

Jarrett Hougland  
Benson, AZ  
85602

A Public Statement Regarding the  
Proposed Aluminum Dynamics Plant  
in Benson, AZ

August 13, 2025

To Whom It May Concern,

The people of America today are faced with a growing sense of pessimism. A deep suspicion that each year will actually be *worse* than the last, and not better. There is a burgeoning confusion and uncertainty underlying nearly everything we do today. From the rapidly collapsing economy, the spiraling cost of groceries, or the simple impossibility of most young families to ever be able to own their own home, the American dream has become more of a living nightmare.

Which is why the people of Benson have been so disappointed and angry at the news that an aluminum recycling plant has not only been proposed in their city, but that construction had already begun.

In a move that can only be defined as shady by those involved, the construction of the aluminum plant has been shrouded in secrecy. The vast majority of those living within Benson city limits were not only not notified, but seemed to have been intentionally kept in the dark. Not surprising given how unpopular such a decision has been. In fact, most people living in Benson weren't even aware of the proposed construction until mid July, and if it wasn't for the incredible hard work of a *very* small group of people, I doubt any of us would have been aware of the proposed facility until after it was far too late.

It is certainly suspicious that an organization which has amassed a total of \$4.6 million dollars in publicized ethics violations would have been secretly building a facility that would, by their own estimation, emit more than 50 tons of toxic chemicals into the air in the middle of our town.

The very fact that we are even having a conversation about whether or not such a facility, built in the middle of multiple residential homes, farms, and ranches, should be allowed to be built defies explanation. How anyone can support such a facility is more than I am able to wrap my head around. It is either malicious or foolish or both; sometimes, it can be hard to tell the difference.

There are three points that I believe are the most relevant when discussing the proposed facility's impact on the surrounding community: the environmental fallout, the economic fallout, and the human, or ethical, fallout that will accompany it. And remember, it isn't only the people within city limits who will be bearing the brunt of this facility. The full range of the facility's impact is unknown; indeed, it cannot be known until it is far too late. This is precisely how such facilities have operated in the past; gaslight the population, build the factory, then simply pay the accumulating environmental fines without regard to the human cost that comes along with their shortsightedness.

So why is an aluminum plant operated by a federally funded, out of state corporation being built in Benson, Arizona in the first place? Wouldn't it make more sense to build such a facility in a more out of the way location? Somewhere not less than a quarter of a mile away from people's homes and businesses?

I believe there are two answers to that question; one having to deal with a mistaken notion of the economic benefits such recycling plant would bring to the city, and the other having to do with water. That's right, water.

For those of you who don't know, the people of the San Pedro River Valley have been in a decades long battle with a certain native tribe to protect their rights to access their own water, on their own land. This has been a very long, very involved, and very *expensive* battle that has directly effected the lives of thousands of people in Cochise County. Stop orders have been issued to prevent new commercial construction from sinking further wells in the area, a fact that has cost at least two major businesses to lose millions of dollars of investment. To get around this, Aluminum Dynamics has brokered a deal with City of Benson to use *city* water for their plant, most likely at a reduced rate. While the exact amount of water that the plant intends to use has been difficult to discover, their proposal does include a stipulation for at least 300,000 gallons per hour for their cooling towers. Let me re-iterate that: the proposed plant is planning on using a *minimum* of 300,000 gallons an hour of city water at a time when your average residential well is being threatened with either being shutdown, or having to pay a service fee to a group of people 400 miles away. For some context, that amount is more than 30% of what the *entire city of Benson* currently uses in a single year.

But excessive water usage is the least of our concerns.

The sonoran desert is a land of many moods. Fiercely blowing winds, torrential rains, and hot and dusty conditions are all part of the norm. Thick layers of dust coat every surface of every home, and the unique flora of the southwest becomes the bane of every Arizonan whenever pollen season comes around. Obviously, air quality is of a constant concern. The Arizonan winds can be a blessing on a hot summer day, or a scourge that can take roofs off of sheds and get dirt and sand in places you didn't even know you had. And it's about to become weaponized against you.

Hydrogen Chloride is a known corrosive and irritant, and only one of the many hazardous air pollutants that Steel Dynamics (Aluminum Dynamics parent company) intends to pump into our environment. Hydrogen Chloride, itself, is a dense compound that tends to disperse close to the ground; especially in warm and dry environments such as our own. Remaining close to the ground will make it more likely directly effect people within the city. The desert winds will help spread it throughout the valley. How far? It's impossible to know.

Those who work in industrial areas where such compounds are commonly produced report constant irritation of the eyes, nose, and throat; an irritation that often becomes chronic, especially in high-risk individuals such as children and the elderly.

This is because of the fact that hydrogen chloride is highly soluble in water. But when exposed to moisture (such as that found in your eyes, nose, throat, and lungs for example) it doesn't stay hydrogen chloride – it becomes hydrochloric acid! Regular exposure commonly leads to ulceration of

the mouth, throat and lungs, uncontrollable coughing, chest tightness, and shortness of breath; all of which also often become chronic. Over time, such exposure is known to create a hypersensitivity in many individuals, leading to a swelling of the throat and even pulmonary oedema; that is, a build up of fluid within the lungs.

That's not all. Constant skin exposure can cause inflammation and eczema, especially in young children. Buildup in the eyes is known to cause corneal damage even at low concentrations, and can lead to corneal necrosis, cataracts, and increased risk of glaucoma at higher rates of exposure. We've already spoken about some of the potential respiratory risks involved, but we'd be remiss if we didn't also point out that constant exposure, at even low concentrations, can and does lead to decreased lung functionality, and can create what is effectively a chemically induced asthma.

And before anybody asks; no. Neither hydrogen chloride nor hydrochloric acid are classified by the international Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) as a potential carcinogen.

Aluminum, however, *is*.

According to the IARC, aluminum production, which would include the recycling process, is classified as a 1a carcinogenic to humans, due to the well documented increase in cancer rates among aluminum industry workers. Regular inhalation and ingestion of aluminum dust is also known to lead to an increase of Alzheimer's disease, an overall decrease in brain function and brain development (especially in children), an increase in instances of brain disease, reduced kidney function, and a propensity for the development of a variety of bone diseases.

Remember all that water the plant was intending to use? While most of it would be used for the plant's cooling towers, a good portion of it will also be used in the recycling process. That means that an unknown quantity of aluminum oxides are likely to be introduced into the surface water, along with other hazardous waste materials.

How far will such contaminants spread? What will the long term effects be? To people? To crops? To livestock? Nobody knows; and that's if we're assuming that *only* the surface water becomes polluted. What isn't being talked about much is the incredible potential for such pollutants to infect the aquifer. What happens when there is no safe water to drink anymore? What do we do then?

Numerous cities back east are already dealing with this problem due to their rapid industrialization. If we are to accept them as the model, then the answer seems to be 'accept the new normal'. Brown, off-smelling water is the standard in most states, and for those unfortunate enough to have suffered through hazardous waste or deadly chemical spills. . . well, the company involved was occasionally forced to pay a fine. I'm sure that will be comforting to the people whose lives were ruined, as they watch the health of themselves and their children rapidly decline because of a completely preventable situation.

Obviously, there are going to be those reading this that are going to say that I am being alarmist. That the ADEQ and EPA are going to be monitoring the levels of the hazardous waste the plant is emitting to ensure that it stays within 'acceptable levels'.

Certainly; because trusting in government oversight to keep you safe has always worked so well in the past.

I would argue that inviting such a plant into our town is a lot like introducing a rabid pit bull into a children's home. Sure, you *might* be able to keep it on its leash – but it only has to escape once. Why even take the risk? Especially when this particular pit bull has a history of environmental infractions totaling over more than six million dollars.

Make no mistake, either; I am assuming the potential fallout assuming that everything operates under the best of conditions. No matter how well run the plant is, sometimes things just go wrong. People can get tired; they can make mistakes. What would it really take for a massive environmental disaster to take place? How many links in the chain would have to break before hundreds of thousands of gallons of hazardous waste became introduced into our town, into our water, into our air? The simple answer is 'just one'.

Most of that is practical; at least, as far as the company is concerned. Safety and redundancy are expensive, after all. Sure, you could argue that it is simply good business to look after the people who work for you, but what about your shareholders? Who's looking out for them?

And you, when a mistake *does* happen (which it will), who will be held responsible for *your* well being? Who will answer for the fact that your water is now poison, or that you can't go outside without seeing twin columns of noxious gas rising into the sky? Without smelling it?

Well. . . nobody. Not legally. Aluminum Dynamics isn't an individual; they're a federally funded company with connections in multiple state governments. Do you think they're going to answer to you? They're not even an independent company. They're merely a shell company; a facade for Steel Dynamics who operates them from behind the scenes, protected from liability by layers and layers of legal and financial obfuscation.

Of course, that's not the real answer. The real answer is that the person at fault when everything goes wrong will be *you*. The people in the ADEQ who didn't consider the real human cost of what they were doing, or didn't care. The members of the EPA who clearly do *not* have your best interests in mind. The citizens who either supported the construction, or did nothing at all to stop it. Citizens, it must be pointed out, who either don't even live in Benson, or who will be the first to move away when things do eventually go wrong, leaving all of us to try to clean up their mess.

And for what? What have you gained? Jobs? Economic opportunity?

Has anyone thought about what sort of jobs this facility will actually bring to the area? Plants like this require highly trained technicians and engineers to operate smoothly; not professions our largely agricultural town is exactly swimming in. No, the majority of work available will be low-skill to no-skill jobs; janitors, for example. Off-duty police officers can likely expect to see opportunities for security positions. A handful of heavy equipment operators *might* get hired, but such organizations tend to hire large contract services rather than individuals for insurance purposes. The truth is that factories like this one historically recruit between 90-95% of their employees not only from outside of the city, but from out of state. For the jobs that are left over, you would likely be better off working at the

recently built Jack in The Box, where at least you would not be gambling on your long term health for a few bucks. The pay will probably be better, too.

The excuse I have heard the most often from city officials isn't employment, though; it's tax revenue. The claim that an increase in tax revenue is somehow worth destroying the well-being of your citizens is simply not one that I can agree with. However, I also don't think they've thought through all of the variables. It is highly probable that the construction of the aluminum recycling plant will result in a net zero, or even a loss of overall tax revenue.

Certainly, Steel Dynamics is going to bring an influx of money to the table. They're a massive, publicly supported company, after all. But at what cost? The many RV parks around Benson will undoubtedly see a marked decrease in revenue following the facility's construction. After all, who would want to vacation in an industrial park? Who wants to go to a Country Music Festival right next to a foul-smelling plant belching out noxious fumes? Why would anyone want to make the drive up from Tucson to grab breakfast at the Horseshoe Cafe or dinner at Mi Casa, when doing so would mean navigating past massive diesel trucks that have now completely clogged the narrow streets of our small town, which is painfully unequipped to deal with such a large increase in traffic? As people leave, who will be going to the local hardware store, anymore? The barbershops? You can't have small tourist shops without tourists. What's going to happen to the city's murals after they're covered in effluent from the stacks the facility intends to build?

In short, instead of fixing the already well-known infrastructure problems that have prevented the town from organically expanding and developing in a healthy way, they have shortsightedly brought in outside development which will completely destroy the lives and livelihood of the people who live here.

Because it isn't just the businesses in town that will suffer. Everyone in the surrounding area has been forced to make extremely hard decisions. On the other side of the river, numerous homes have had their once tranquil days and evenings shattered as construction has started on the massive facility only a stone's throw away. Property values in the area are already dropping because, again, who wants to live right next to a recycling facility? The families who have lived here for generations, who spent their blood and sweat into developing their property and building their dream homes, are now watching decades of work go up in flames due to the misplaced greed of a few individuals. Those who retired to our quiet town and no longer have the financial means to leave, due in no small part to the recycling plant's existence, will simply be stuck. I suspect that more than a few families will find themselves suddenly upside down on their mortgages once the plant gets going. I'll say it for the last time; who wants to live next to a recycling plant?

If I'm being perfectly honest, even at nearly three thousand words long, I am barely scratching the surface of the negative effects that such a company would bring to Benson. I've haven't even really discussed the ridiculousness of what the increased commercial traffic would do to the city streets, nor the increased maintenance costs such traffic would require. In closing, I can't help but notice that most of the plants strongest proponents don't even live in Benson at all. They're in St. David, Dragoon, or Cochise; some are even in Phoenix or Tucson. Why such people should have any voice of authority in what happens in Benson city limits is beyond me. They certainly aren't going to have to deal with the destruction of their water supply, the loss of air quality, or the long-term health defects

that will come from having the Aluminum Dynamics facility in their own backyard. They won't have to see everything they've worked for destroyed. Their children poisoned. Their dreams shattered.

Instead, they will be able to talk about 'acceptable limits'. They, like the company they sponsor, will be blinded by greed. Perhaps their motivations were good. Perhaps they thought they were actually helping the town through the increased tax revenue; but their scope was too narrow. They didn't think about the consequences of their actions beyond the most superficial; and they didn't even really consider those very well, either.

ADEQ has a chance to do the right thing and turn down the application on humanitarian and practical grounds. No such facility should ever be built in such proximity to pre-existing residences and homes. We all know that they won't do that, however. The ADEQ has already spent their time and resources doing their best to convince the residents of Benson to accept the plant, and to ensure the people that the effluent from the plant will be well within 'acceptable limits'; as though accepting toxic chemicals into your body is ever an acceptable process. Perhaps the EPA will do the right thing and prevent the plant from being built. Perhaps. Truly, though, it is up to the people of Benson to fight for their own health, and the health of their children. If they don't, or if they are not willing to, then they will have nobody to blame but themselves for the disaster that will befall them.

And like I said earlier, by then it will be far too late. The people responsible will have departed, the plant will be built, and all you will be left with will be. . . regret.

Jarrett Hougland

Benson, Arizona