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Resend

Environmental Report August 2020

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L.A. County Board of Supervisors unanimously opposes renewing Qumetco's operating permit.

After decades of effort by community organizations and concerned citizens the LA Board of Supervisors has unanimously endorsed a letter to oppose the renewal of Qumetco's operating permit until environmental issues are resolved. Enclosed is the Board's press release on the issue:

"Qumetco, a battery-recycling facility, has been in operation since 1972 in the City of Industry. Every day, the facility crushes and melts 600 tons of used lead-acid batteries and stores hazardous wastes. Over the years, Qumetco repeatedly violated state laws in the handling of toxic substances and endangered surrounding neighborhoods, which are primarily low-income communities of color. In response, today the Board of Supervisors approved a motion, authored by Los Angeles County Supervisor Hilda L. Solis and co-authored by Supervisor Janice Hahn, opposing the plant's permit renewal until it fully complies with state environmental laws.

"If you violate state laws that protect public health, you should not be allowed to renew your permit if you haven't fully implemented the proper mitigations. For years, communities of color near this facility have suffered from exposure to hazardous waste and air pollution, including lead and arsenic emissions, and all of this must stop," said Supervisor Solis. "For me, this is personal: my father worked at Qumetco as a Teamster. His struggle led me to public service, where I have dedicated my life to environmental justice issues. Too many have suffered as a result of Qumetco's actions. Until these violations have been addressed to the fullest extent possible, regulators must not move forward with issuing a decision on Qumetco's renewal permit."

"These repeated violations, pending investigations, and the continuous push back from Qumetco leadership, makes it clear that we cannot trust this plant to follow the rules to keep their workers and the community safe," said Supervisor Hahn. "This plant should not be allowed to renew their operating permit or expand their hours of operation until they can show that they are in full compliance with all the environmental and basic safety regulations."

In November 2018, DTSC sued Qumetco for 29 violations of state hazardous waste laws and regulations. In December 2018, the state Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) ordered Qumetco to remove contaminated soil immediately outside its facility, where sampling found high levels of lead. In February 2020, DTSC reached a tentative workplan with Qumetco to begin this cleanup. However, Qumetco has failed to both fully carry out this cleanup plan and conduct further sampling to gauge the extent of their contamination.

DTSC is expected to issue a preliminary decision on Quemetco's permit renewal by September 2020. Any action, other than denying Quemetco's request, would be premature given pending regulatory investigations involving Quemetco.

Since July 2017, the plant has received four violation notices from the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD), including two for exceeding the level of permitted arsenic emissions. In May 2020, SCAQMD entered into a \$600,000 settlement with Quemetco to resolve these violations. However, SCAQMD has not held a public meeting to explain the basis of this settlement or how the \$600,000 will be spent.

The areas surrounding the plant have been identified as disadvantaged communities by the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA). Neighborhoods near the Quemetco facility are predominantly low-income communities of color, which raises serious environmental justice concerns if regulators approve Quemetco's permit renewal.

With the approval of today's motion, the Board of Supervisors will send a five-signature letter to DTSC opposing the renewal of Quemetco's operating permit until:

- 1) All of Quemetco's unresolved violations of laws are remedied;
- 2) Additional community sampling and cleanup is completed by Quemetco;
- 3) After DTSC's violation score process concludes, and
- 4) After a rigorous public environmental review process is conducted, in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act.

Further with today's Board motion, the Board of Supervisors will also send a five-signature letter to the SCAQMD requesting:

- 1) SCAQMD hold a public meeting to explain its settlement with Quemetco to the public, including how violations were resolved and how the funds will be used;
- 2) SCAQMD consider using a portion of the settlement to help communities impacted by Quemetco, and
- 3) SCAQMD stop considering Quemetco's permit to expand its operations until after the DTSC decides on Quemetco's request to renew its operating permit.

Lastly, copies of these letters will be sent to Gov. Gavin Newsom, CalEPA Director Jared Blumenfeld and to the LA County state legislative delegation."