

To the Editor:

January 15, 2026

One of the Sierra Club's objectives is to safeguard the health of our communities. With this in mind, we have serious concerns about the news that the gray iron foundry in Fairfield, now under new ownership as Hycast Foundry, is seeking a new Title V Operating Permit.

This foundry melts down scrap iron and molds it into parts for agricultural and industrial use. By its nature, this industry has the potential to emit high levels of health-damaging particulate matter and other toxic substances. No doubt if it were built today, it would be located miles away from residential areas. But in 1912, little was known about health risks, so it was located in town, adjacent to the railroad and to workers' homes, near the intersection of Ninth and Depot Streets.

Over the past century we have learned a lot about air pollution – its components, how to measure them, and how they affect our health. The Clean Air Act of 1980- and subsequent amendment to it -was a major step in regulating industries to protect public health. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is charged with implementing the Clean Air Act, in coordination with state agencies like our Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Requirements for modeling air dispersion, on-site and off-site measuring and monitoring, and mitigation measures are all designed to keep toxic emissions to safe levels.

The foundry's new owners, Hycast Foundry LLC, are required to obtain a renewal of the plant's Operating Permit from the Iowa DNR. In late November, the Iowa DNR issued a public notice announcing a draft Operating Permit. Currently, this draft allows the facility to emit 179 tons of fine particulate matter (PM2.5) and over 24 tons of hazardous air pollutants (HAP) such as benzene, nickel, and toluene per year. Such pollutants are linked to asthma, heart disease, respiratory harm, cancer risk, and developmental effects. **Our analysis of the draft permit concludes that it does not adequately protect our air quality, especially for the many residents who live within a mile or less of the plant.**

**OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION:** The DNR has set a public comment period through February 2, 2026, as well as a public hearing via Zoom on **January 29<sup>th</sup> 2026 from 7 to 9 pm**. This is an opportunity to voice our concerns and ask that the Operating Permit be revised to include stronger requirements. The public notice of the draft permit, how to submit a comment, and how to participate in the public hearing can be viewed at the Fairfield Public Library.

**PUBLIC MEETING:** On Saturday **January 17 from 2 to 4 pm**, there will be an informational meeting at Fairfield Public Library. All are welcome to attend to learn more about what a foundry is, what air pollution is, how it affects human health, how it is regulated, and improvements to the Hycast Foundry Title V Operating Permit that could reduce health risks to the surrounding community.

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