

Hearing the concerns of Midway-area homeowners is 23rd Ward Ald. Silvana Tabares (left).
– *Southwest News-Herald photo by Tim Hadac*

# It's the screens that smell

## Aviation Dept. releases test results on sound-insulating windows, doors

**By Tim Hadac**

The foul, "burning plastic" odor found in hundreds of Midway-area homes (and possibly more) is not coming from government-supplied sound insulation windows and doors—but from screens that go along with them, Chicago Department of Aviation officials said last week.

Further, laboratory tests paid for by city government have found no evidence of a hazard to human health, CDA officials added.

An ongoing concern of many of homeowners with Residential Sound Insulation Program windows and doors is that the fumes emitted are more that an annoyance—and they have produced anecdotal evidence to suggest a link with respiratory illnesses, particularly in children living in the homes.

The screens tested are coated with polyvinyl chloride (PVC). Sunlight is known to break down poorly stabilized PVC, a substance often used in construction of window frames and doors. PVC, a known carcinogen, is

**See SCREENS, Page 7**

## SCREENS

Continued from Page 1

banned in some countries, but not the U.S.

The findings were rendered by Amec Foster Wheeler (now known as Wood) and architectural testing firm Intertek-ATI (Intertek).

Overall, laboratory testing also indicates that elevated temperature contributed to the rate of off-gassing.

"Based on odor screening and laboratory testing, we have identified a cause for the odors observed: the Sound Solutions screens are a significant contributor," said Chris Everts, an Amec (Wood) environmental engineer. "Exposure to high temperatures can cause most vinyl window products irrespective of the manufacturer to originate odors. Going forward, we are committed to working with the City, as well as Intertek, to establish an effective mitigation program for the community."

At last week's quarterly meeting of the Midway Noise Compatibility Commission, CDA Deputy Commissioner Aaron Frame said his department is still working out a plan to replace defective screens. It is anticipated that a plan will be announced in the weeks ahead.

At that same public meeting, some homeowners expressed skepticism about the testing.

"Do I think the problem could be the screens and not the windows? Yes, I do," said Chrysler Village homeowner Pam Zidarich, a co-founder of the Midway Defective Window Recipients non-profit advocacy organization. "But do I think the Department of Aviation has done all it can to check these screens for health hazards? No, I don't."

Zidarich said that the tests appeared to fail to expose the screens to sufficiently high heat. The tests went up to 149 degrees. Zidarich said the air pocket between the RSIP windows at her home reached 145 degrees—on a relatively mild summer day.

She said that according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the air in a car on a hot day can reach 173 degrees. "So you know it can get that hot with some of these windows and screens," she said.

Also at last week's MNCC meeting at Mayfield Banquets was new 23rd Ward Ald. Silvana Tabares, who spoke during a public-comment session and said as a Garfield Ridge resident and as a new mom, she has "major concerns" about the situation.

"It's clear to me that more testing needs to be done," she said, adding that she understands "the frustration of many homeowners who are going through this...with headaches and dizziness [from the fumes]."

She added that resolving the situation is a priority of hers and pledged to continue to work with the Department of Aviation and local homeowners—who greeted her remarks with a strong round of applause.

Zidarich said that the MDWR is hosting a public "summer social" that will run from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Monday, Aug. 13 at West Lawn Park, 4233 W. 65th St.

All RSIP homeowners are invited to attend. Since the event will be set up as a resource fair—homeowners do not need to be there at 6:30 p.m. They are invited to attend and bring documentation of their dealings with RSIP. Volunteers will be on hand to offer advice and help guide them through the process of dealing with the Department of Aviation.

### More than 10,000 homes in 21 years

The Midway Residential Sound Insulation Program's goal, according to a statement on the Chicago Department of Aviation's website, is "to make it easier for the highest impacted homeowners surrounding Midway to talk on the phone, watch TV, listen to music, sleep, or have a conversation in their own homes. By properly sound-insulating these homes, homeowners not only gain a quieter interior, but may also benefit from long-lasting improvements and increased efficiency in their heating and cooling systems."

Since the program was launched in 1996, some 10,173 homes near Midway have been sound-insulated, CDA officials note, as well as 41 local schools.

RSIP homeowners with questions or concerns are advised to call the Midway RSIP office at (773) 838-5632.