

MOTION

Atlas Iron & Metal Co., one of the city of Los Angeles' oldest metal recyclers, is located near the intersection of South Alameda Street and Century Boulevard in Watts. Adjacent to Jordan High School, it has been in business since 1949 and purchases scrap metals, alloys, and other recyclable materials while also providing demolition services, baling, and shearing. On August 12, 2024, an explosion at Atlas Metal led to safety concerns at Jordan High School where students and staff have cited metal projectiles and metallic dust flying onto school grounds.

The metal recycling plant has been the subject of multiple lawsuits, including one from the Los Angeles Unified School District. The Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office has also filed two dozen criminal charges against Atlas. In recent years, as heavy rains have showered Los Angeles, the site's operations have allowed polluted stormwater to drift onto the high school grounds, according to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Earlier this year in March, the EPA ordered Atlas Metal to take action to prevent chemicals from washing into local storm drains and drifting onto Jordan High School. Atlas Metal is required to upgrade its stormwater treatment system and limit metallic debris from migrating off its property. Under the agreement with the EPA, the facility operators have vowed to comply with federal water rules, or the facility could face civil penalties.

On September 26, 2024, Atlas Metal was charged in a 25-count indictment for allegedly exposing students at Jordan High School to explosions, hazardous waste, and lead levels 75 times higher than those deemed safe by the EPA. Soil samples taken from Jordan's campus show excessive concentrations of lead and zinc, according to authorities. In August, the Better Watts Initiative, a collaborative of community members and groups organized for environmental justice, called for urgent government-led water testing across Watts households and public housing developments. Researchers documented toxic levels of lead in the tap water of some homes in Watts, leaving local residents facing serious health risks. As samples are collected and testing continues, potential polluting agents that are above ground and persistent in nature in Watts, such as Atlas Metal, should be identified, investigated, and held accountable.

I THEREFORE MOVE that the City Council request the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) and the Office of the City Attorney to investigate the status of Atlas Iron & Metal Co.'s legal requirement to upgrade its stormwater treatment system. This should include specifically what improvements to the stormwater management system have been made and the status of compliance with federal water pollution rules.

I FURTHER MOVE that the City Council request the LADWP coordinate with the Los Angeles School Unified District and the Better Watts Initiative to immediately develop any additional testing strategies for pollutants currently present onsite at Atlas Iron & Metal Co. that could be impacting Jordan High School.

I FURTHER MOVE that the City Council request the Office of the City Attorney report back on recorded citations of illegal disposal of hazardous materials and waste and the status of any penalties incurred by Atlas Iron & Metal Co. in the last five years.

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I FURTHER MOVE that the City Council request the Office of the City Attorney report back on the ability of the City to impose restrictions on operations onsite at Atlas Iron & Metal Co. as the City is investigating the facility. Additionally, the City Attorney should provide measures the City can impose on the operator, including, but not limited to injunctive relief, criminal or civil fines and penalties, and community mitigations, such as a fund, to provide assistance to environmentally sensitive areas in need and to prepare remediation plans for projects that revitalize environmental justice communities in Watts.

PRESENTED BY:



TIM McOSKER

Councilmember, 15th District

SECONDED BY:



ORIGINAL