

**INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM**

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# **LEGAL, ETHICS, AND REPORTING STRATEGY**

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# GOPHER WORKS VIOLENCES

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graph TD; A[GOPHER WORKS VIOLENCES] --> B[Gopher exposed workers for years to levels of lead in the air that were hundreds of times higher than the federal limit. At times, the concentration was considered life-threatening.]; A --> C[Gopher knew its factory had too much lead dust, company disabled ventilation features that captured fumes and moved slowly to fix faulty mechanical systems.]; A --> D[Gopher rewarded employees with bonuses if they kept the amount of lead in their blood down and punished those who couldn't. Gopher rewarded employees with bonuses if they kept the amount of lead in their blood down and punished those who couldn't.];
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# GOPHER ENVIRONMENT VIOLENCES

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graph TD; A[GOPHER ENVIRONMENT VIOLENCES] --> B[In the past six years, Gopher repeatedly discharged polluted water into the Palm River, sent too many chemicals into Tampa's sewer system, and mishandled hazardous waste.]; A --> C[In 2013, County regulators found Gopher had released excessive amounts of lead, sulfur dioxide and volatile organic compounds. Then, in 2014 and 2015, fires at the plant discharged more lead than allowed into the neighborhood.]; A --> D[Local, state and federal environmental agencies have hit the company with dozens of violation notices and more than $540,000 in fines and fees. county regulators found more than 24 possible violations, including failing to report mechanical issues that could increase air pollution.]; A --> E[Residents and business owners have reported concerns to the county about metallic smells, their fear of lead infiltrating well water, and mysterious wastewater floods in Gopher's parking lot during the night.];
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OSHA: The Occupational Safety and Health Administration is supposed to ensure that companies provide safe work environments.

# GOPHER INSIDE THE FACTORY

Federal rules required that Gopher provide regular checkups, but the company-contracted doctor didn't tell workers their blood-lead levels put them in danger.

The company and consultants it hired documented more than two dozen possible violations on top of the hundreds of high blood-lead tests that warranted inspection.

The blood-lead levels of Gopher workers have been under the OSHA standard for determining when employees must be removed as a safety precaution.

In the furnace department, 46 percent of air samples exceeded the protection of the respirators assigned to most workers in 2019—the highest percentage since OSHA had last been at the factory.

OSHA: The Occupational Safety and Health Administration is supposed to ensure that companies provide safe work environments.

OSHA took weeks or longer to nail down a date with the factory's safety managers, Gopher's has time to prepare and cover the real glimpse into day-to-day conditions at the factory

# FEDERAL DEPARTMENT ETHICS

The absence of regulators at the plant is a total failure and total abdication of their responsibility. OSHA hasn't been inside the factory in five years.

Federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration regulators haven't inspected the factory for lead contamination since 2014 and missed critical problems in previous visits. Even when top regional safety officials ordered increased inspections of lead businesses across the Southeast, no one came to the factory.

STRATEGIES

The company disagreed with being interviewed

the journalist obtained a writing statement from the Gopher's Chief Operating Officer, Eric Robinson

REPORTING HINDRANCES

Bohnker, the medical director of a Tampa Clinic that Gopher has hired, refused to answer questions from the journalist.

The journalist reviewed medical records and interviewed former and current workers, doctors, occupational health specialists, professor emeritus.

OSHA officials refused to be interviewed

some of them responded to questions in writing

## STRATEGIES

examined a consultant report for company

find a tendency of violation towards the environment

interviewed industrial hygienists, neighboring residents, nearby business owners, air pollution experts, environmental chemist, county's air division director, The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a toxicologist and director of the industrial hygiene program at Tulane University.

analyzed blood-lead tests of more than 500 Gopher employees from 2014 to 2018.

reviewed company medical records of 16 former workers, who spent from one year to 33 years at the plant and left in the last decade

Reviewed the federal government regulation for worker exposure to cadmium.

analyzed more than 300 air samples collected by the company monitors attached to workers from 2007 to 2019

## STRATEGIES

**the journalist**, Corey G. Johnson, had been following national news coverage of lead poisoning in the public water supply in Flint, Michigan

identified the recycler as the last lead smelter operating in the state and learned the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency had cited its owner, Gopher Resource, as a significant lead polluter.

examined which position for each individual member of the team in order to obtain evidence of accuracy.

The journalists interviewed the workers in person at their homes, to avoid their supervisors and coworkers

The Times sent the three reporters to Georgia to take the courses needed to earn certifications as lead inspectors. They learned how to make samples, the risk of lead exposures, and regulations imposed by federal agencies, including OSHA and the EPA

Asked for any footages from the 100 former workers.



# JOURNALISTS ETHICS



## CONCERN

When investigative journalist Corey G. Johnson started working at the Tampa Bay Times in 2017, he had been following national news coverage of lead poisoning in the public water supply in Flint, Michigan, where he spent summers as a kid visiting family. After some digging, Johnson identified the recycler as the last lead smelter operating in the state. He also learned the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency had cited its owner, Gopher Resource, as a significant lead polluter.



## ESTABLISHED THE MAPS

Examined human trail, document trail, and money trail. For instance, for document trail, the three journalists asked workers to share copies of their personal medical records. The three journalists asked workers to share copies of their personal medical records.



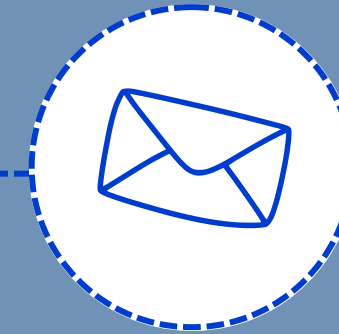
## PROBING SKILLS

The journalists avoided contacting them at work or on social media. The team chose to approach workers at their homes, away from their supervisors and coworkers. The reporters also wanted to do interviews in person so workers could see in their faces that they cared about them and the story.



## DIGGING DEEPER

- analyzed more than 300 air samples collected by the company monitors attached to workers from 2007 to 2019.
- reviewed company medical records of 16 former workers, who spent from one year to 33 years at the plant and left in the last decade
- interviewed primary sources, for instance their worker.
- Asked for any footages from the 100 former workers.



## EVIDENCE ACCURACY

Reporters go to Georgia to take the courses needed to earn certifications as lead inspectors. Not only did they learn how to take samples needed to test for lead in soil, they learned about the health risks of lead exposure and regulations imposed by federal agencies, including OSHA and the EPA. The reporters asked the former workers for the photos and videos inside of the Gopher factory.