long-term impacts to people, property and waterways.

EPA mobile air monitors showed high levels of particulate matter in the air during the fire. However, community members received very little information about what was in the smoke and ash. LaSalle contracted with a company called Brownfield, which collected soil from neighboring homes, a park and fire station, and tested for manganese and potassium. The Illinois EPA (IEPA) collected 1 soil and 6 surface wipe samples (mostly from the Carus site), and tested those for heavy metals. They found a lot of metals on the site property and some on neighboring side walks.

Contractors washed down homes, sidewalks and hosted a car wash. Surface cleaning is ongoing.

Sierra Club Illinois and community members collected 8 furnace filters from homes near the facility and sent them to a certified lab for analysis. Elevated concentrations of barium, copper, lead, manganese and zinc were found on all samples, and mercury on one filter. These results highlight the fact that other metals were airborne during the fire and could still be lodged in homes and air ducts near the site.

Sierra Club believes that further testing and transparency is necessary for people in LaSalle to be sure their homes and community are safe. More clean up may be necessary and Carus should bear the cost of this work. Simple technologies like higher-quality furnace filters can reduce the amount of ash and metals that enter people's homes. Moving forward, community members and the local government need access to a full safety review to understand what caused the fire, best practices for materials management, and to make sure the facility isn't the source of ongoing pollution in the area.

Community members, we want to hear from you! Please use and share the QR code to fill out a form to let us know your concerns about community needs and safety.



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