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- [Nation](#)
- [Opinion](#)
- [Politics](#)
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- [Weird News](#)
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- [High School](#)
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- [Ski Conditions](#)
- [Twins/MLB](#)
- [Vikings/NFL](#)
- [Wild/NHL](#)
- [Wolves/NBA](#)

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- [Columnists](#)
- [Personal](#)

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- [Technology](#)

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- [Columnists](#)
- [Art](#)

[Back to Home](#) > [Pioneer Press](#) >

Monday, Mar 01, 2004



## Local News

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Posted on Thu, Jan. 08, 2004

## ST. PAUL: Ethanol plant fails smell test

BY ROBERT INGRASSIA  
Pioneer Press

Results from the first batch of official odor tests at Gopher State Ethanol are in and the West Seventh Street plant still stinks way too much.

The odor escaping from one part of the plant was nearly 14 times worse than allowed under last fall's court deal between Gopher State and the city of St. Paul. Smelly emissions from other parts of the plant were five to seven times above the limit.

In all, tests were conducted on nine emission points. Gopher State came in below the target odor level at two of them.

"They've got some substantial work to do on a number of fronts," said Michael Unger, a Minneapolis attorney who represents a group of West Seventh neighborhood residents upset about the odor. "In some cases, it's fairly drastic."

Gopher State Chief Executive Officer Jim Freeman could not be reached for comment Wednesday. He has said previously that he didn't expect the plant to meet the odor limits in the first round of tests. St. Paul attorney Tom Fabel, who represents Gopher State, said he hadn't seen the test results.

Assistant City Attorney Eric Larson, who represents St. Paul in a nuisance lawsuit against Gopher State, said the city would work aggressively to ensure that the firm sticks to its agreement, which requires the plant to meet odor limits by May.

"We did not expect instant compliance, but we expect, without question, that the company will meet those targets," Larson said. "We are not going to go through another summer with what occurred from 2000 to the present."

Larson said that if the company misses the deadline, the city would seek "appropriate sanction" from Ramsey County District Judge Dale Lindman, who is overseeing the plan to reduce odors. The judge could order the company to take more stringent odor-control steps. He also could set up a schedule of fines.

Attorneys from the city, Gopher State and the neighborhood are scheduled to meet Monday with Lindman.

The city sued Gopher State in 2002 after other attempts to address odor complaints failed. In September, while Lindman was mulling testimony from a trial four months earlier, the city and Gopher State agreed to a deal that aims to reduce the odor.

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Gopher State promised to make a number of changes at the plant, which has been operating since 2000 in the former Schmidt brewery. The company already had taken some steps, including increasing the height of smokestacks, before the first odor samples were taken.

Measuring odor is complex. Because the chemicals responsible for the odor become so diluted by the time they reach the surrounding neighborhood, air samples are taken from the plant itself. The samples are then diluted to simulate how they would be dispersed into the neighborhoods. Human testers smell the diluted samples to determine the odor level.

Last fall, Gopher State began using a new process that officials said would help reduce the odor. The plant, which generally distills corn into ethanol, began using waste soda and alcoholic beverages as its source of sugar.

The test results show that the new sugar source might have only a limited impact, Unger said. One of the smelliest parts of the ethanol-making process occurs after the raw material, whether it's corn or cola, has been broken down, he said.

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*Tim Nelson contributed to this report. Robert Ingrassia can be reached at [ringrassia@pioneerpress.com](mailto:ringrassia@pioneerpress.com) or 651-292-1892.*

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