Trade-Offs in Tallassee

Neptune's Impact on its Alabama Hometown

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Good Neighbors Alabama

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART ONE

About Jobs To Move America

Jobs to Move America (JMA) is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that conducts rigorous and independent research to develop the ideas, practices and policies necessary for building a just new economy. For more than a decade, federal, state and local policymakers have relied on JMA's research to inform their decision-making at the intersection of public procurement and emerging industries. JMA has recently produced leading insights into industries such as electric school bus manufacturing, microchip manufacturing and lithium extraction.

JMA employs eight personnel living and working in Alabama, including the two primary authors of this report. Across the country, JMA's team includes six PhDs with deep expertise in fields ranging from sociology to organismic and evolutionary biology. The research team's methods combine rigorous standards informed by extensive experience in academia with deep, on-the-ground fieldwork by local staff. Our in-depth research often focuses on the impact of corporate behavior on workers and communities around the United States. As a result, JMA frequently conducts surveys of workers and communities that help illuminate the conditions in and around factories owned by global corporations that receive extensive public subsidies and contracts.

JMA also partners with top academic programs to produce and share research, including recent collaborations with Columbia University, Cornell University, Jackson State University, and Alabama A&M University. These partnerships have resulted in published reports by academics at Jackson State and Alabama A&M, as well as an upcoming report from Columbia Labor Lab.

PART TWO

Author Biographies

Sherah Faulkner

is a Senior Researcher for Jobs to Move America and native Alabamian. She holds a PhD in Geography with a concentration in Cultural Studies from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and an MA in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies from Georgia State University. She completed her bachelor's degree at Agnes Scott College in Atlanta, Georgia.

Will Tucker

is the Southern Director for Jobs to Move America and a native Alabamian. He holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Alabama and worked as an investigative journalist for 10 years before joining JMA's staff in 2021. He previously worked at the Southern Poverty Law Center as an investigative reporter covering criminal justice, focusing on prisons and work release programs. Before that, in Washington, D.C., he covered Congressional ethics, K Street, campaign finance and foreign lobbying for the Houston Chronicle and Opensecrets.org. There, reports under his byline led to two Ethics Committee investigations in the House of Representatives involving misconduct by 11 members of Congress and the federal conviction of a former congressman on nearly two-dozen corruption charges.

HeeWon Brindle-Khym

is the Research Director for JMA. Before joining JMA, she served as Director of Research and Global Strategies at the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU/UFCW). HeeWon has served on numerous boards, including the NYC Industrial Development Agency, the Public Utility Law Project of New York, and global union federations such as UNI Global and IUF. She holds a Master of Public Administration from Columbia University and a B.S. from Boston College.

PART THREE

Executive Summary

Neptune Technology Group, a Tallassee, Alabama-based manufacturer of smart water meters, plays a key role in supplying essential public infrastructure for cities and towns across North America. Its products help conserve water in communities facing shortages. At the same time, the company also releases industrial waste locally into long-troubled disposal sites.

Neptune generates substantial revenue for its parent company, Roper Technologies, while also serving as a major local employer. The company's jobs allow some Tallassee-area residents to work close to home rather than commute to larger cities. Yet those jobs often come with a high cost. Employees report working between 55 and 75 hours per week, often across weekends, with mandatory overtime as a routine expectation. Neptune's offering of "family weekends" is limited and inconsistently implemented. The result is a workplace where extended shifts and restricted personal time are the norm, not the exception.

These dynamics reveal significant trade-offs: workers sacrifice time with family, control over their schedules, and long-term well-being — and yet they stay, often for decades, with an employer that helps create public benefits like efficient drinking water infrastructure elsewhere. In short, Neptune's economic contributions to distant cities are not matched by equivalent benefits to its own community.

This report by the Jobs to Move America (JMA) research department, based on a two-year study, outlines these tensions in detail. It concludes with a recommendation that Neptune work with local community and worker organizations to solve these problems through the negotiation of an enforceable community benefits agreement (CBA) with local and state partners. Such an agreement could help ensure that as Neptune supports water infrastructure across the country, it also upholds dignity, opportunity, and sustainability for the people and places it calls home.

PART FOUR

Key Findings

A two-year, mixed-methods investigation by JMA based on interviews, survey responses, and public document review reveals:

- **Women — regardless of race — earn $5.91 less per hour than white men on average.** Black men earn $6.59 less per hour than white men.
- The wage disparities observed at Neptune are driven primarily by occupational segregation rather than direct pay differences by race or gender. **Access to higher-wage positions is not equal.**
- **Neptune workers regularly work between 55 and 75 hours each week.** Some described stretches of 21 work days straight without a day off.

- **More than 60%** of surveyed production workers' hourly wages are concentrated between $20 and $25. Not all workers have access to wage mobility. Women and Black workers are clustered in the lower wage bands; high earners are all white men. Tenure does not equate to advancement or higher wages. The majority of production workers see sharp gains in their first few years, but by ten years earnings are mostly flat.
- **More than two-thirds (78.46%)** of workers reported having witnessed or experienced at least one serious injury on the job; over 46% reported witnessing or experiencing multiple injuries during their tenure at Neptune.
- **Nearly 70%** of all surveyed workers reported experiencing or witnessing unfair treatment—including favoritism, inconsistent discipline, racism, and sexism. Unfair treatment is systemic and the majority of workers are impacted.
- Of the three Alabama landfills currently under contract with Neptune to receive its industrial waste, two—Emelle and Stone's Throw—have been the focus of environmental justice investigations and litigation. Academic and advocacy publications continue to reference Emelle as an example of hazardous waste disposal located in majority-Black communities with little local oversight.

PART FIVE

Introduction

On March 12, 2019, 50-year-old Aaron Ledbetter was working on a factory floor in Tallassee, Alabama when a heavy fixture from an industrial machine began to fall out of place above him. Aaron tried to stabilize it but couldn't—the fixture came down and Aaron seriously injured his back.

"The 350-pound fixture fell from above my head and I caught it and threw it off me," Aaron said. "It messed up my back." The initial treatments for his injury were ineffective, he said. "The shots didn't work. Nothing. Therapy didn't work."[1]

According to Aaron, this wasn't his first injury on the job.

Aaron had worked for his employer, Neptune Technology Group (Neptune), since 2002. Neptune manufactures water meters, including "smart" meters — products that allow water utilities to remotely monitor customer water usage electronically rather than mechanically — for more than 4,000 cities and towns across North America. According to the company, Neptune's Tallassee headquarters is unique in two key ways: it was the first North American water meter manufacturing facility dedicated to "lead-free" operations and is the only one that maintains an in-house foundry where bronze parts for its metering products are cast.[2]

Aaron, along with several of his former co-workers, said that the industrial machines on Neptune's shop floor run constantly, making them difficult to maintain. By the time the fixture fell on him in 2019, Aaron said he had already undergone shots and therapy for a very similar prior injury. And yet, he kept coming back to Neptune, trying to make the job work for him. While Aaron's injury was severe, his dilemma is not unique. As the area's major industrial employer, Neptune looms large for many local manufacturing workers, their families, and other Tallassee residents.

This report documents trade-offs Neptune's operations impose on its workers, community, and its customers. While the company helps produce public goods around the country, its employees and neighbors face the current realities of punishing working conditions, stagnant wages, and environmental concerns.

Tallassee is a small city of just under 5,000 people, covering eleven square miles and split by the Tallapoosa River, which runs quickly past the Neptune plant. According to its mayor, Tallassee is the industrial anchor of Elmore County.[3] And Tallassee's economy and daily life have long been shaped by the presence of Neptune.

According to the company, "Neptune was one of the first large-scale manufacturing operations to relocate to Alabama for industry expansion, having moved its headquarters from Long Island City, New York" in 1972.[4] During this period, many industrial companies left northern cities and arrived in the U.S. South as part of an influx of capital seeking plentiful, hard-working labor, low wages, and lax regulations.[5] Over time they became central not only to individual workers' lives, but to entire rural communities.

By now, some have operated long enough in Alabama to employ multiple generations of the same families. Such is the case for Neptune, which employs around 500 workers in Tallassee.[6]

For many local families, a job at Neptune is perceived as the best available, offering higher wages than other area factories. For residents of Tallassee and nearby communities such as Notasulga, Wetumpka, and Eclectic, employment at Neptune means the possibility of stable income without a long commute to Montgomery or other surrounding cities. Neptune is owned by Roper Technologies, Inc. (Roper), a $7.04 billion diversified technology company traded on the Nasdaq stock exchange[7] and headquartered some 500 miles away from Aaron and his coworkers in Sarasota, Florida.

Neptune operates under Roper's Technology Enabled Products (TAP) segment and has enabled the segment to net revenues of $1.7 billion for 2024, with an operating margin of 34% and operating profit of $1.02 billion. This segment makes up approximately a quarter of Roper's total net revenues,[8] with Neptune being a key driver for the segment's performance.[9] Roper President and CEO, Neil Hunn, is among the highest-compensated executives in the country, with compensation totaling more than $40 million in 2023.[10] But for Aaron, "We don't see Roper. We see Neptune," he said.

Despite Neptune's financial importance to its parent company and its role as a leading employer in the region, local workers report mixed reviews. Employees

interviewed and surveyed by Jobs to Move America (JMA) describe Neptune as the best option in the area, but also as a workplace where the benefits come with significant trade-offs. Workers report weeks ranging from 55 to 75 hours, mandatory overtime, and frequent weekend shifts. Some describe little control over their schedules and a pattern of long hours that leaves little time for family, rest, or other responsibilities.

Wage growth is also a concern for many. Respondents reported receiving raises in their early years at Neptune, but wage increases tend to flatten over time, with real earnings stagnating and even declining when adjusted for inflation. Opportunities for advancement are limited, and bonuses are rare. Employees report that rewards for exceeding production targets typically take the form of small gift cards or an occasional pizza party, rather than significant pay increases or profit-sharing.

In addition to concerns about hours and wages, workers describe challenging health and safety conditions. Reports of workplace injuries—such as carpal tunnel, tendonitis, rotator cuff problems, and back pain—are common, particularly among those who have spent years on the production floor or in the foundry.

Neptune's impact is not limited to its workforce. The company's environmental practices have significant consequences for Tallassee and its surroundings. Public records from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) show that Neptune disposes of large amounts of toxic metal waste, including copper and lead, much of it going to landfills located in predominantly Black communities or the city's municipal wastewater lagoon.

Conducted between 2023 and 2025, JMA's study of Neptune examined its workplace conditions, wage structure, and impact on both the workforce and the community. The research relied on surveys, interviews, and public records. The goal was to provide an understanding of what it means to work at Neptune in Tallassee and how those experiences relate to the company's financial success and environmental footprint.

This report draws on the voices and experiences of Neptune workers themselves to describe the conditions inside the factory, the realities of pay and advancement, the challenges of work-life balance, and the relationship between the company's business practices and its impact on workers and the community it operates in.

Workers report weeks ranging from 55 to 75 hours, mandatory overtime, and frequent weekend shifts. Some describe little control over their schedules and a pattern of long hours that leaves little time for family, rest, or other responsibilities.

PART SIX

Methodology

To understand the conditions faced by Neptune workers and the broader impact of the company's operations in Tallassee, Jobs to Move America (JMA) researchers conducted a comprehensive, mixed-methods research project between 2023 and 2025. The aim was to document, as thoroughly as possible, both the daily realities for workers at Neptune and the company's environmental practices in the surrounding community.

The research team created a study design that combined quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. The process began with the development of a core survey instrument that was then administered to Neptune employees. The survey included questions about wages, schedules, overtime, safety, advancement opportunities, benefits, injuries, and perceptions of fairness. The survey was revised and expanded over the course of the study to better reflect the concerns raised by respondents.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were a core part of the study. These interviews were designed to capture stories that could not be reduced to survey responses—covering topics such as the evolution of workplace culture, the impact of overtime on family life, experiences of injury and recovery, and perceptions of fairness and respect on the job. Workers were encouraged to speak openly about their experiences, both positive and negative. Workers routinely referenced the experiences of parents, grandparents, or cousins while recounting their own. Interviews with one worker could expand spontaneously to include others — sons-in-law were brought over from next door, grandchildren called on the phone, spouses and siblings on different shifts were woken up to contribute their stories. These intergenerational patterns gave life to our quantitative analyses, making it clear that workers' individual experiences at Neptune are far from isolated–they're part of a community history.

The goal of this methodology was to provide a comprehensive and accurate picture of Neptune as a workplace and as a corporate presence in Tallassee, relying on the best available evidence and the lived realities of the people who know the company best—its workers.

Reaching this workforce was challenging and data collection required a flexible, worker-centered approach. Neptune's manufacturing employees work very long hours, live in rural areas, and spend what little free time they have with their families or engaged in activities–going to church, hunting and fishing, riding motorcycles–that aren't conducive to meeting with interviewers. During later data collection, workers reported that management was holding meetings to instruct them to not answer the researchers' questions and to direct them to leave their private property if visited at home. At least two workers interpreted these statements to suggest workers would be punished if they did not comply. JMA spoke with a total of 84 current and former Neptune workers. Of these, a core group of 70 current and recently separated manufacturing employees provided the primary basis for statistical analysis. This group represented approximately 23% of the total production workforce.[11] Interviews and surveys with white-collar workers, security staff, temporary employees, and retirees were also conducted to provide broader context and historical perspective.

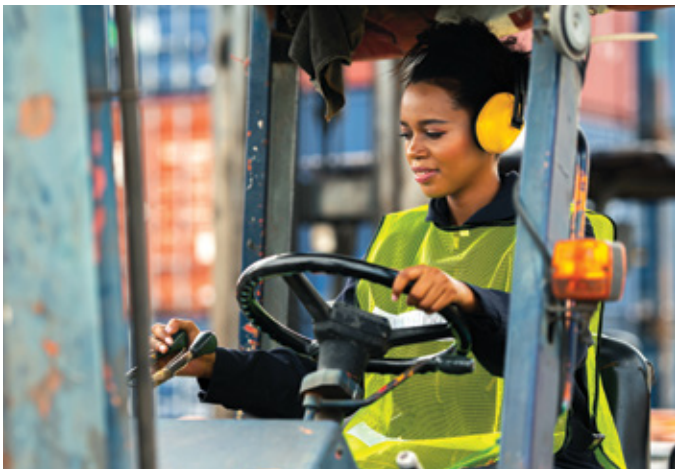
The survey core sample served as the basis for the statistical analyses. As not every respondent answered every question, statistical significance and confidence intervals were calculated on a question-by-question basis. For most questions, results were statistically significant and, given the size and representativeness of the core sample, can be generalized to the broader manufacturing workforce, with confidence levels typically at 95% and margins of error between 8 and 11.5 percentage points. Survey responses were coded and statistical tests conducted, including descriptive statistics, t-tests, Mann-Whitney U tests, Chi-square tests, ANOVA, and linear regressions to identify statistically significant differences and patterns. Special attention was paid to wage bands, occupational segregation, and the relationship between years of service and pay.

Inductive qualitative coding was conducted for interviews with an emphasis on identifying recurring patterns of experience. The research team continued interviewing new participants until "thematic saturation" was reached, meaning that no significant new patterns or themes were emerging. Interviews and field notes were coded using a collaborative process, identifying recurring issues, memorable anecdotes, and unique perspectives from across departments and job types. While not statistically generalizable, the data collected from the interview process reached a thematic saturation level across a diverse range of respondents, allowing identifiable patterns with strong internal validity and guided the prioritization of issues in this report.

The research team also compared Neptune's wages to benchmarks such as the MIT Living Wage Calculator for Elmore County, and analyzed how overtime pay affected workers' ability to meet household financial needs. Empirical analysis was conducted to identify not just average experiences but also outliers—such as workers earning significantly more or less than their peers, or those with unusually high or low injury rates.

In addition to firsthand data from workers, JMA reviewed public records from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM), and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). Company filings and investor documents from Roper Technologies were also reviewed, as were local news articles and municipal records related to environmental regulation and water infrastructure. Where possible, survey and interview findings were cross-referenced against these public records to verify accuracy.

Neptune's official employee handbook and some internal records were not accessible to researchers and, therefore, based on consistent testimony from employees, policies and practices were often inferred. Workers reported that they must be present onsite to access the employee handbook virtually.



Some topics—especially those related to management retaliation, racial discrimination, or unionization—were sensitive, and several workers expressed fear of reprisal. One former worker likened the situation to Neptune having "the whole area on lockdown." In some cases, participants requested anonymity or withheld identifying details. The research team took steps to ensure confidentiality and to respect workers' wishes about how their stories would be shared.

Findings in this report are grounded in both numbers and narratives: statistical results from survey data, complemented by the lived experiences and direct voices of workers. Special effort was made to capture patterns that persisted across different groups of workers and over time, as well as to highlight the diversity of experience in different departments, roles, and demographic groups.

The goal of this methodology was to provide a comprehensive and accurate picture of Neptune as a workplace and as a corporate presence in Tallassee, relying on the best available evidence and the lived realities of the people who know the company best—its workers.

RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Of the core survey respondents, 71% were men and 29% women, with 54% identifying as white and 46% as Black. Workers' ages spanned from 18 to nearly 80, with an average age in the early 40s and an average tenure exceeding 15 years.

PART SEVEN

Working Hours, Scheduling, and Overtime

The issue workers raised most often and insistently during interviews was their working hours. Of the manufacturing workers interviewed, 60% volunteered their opinions about working hours, characterizing the number of hours and/or their limited time off as a problem.

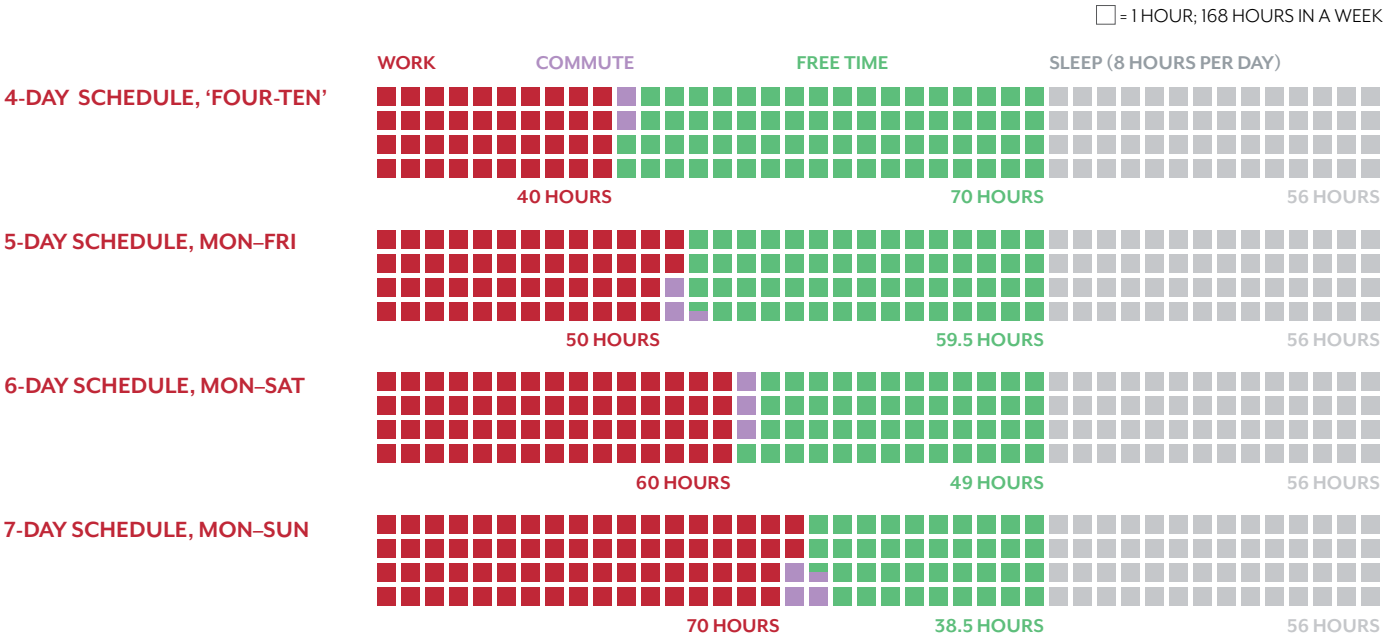
Interviewed workers said that Neptune's supposed schedule for production workers is a four-day, ten-hour shift model known internally as the "four-ten," but this is not the schedule they actually work on a regular basis. Most described an extended workweek, with little to no control over their schedules.

According to survey data, fewer than 20% of Neptune production workers report working less than 55 hours a week, a common benchmark for long working hours that adversely impact workers' health and safety.[12] Most survey respondents reported regularly working between 55 and 75 hours per week.

Survey responses show that many workers initially underestimate their weekly hours, only to correct themselves upward when describing their typical shifts. While only 7.7% initially reported over 70 hours per week in the written survey, interviews—in which workers were asked to describe their recent weekly schedules—revealed that more than 45% regularly worked schedules adding up to 68–78 hours.

Mandatory overtime is the norm among surveyed workers, rather than the exception. Five-day workweeks are the minimum; many regularly work six or even seven days, and some workers described stretches of 21 days without a day off. Shifts begin as early as 2:45am and often stretch until well after 3 p.m. Several respondents noted that overtime hours are often added to their shifts when daily quotas are not met. One worker told interviewers that when Neptune's lines get behind, the company "just wants a body."Many employees said that any day off, including Fridays and weekends, is subject to cancellation based on production demands. Some workers reported not having a Friday off in years. While interviewees reported that overtime at Neptune is nominally voluntary, not a single worker framed weekend shifts as optional. Long-tenure

FIGURE 1: TIME OFF BY SCHEDULE BY TYPE



and retired workers who were interviewed described similar conditions across decades. One recalled shifts being capped at 12 hours in the early 2000s after mass worker complaints about 14-hour shifts. Another worker reported that the 10-hour shifts of the 1980s were less exhausting than current shifts, underscoring this point with a personal anecdote of experiencing a fatigue-induced car wreck on the way to work. This scheduling system directly affects worker health, well-being, and family life.

In interviews, frustration with how work hours erode workers' time for families and friends emerged as a deeply shared experience. Workers told interviewers about challenges finding childcare, going to their kids' school and sporting events, and taking care of their aging parents. Others discussed marital strain. One long-tenured worker described the "difficulty of having a family" while employed at Neptune. More precarious workers–temps and security guards–recounted losing their jobs because they needed time to care for small children. Every single worker who was asked or volunteered what they would do with more time off said they would spend it with their families.

These concerns about family, hours, and schedules intensified around the topic of weekends, specifically the tension between the four-ten and the "family weekend." Many workers emphasized that they had been promised the four-ten schedule. Instead of having access to three days off each week, interviewed workers reported that they have family weekends, or pre-arranged times when they will not be required to work. These are supposed to be scheduled every two weeks, but workers report they had rarely, if ever, enjoyed family weekends with such regularity.

One worker captured this sentiment, commenting "we are having to adjust our family life to make the company better."

RECOMMENDATION

NEPTUNE SHOULD MAKE COMMITMENTS TO REDUCING MANDATORY OVERTIME AND REMOVING THE BARRIERS WORKERS FACE TO THEIR FAMILY TIME. IT SHOULD ALSO COMMIT TO PROVIDING NEW AND ACCESSIBLE IN-HOUSE TRAINING AND FAMILY-SUPPORTING RESOURCES. TO ADDRESS WORKERS' FEAR OF REPRISAL, NEPTUNE SHOULD COMMIT TO ALLOWING WORKERS TO SPEAK FREELY AMONG THEMSELVES AND WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF NON-PROFIT AND WORKER ORGANIZATIONS, AND TO ADOPT OTHER SOLUTIONS WORKERS CALL FOR.

PART EIGHT

Health, Safety and Injuries

When an interviewer from JMA's research team first met Aaron in 2024, he was living with his niece. Aaron was near-bedridden and appeared to be in constant and tremendous pain. Sitting in the living room of his niece's trailer, he explained that he had experienced cascading effects from his injury–he had since suffered a heart attack, a stroke, and a mild cognitive impairment from a brain surgery to address excess spinal fluid build-up. The interviewer noted that Aaron often became frustrated by his cognitive impairment during conversation, particularly when attempting to express how he had been wronged. He had worked at Neptune for almost 18 years and he had nothing to show for it. Aaron said he had "lost everything."

The combination of extended hours, mandatory overtime, repetitive work, a fast pace and production quotas at Neptune has contributed to injuries at work and chronic health problems.

More than two-thirds (73.13%) of responses from workers reported having witnessed or experienced at least one serious injury on the job; almost 30% reported witnessing or experiencing multiple injuries during their tenure at Neptune. The most commonly reported injuries included carpal tunnel syndrome, tendonitis, rotator cuff tears, smashed or amputated fingers, burns, back injuries, and repetitive motion trauma.

Interviewed workers reported that the types of injuries workers suffered correlate to specific departments and positions. Repetitive tasks, heavy manual handling, and lack of adequate machine maintenance were frequently cited as causes by workers.

"In the cleaning room [of the foundry], there are a lot of surgeries on hands, arms, elbows," one worker said. An assembly worker directly associated her own injury with the pace of work: "[T]hese types of things happen because [we're] rushed."

More than two-thirds (78.46%) of workers reported having witnessed or experienced at least one serious injury on the job; almost over 46% reported witnessing or experiencing multiple injuries during their tenure at Neptune.

Aaron was one of four workers in our dataset who reported that outdated or inadequately maintained machines contributed to their serious injuries. According to Aaron and two other interviewed maintenance workers, the industrial machines on Neptune's shop floor are "always running" and therefore cannot be properly maintained. Aaron also cited fatigue from overwork as causal to his injury. Working long hours and mandatory overtime are known to increase injury rates and health impacts. One large cross-industry study from the U.S. found that overtime increases the risk of workplace injury, measured as the injury hazard rate,[13] by 61%. At least 12 hours a day was associated with 37% increases and at least 60 hours per week to 23% increases.[14]

"If you get hurt, it's like they don't want to take care of you. That's it," Aaron told interviewers.

RECOMMENDATION

NEPTUNE MUST COMMIT TO INSTITUTING COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH AND SAFETY PRACTICES, INCLUDING REGULAR SAFETY TRAINING, THE CREATION OF A WORKER HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE AND OTHER MEASURES TO DRASTICALLY REDUCE THE INJURY RATE. NEPTUNE SHOULD ALSO COMMIT TO PAY FOR EMPLOYEES TO ATTEND QUARTERLY SAFETY TRAINING SESSIONS CONDUCTED ON SITE BY AN INDEPENDENT ORGANIZATION. NEPTUNE SHOULD SET THE GOAL OF MEASURABLY INCREASING THE NUMBER OF OSHA 10- AND OSHA 30-AUTHORIZED WORKERS IN THE PLANT.

PART NINE

Unfair Treatment

Nearly 70% of all surveyed workers reported experiencing or witnessing unfair treatment, including favoritism, inconsistent discipline, racism, and sexism. For Black workers, that number is 82%. For women, it is 95%. A logistic regression model found Black workers four times more likely than white to report unfair treatment and women thirteen times more likely than men. While these distributions are stark, over half of men (57%) and white workers (54%) also reported unfair treatment. Even though the kind of reported unfair treatment varies, the experience is clearly systemic and the majority of workers are impacted.

In interviews, many workers described how a top-down system of unfair treatment impacted their work experiences, with several saying that a "good old boys" club wields considerable power over hiring and promotions. One worker who discussed sexism and promotions in her department told us about a supervisor explaining to her that Neptune is "a man's world," while others described racial discrimination in promotions as the "Alabama treatment" or typical of the U.S. South.

Just under one-third of all workers we spoke with reported witnessing or experiencing favoritism from supervisors or managers. Echoing several of these workers, long-tenured factory worker Sally Sue stated "this creates an unfair work environment and causes workers like me that are not treated special to have to work harder and longer to make sure the job is getting done."[15]

Several workers, including Sally Sue, said they believe Neptune employees are reluctant to speak up about unfair treatment–specifically racism, sexism, and favoritism–due to fear of retaliation or being fired. One described this perceived cost of reporting unfair treatment bluntly: "people who speak up don't [get to] work."

RECOMMENDATION

IN ORDER TO ADDRESS MANY OF THE PRECEDING PROBLEMS REGARDING ADVANCEMENT, TENURE AND UNFAIR TREATMENT, NEPTUNE SHOULD COMMIT TO AMBITIOUS, MEASURABLE HIRING AND PROMOTION GOALS TO ENSURE PEOPLE FROM HISTORICALLY DISADVANTAGED GROUPS ARE OFFERED JOBS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROMOTION. NEPTUNE SHOULD ALSO COMMIT TO A DISCRIMINATION AUDIT TO DETERMINE IF THESE OCCUPATIONAL SEGREGATION ISSUES VIOLATE STATE AND FEDERAL EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AND CIVIL RIGHTS, INCLUDING TITLE VII OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT. NEPTUNE SHOULD ALSO COMMIT TO ACCEPTING OTHER SOLUTIONS IDENTIFIED BY ITS WORKERS AND COMMUNITY-BASED STAKEHOLDERS.

PART TEN

Wage Structure and Compression

Neptune is widely regarded as the highest-paying industrial employer in Tallassee. Workers reported wages ranging from $16.50 to $38/hour, but survey analysis indicates that pay distribution for production workers is highly compressed and stratified. More than 60% of surveyed production workers are concentrated between $20/hour and $25/hour. Only a handful of workers, primarily maintenance technicians, earn $28 or above.

Additionally, empirical wage bands emerge clearly from the survey dataset:

- **Low Margin (<$22/hour):** The lower range of the first quartile.
- **Mode Cluster ($22–$24/hour):** The largest single wage band where most workers are concentrated (-23/hour).
- **Median Cluster ($25–$26/hour):** Slightly higher wage, but not enough to change standard of living.
- **Upper Band ($27–$28/hour):** Entry point to the top quartile, but with few employees.
- **Barrier Zone ($29–$31/hour):** Almost empty; represents a hard-to-cross threshold with only one surveyed worker earning in this wage zone.
- **Post-Barrier ($32+/hour):** All are in maintenance and technical roles, and all white men.

Figure 3 (Wage Distribution by Race and Gender)[16] illustrates how workers are distributed across these bands by race and gender. The illustration shows a wage system that affords symbolic — rather than actual — upward mobility. This is clearest in the *barrier zone*, a structural wage ceiling in the top quartile where the wage increases begin to slow down at $27/hour and stall by $29/hour.

The heatmap also shows dramatic clustering by race and gender, providing a clear illustration of who is, and is not, able to access upward mobility. Women and Black workers are concentrated below the wage ceiling, while the high-earners band is occupied exclusively by white men. Statistically, these distributions are meaningful and appear to reflect structural features of the wage system itself.[17]

Further, regression analysis of combined race and gender categories found that women — regardless of race — earn $5.91 less per hour than white men on average. Black men earn $6.59 less per hour than white men. These gaps are due to occupational segregation.

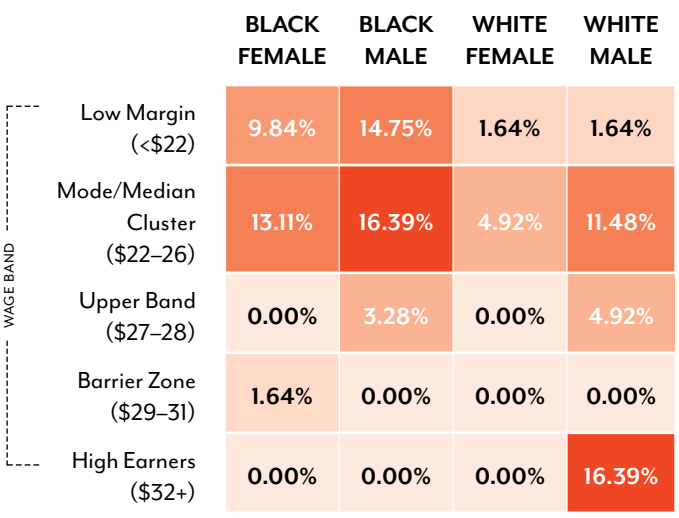
FIGURE 2: DISTRIBUTION OF NEPTUNE WAGES AND INEQUALITY MEASURES

$25.00 Median	$25.30 Mean	$24.03-$26.56 95% Confidence Interval for Mean

QUARTILE	WAGE RANGE	COUNT	GINI COEFFICENT*
Whole sample	$16.50-$38.00	61	0.105
Q1 (Bottom 25%)	$16.50 – $22.00	17	0.043
Q2 (25–50%)	$22.01 – $25.00	21	0.022
Q3 (50–75%)	$25.01 – $27.00	8	0.006
Q4 (Top 25%)	$27.01 – $38.00	15	0.058

*** GINI COEFFICIENT**: A STATISTICAL MEASURE OF THE DEGREE OF VARIATION OR INEQUALITY REPRESENTED IN A SET OF VALUES, USED ESPECIALLY IN ANALYZING INCOME INEQUALITY. 0 INDICATES PERFECT EQUALITY: EVERYONE HAS THE SAME INCOME. A VALUE OF 1 INDICATES PERFECT INEQUALITY.

FIGURE 3: WAGE DISTRIBUTION BY RACE AND GENDER



PART ELEVEN

Occupational Segregation

Empirical analysis shows that the way certain workers sort into certain occupations over time, rather than direct pay disparities by race or gender within those occupations, is the principal mechanism driving wage inequality at Neptune.

The impact of this system is visible in the workforce's composition by occupational classification. Workers consistently said that people doing the same job get similar pay, and that certain departments—like the foundry—are almost all men; in maintenance, nearly every worker is a white man with a technical credential; and the register department, often called the "nursing home" for its perceived easier work and lower pay, is mainly staffed by Black women.

To understand how jobs are divided at Neptune, we calculated occupational dissimilarity indexes. This metric shows what percentage of workers would need to switch jobs for the company's positions to achieve race or gender parity. The scale runs from 0 to 1—0 means no segregation, and 1 means complete segregation. A score under 0.3 is considered low; above 0.6 is high. A very high score of .7 or above would mean workers are segregated, and sorting would be noticeable.

At Neptune, the dissimilarity index is almost 0.7 for gender and 0.61 for race. This means nearly 70% of men and women, and approximately 60% of Black and white employees, would need to switch positions to achieve gender and racial parity, respectively. When we compared specific groups, the sorting of white men from Black and women workers became even more evident; occupational segregation rates between Black workers and women workers remain near 0.5 while those between white men and Black men and white men and all women rise.

FIGURE 4: OCCUPATIONAL SEGREGATION ACROSS RACE AND GENDER

OVERALL MEASURES	D-INDEX	INTERPRETATION
Race	0.61	High Segregation
Gender	0.69	High Segregation
PAIRWISE COMPARISONS		
White Men and Black Men	0.70	High Segregation
White Men and All Women	0.82	Very High Segregation
Black Men and All Women	0.56	Moderate Segregation

NOTE: TOO FEW WHITE WOMEN RESPONDED TO DISAGGREGATE WOMEN BY RACE

RECOMMENDATION

TO REDUCE THE DEGREE OF OCCUPATIONAL SEGREGATION IN THE FACTORY, NEPTUNE SHOULD COMMIT TO JOINING COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS AND WORKERS IN AN INITIATIVE TO GROW THE NEXT GENERATION OF FACTORY LEADERSHIP AND WORKERS IN HIGHLY PAID POSITIONS; ADVOCATING FOR AND ACCEPTING NEW DEGREE AND CERTIFICATE OPTIONS AT LOCAL COMMUNITY COLLEGES; AND LAY OUT A CLEAR PATHWAY TO EMPLOYMENT AT NEPTUNE THROUGH LOCAL EDUCATION. NEPTUNE SHOULD ALSO UNDERGO A DISCRIMINATION AUDIT TO DETERMINE WHETHER SUCH CONCENTRATION OF OCCUPATIONS BY RACE AND GENDER VIOLATES STATE AND FEDERAL LAW.

PART TWELVE

Advancement and Tenure

At Neptune, the majority of production workers see sharp wage gains in their first few years. For those with ten years of tenure at Neptune, wage increases flatten out. For those with over a decade of service, the most common hourly wage is $25.

The trajectory of wage growth is captured in Figure 5 (Wage Trend by Tenure), which shows a steep incline, followed by a prolonged plateau. In Figure 5, individual survey responses — the wages and tenure each worker reported for themselves — are represented by green dots. The dots fall along the horizontal axis corresponding to the worker's tenure, and the vertical axis according to the worker's wage. The red line is the clearest distinct pattern among the data; the blue lines are the margin of error. [18] Linear regression estimates based on survey data indicate that a year of tenure is worth about 10 cents an hour — 27 cents early on, and zero or even less after 15 years. Neptune rewards new hires with significant raises; long-term employees rarely see substantial wage increases, even after decades of service. Again, at Neptune race and gender matter to wages over time. A review of historical wage data for a sub-sample of 31 surveyed workers shows that, relative to inflation, Black women in the sample saw less real wage growth ($.50 per hour per year) than white men who had a comparable average tenure but much higher real wage growth (greater than $2.50 per hour per year).

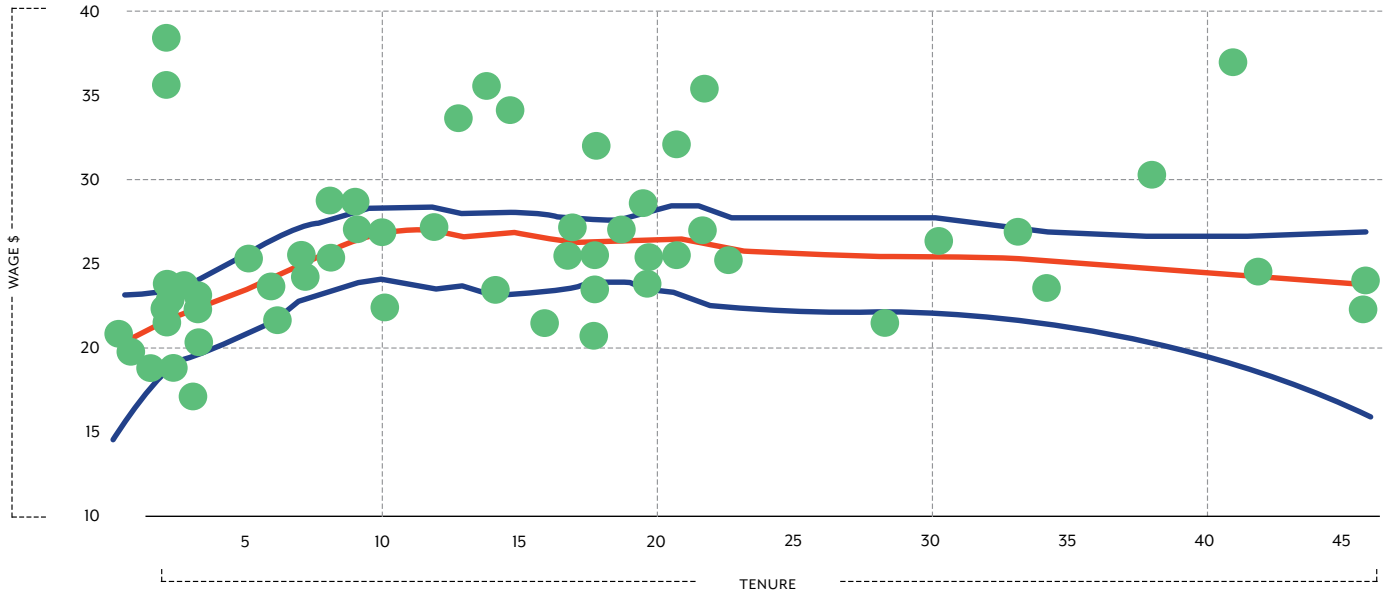
Tenure, loyalty, and experience are not rewarded with significant economic mobility, especially for Black workers and women.

Like Aaron, many workers stay at Neptune well beyond the 10-year mark.

Workers shared stories of stalled or withheld raises, issues moving within or between pay grades, and accounts of at least two different years of ungranted COLA (Cost of Living Adjustment). Whenever pay increases become inconsistent for workers who stay in the same job for so long, the impact of even a single missed raise can compound over time to seriously dent lifetime earnings.

At Neptune, average tenure is more than three times the national average in manufacturing.[19]

FIGURE 5: **WAGE TREND BY TENURE**



PART THIRTEEN

A Living Wage?

Though they stay so long and make many other trade-offs, workers at Neptune do not necessarily make a "living wage." Workers told JMA's researchers that Neptune offers the "best" wage around. Most workers' wages do not meet nationally recognized benchmarks for determining whether certain wages can support workers' families.

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Living Wage Calculator builds a "basic budget" that families of different sizes would need in order to subsist in their home county. The calculator takes into account whether one or both adults in the family are working and earning a comparable wage. It produces wage figures to answer the question: what would a worker or workers, with a certain number of children, need to make in order to get by?

FIGURE 6: SHARE OF WORKERS MEETING LOCAL LIVING WAGE REQUIREMENTS

	Meets the living wage threshold	
FAMILY SIZE	**YES**	**NO**
2 Working Adults, 0 Children	100.00%	0.00%
2 Working Adults, 1 Child	93.44%	6.56%
Single Adult, 0 Children	86.89%	13.11%
2 Working Adults, 2 Children	55.74%	44.26%
2 Working Adults, 3 Children	24.59%	75.41%
1 Working Adult, 0 Children	18.03%	81.97%
Single Adult, 1 Child	11.48%	88.52%
1 Working Adult, 1 Child	8.20%	91.80%
Single Adult, 2+ Children	0%	100%
1 Working Adult, 2+ Children	0%	100%

Living wage analysis based on the Living Wage Calculator[20] for Elmore County shows that, at base pay, most Neptune workers meet the living wage for a partnered adult with no children, and just over half meet it for two working adults with two children. For single-income families, or for families with more than two children, very few Neptune employees meet the threshold without overtime, but it comes at the cost of personal and family well-being. Since MIT's benchmarks are based on a 40-hour week and overtime is significant at Neptune, analysis was conducted on whether overtime pay helps workers meet the living wage thresholds. Each worker's average hourly wage with overtime pay was calculated for 48 hours (four 12-hour shifts) and 58 hours (adding a 10-hour weekend shift).

At 48 hours, the share of workers able to support two children in a dual-earner household jumped from 55.7% to 82% and the ability to support a family of three doubled. Beyond these categories, gains were modest. Capacity for single parenthood rose slightly, from 11.5% to 16.4%. One worker was able to support two children as a single parent and four met the threshold for supporting a family of four. Gains between 48 and 58 hours were minimal — less than 10% — and mostly benefited those already earning higher wages. In brief, overtime helped a little but shifted few workers into materially different living wage categories.

PART FOURTEEN

Environmental Practices

On May 27, 1983, two women — investigators for the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) and the local health department — visited the premises of a local Tallassee business called the Quick Freeze to investigate a complaint about industrial waste dumped there. The waste was mostly foundry sand.

During their investigation, a Neptune truck arrived and "dumped a load of industrial waste." One of the women took a photo and a sample. ADEM wrote Neptune a letter later that summer. "Note that due to the high level of lead found in the waste, it is hazardous waste," the letter reads.[21] Records reveal from 1974 to 1983, Neptune dumped waste in three informal landfills around Tallassee, including the Quick Freeze's lot.[22]

For the next three years, Neptune and ADEM argued about what should be done with the company's waste. Eventually, in 1986, an ADEM phone log of one conversation noted that "all accumulated hazardous wastes [at the Neptune facility] have been removed to Chemical Waste Management."[23] Chemical Waste Management was the name of a notorious landfill in Emelle, Ala. — the site had already become a textbook example of environmental racism and was the focus of intense community organizing against toxic dumping.

Today, Neptune's brand and public communications emphasize its commitment to water conservation and environmental innovation, especially in the products it sells to drought-prone cities and major utilities nationwide.[24] But the company has long forced trade-offs on its own hometown's infrastructure and environment in return for its presence. Neptune's environmental impact has been shaped by Alabama's regulatory loopholes, the company's own waste handling decisions, and, at key points in history, pressure from advocacy groups, its largest customers and the end-users of its meters.

Neptune's environmental impact has been shaped by Alabama's regulatory loopholes, the company's own waste handling decisions, and, at key points in history, pressure from advocacy groups, its largest customers, and the end-users of its meters.

This section reviews the history of how the customer pressure in particular has influenced Neptune's use and handling of lead. Regulatory pressure, like ADEM's actions in the late 1980s, has waned. This section details the company's chosen methods for managing lead, copper, and other toxic waste. It examines Neptune's use of in-state landfills, particularly the Emelle and Stone's Throw sites, and the legacy of environmental justice issues associated with those sites.

This section relies on regulatory filings, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and ADEM reports, and the company's own data to provide a clear account of Neptune's environmental footprint in Tallassee and beyond.

HISTORY AND CUSTOMER PRESSURE

Neptune adopted lead-free meter production in 2001, long after regulatory action from ADEM in the 1980s. Since then, Neptune has described itself as the first or only North American meter manufacturer to exclusively use an alloy with virtually no lead.[25] Though the company produces lead-free products, environmental and legal documents show that the Tallassee factory still disposes of lead, along with other metals.

The amount of lead the factory has disposed of has risen and fallen over time, federal records show.[26] Reductions sometimes coincided not with local or state regulatory changes, but rather with customer pressure rooted in growing public awareness of lead's impact on people and communities. The element is a neurotoxin with no safe level of exposure.

Specifically, pressure on Neptune surrounding a major contract with the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power coincided with a period of reduced lead disposal from the Tallassee factory.

In 1991, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) implemented the Lead and Copper Rule (LCR) to reduce lead in drinking water, which they estimated accounted for 20% of lifetime lead exposure.[27] The LCR focused on remedial treatment of common contamination sources, which include lead pipe and brass plumbing fixtures.[28] Some advocacy groups dissatisfied with the limits of the federal regulations turned to California's Proposition 65 — the Safe Drinking Water and Toxic Enforcement Act of 1986 — to pressure brass plumbing manufacturers to limit their reliance on lead-leaching materials.[29] After securing settlements with faucet manufacturers in 1995, the Natural Resource Defense Council (NRDC) and Environmental Law Foundation (ELF) sued nearly the entire water meter industry in 1997.[30]

At this time, the LADWP had unique requirements for water meters. The department had to purchase meters made from alloys containing less than 6% lead, lower than the 8% industry standard. In 1998, the NRDC and ELF filed a California False Claims Act against Schlumberger, Neptune's parent company at the time, alleging it had sold LADWP meters with more than the 6% maximum amount of lead for almost a decade. LADWP and the California Attorney General joined the suit in 1999, and in 2000, LADWP customers filed a class action against the company for installing lead-leaching meters on their properties.[31]

The settlements from these lawsuits were used to initiate and support LADWP's lead-free meter replacement program, one of the first in the country. As part of the Proposition 65 settlement in 2001, Neptune agreed to provide LADWP with 120,000 lead-free water meters over two years, which LADWP used to implement the program.[32] As a result of the 2003 class action settlement, Neptune made

grants to LADWP's meter replacement program and provided favorable bid pricing to LADWP for the purchase of meters through 2008.[33]

Amid all the legal action, in 2001, Neptune switched to exclusively using a nearly lead-free, high-copper alloy called Envirobrass II to make its meters.[34] As federal regulations tightened in subsequent years, Neptune's public communications emphasized its leadership in this area, describing the Tallassee facility as the first North American meter production facility "dedicated to lead-free operations, production, and testing."[35] In 2011, Neptune's then-president Charles DiLaura told the industry publication WaterWorld that "after weighing all the social and environmental benefits, we believed our decision was prudent."[36]

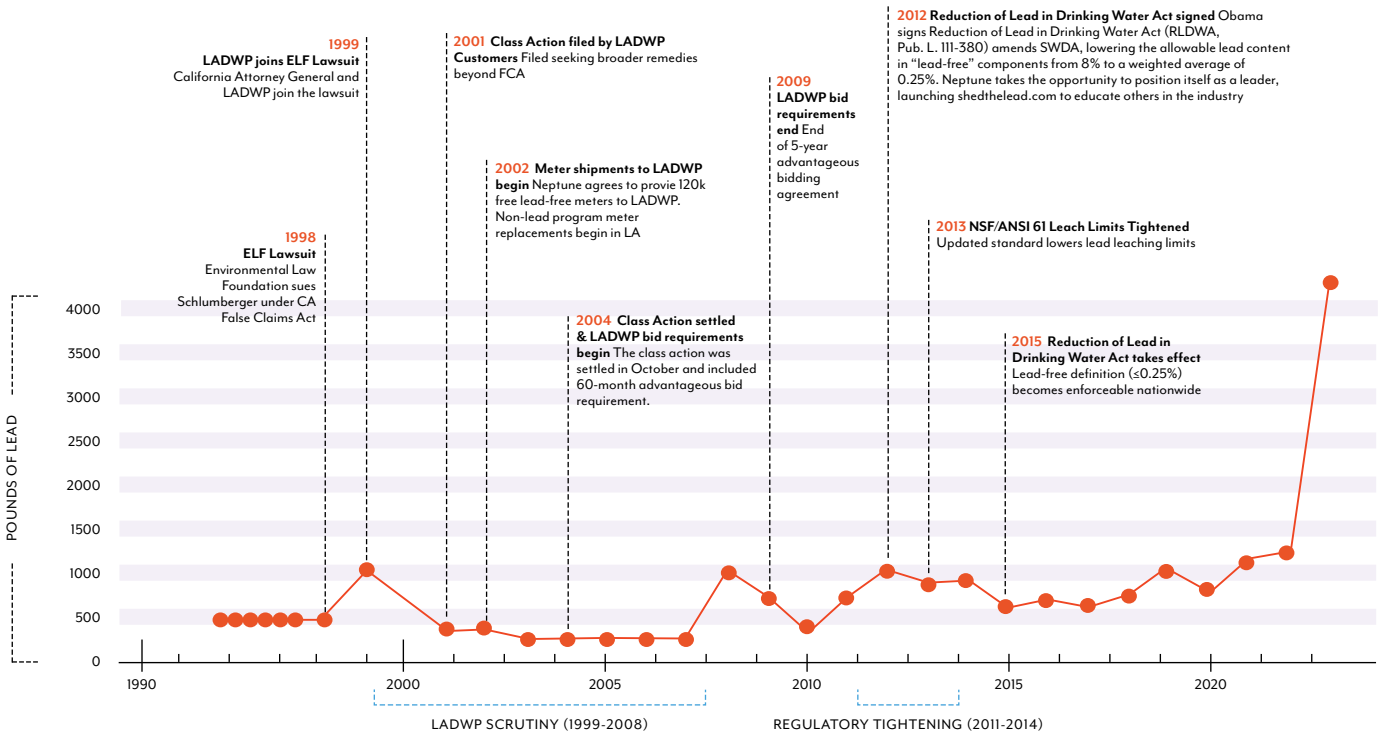
As shown in figure 7, EPA records show that Neptune's reported lead waste dropped to its lowest recorded level following the 2001 settlement and remained consistently low until 2008, the year their bid obligations to LADWP ended. Neptune's reported lead waste output remained above this level even during the tightening federal lead regulations in the 2010s. Records from 2006 describe the sources of lead at the time in Neptune's processes: "Floor sweeping, baghouse dust, no-bake sand, spent coolant, foundry ladle linings [and] e-waste."[37] Though the sources of the waste are identified, records available publicly do not shed light on the reasons for fluctuations in the amounts of lead and other metals produced as waste. In recent years — and with the California cases long in the past –Neptune's reported lead waste disposal figures have significantly increased. The amounts rose sharply in 2021, quadrupled over the previous year in 2023, and nearly doubled that amount in 2024.[38] JMA's research team has not found any public explanation for this increase nor evidence that any public agency has investigated the cause.

In Alabama, major waste sites are located in or near low-income Black communities. Of the three Alabama landfills currently under contract with Neptune, two—Emelle and Stone's Throw—have been the focus of sustained environmental justice investigations, complaints, and litigation.

RECOMMENDATION

PUBLIC AGENCIES AND PURCHASING UTILITIES LIKE LADWP SHOULD INVESTIGATE WHY THE AMOUNT OF LEAD REPORTEDLY DISPOSED OF BY NEPTUNE BEGAN TO INCREASE AFTER 2008 AND GREW SIGNIFICANTLY IN 2024. THESE AGENCIES SHOULD PRODUCE A PUBLICLY AVAILABLE REPORT THAT RECOMMENDS SPECIFIC MEASURES THAT NEPTUNE CAN TAKE TO REDUCE THE USE OF LEAD AND LEAD WASTE. LADWP SHOULD CONSIDER CONDITIONING ALL FUTURE PURCHASES OF NEPTUNE PRODUCTS ON COMPANY ACTIONS TO REDUCE ITS LEAD WASTE OUTPUT. THE COMPANY, ITS CUSTOMERS, AND THE COMPANY'S NEIGHBORS SHOULD GAIN AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE IMPACT OF THIS LEAD DISPOSAL ON THE AREA AROUND ITS ULTIMATE DESTINATION.

FIGURE 7: NEPTUNE'S LEAD WASTE DISPOSAL, 1995 TO 2025



WASTE MANAGEMENT METHODS

Neptune's manufacturing doesn't only produce lead waste. The company reports other heavy metal waste, including copper, nickel, and zinc, to the EPA's Toxic Release Inventory (TRI) program, which tracks the use and management of toxic chemicals. Since 2022, cadmium, selenium, and mercury have also been reported.[39]

The EPA ranks management methods for TRI-listed chemicals from most- to least-preferable: source reduction is preferred, followed by recycling, energy recovery, treatment, and, as a last resort, disposal or other releases.[40] In over three decades of EPA filings under the TRI program, the only management method Neptune has reported using is disposal or other releases—specifically, transferring waste to landfills and Publicly Owned Treatment Works (POTWs).[41]

This pattern is not consistent with industry standards. TRI data shows that Neptune's primary peers — other TRI-reporting facilities in the fluid meter manufacturing industry — recycled, recovered, or treated 92.6% of all metal-contaminated waste in 2023.[42] The same year, nonferrous foundries in NAICS 331529 reported recycling 68.57% of lead, 98.38% of copper, and 99.37% of nickel.[43] On a national scale, 90% of the toxic waste reported to the TRI Program in 2023 was managed by preferred methods–just ~1.05% followed the off-site disposal or other releases pathway Neptune relies on for 100% of its toxic waste.[44]

WASTE DISPOSAL SITES

Elements of Neptune's waste management strategy have remained unchanged since the late 1980s, records show. Neptune still uses the same landfills, including the Emelle site, and it still dumps in Tallassee, at Stone's Throw Landfill. Neptune has reported annual disposals at Emelle to the EPA since 1988.[45] Neptune's choices about where to dispose of its industrial waste reflect a relaxation of state regulatory action by ADEM since then, as well as a long-term de-regulatory environment across the state.

In Alabama, major waste sites are located in or near low-income Black communities.[46] Of the three Alabama landfills currently under contract with Neptune,

two—Emelle and Stone's Throw—have been the focus of sustained environmental justice investigations, complaints, and litigation.[47] The third, Salem Waste Disposal Center, shares corporate ownership with Emelle.[48]

The Emelle landfill in Sumter County is known as the largest hazardous waste landfill in the United States.[49] When it opened in 1977, Sumter County was approximately 75% Black and Emelle was more than 95% Black and low income.[50] Dr. Robert Bullard, whose foundational 1990 book *Dumping in Dixie* analyzes the siting of Emelle, described political representation for Black Sumter County residents as so limited it "essentially constituted environmental apartheid."[51] Community opposition to the site is well documented, beginning with a 1981 walkout of landfill workers citing hazardous conditions and the formation of several local environmental groups who would continue to contest the landfill over decades.[52] The Emelle landfill remains a frequent case study in environmental justice literature[53] and advocacy publications continue to reference it as an example of how hazardous waste disposal is sited in majority-Black communities with little local oversight.[54]

According to EPA reports, the majority of Neptune's toxic waste goes to Stone's Throw Landfill in Tallassee — less than five miles away and across the river from the plant.[55] The community there, known as Ashurst Bar/Smith, is majority Black and low-income. The landfill opened in the 1970s, closed temporarily in the early 1990s, and re-opened in 2002 under its present name.[56]

Residents have protested the landfill's location for decades.[57] Their campaign gained national attention in 2015 when the environmental advocacy group Earthjustice sued the EPA, alleging that the agency had allowed decades-old civil rights cases — including one about Stone's Throw — to languish.[58] One resident, writing in a filing in the original Stone's Throw complaint, summed up the issue for Black residents of Tallassee: "To be poor and Black does not mean that a people should not have due process in decisions that affect their health, safety, property, and overall well being."[59]

The final major disposal site Neptune uses is a sewage lagoon on the bank of the Tallapoosa River, owned and operated by the City of Tallassee and directly across the highway from the Neptune factory. The lagoon, named the Tallassee Sewer Stabilization Pond, is classified by the EPA as a Publicly Owned Treatment Works, or POTW.

The Tallassee lagoon was built in 1972,[60] the same year as the Neptune facility.[61] In its filings to the EPA, Neptune has reported transferring TRI-listed toxic waste to the POTW almost every year since 2000,[62] but records show they used the pond earlier as well.[63]

Neptune reported discharging over 630,000 pounds of metal-contaminated waste to the lagoon between 2000 and 2024, with lead accounting for over 13,000 pounds and copper more than 540,000 pounds.[64]

RECOMMENDATIONS

NEPTUNE SHOULD CONDUCT A COMPREHENSIVE ENVIRONMENTAL AUDIT OF ALL THE IMPACTS OF THEIR WASTE DISPOSAL PRACTICES, MAKE THE FINDINGS PUBLIC AND QUICKLY REMEDY ANY PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED.

NEPTUNE SHOULD SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCE ITS USE OF THE EMELLE AND STONE'S THROW LANDFILLS AND THE TALLASSEE SEWER STABILIZATION POND AND IMMEDIATELY INSTITUTE THE PRACTICE OF RECYCLING, RECOVERING OR TREATING THE VAST MAJORITY OF ITS METAL-CONTAMINATED WASTE RATHER THAN DUMPING IT.

PART FIFTEEN

Conclusion and Final Recommendations

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEPTUNE:

This report documents trade-offs Neptune's operations impose on its workers, community, and its customers. While the company helps produce public goods around the country, its employees and neighbors face the current realities of punishing working conditions, stagnant wages, and environmental concerns. In return for a job close to home, workers are expected to accept rigid and overly demanding schedules, compressed pay scales, unfair treatment, long-term strain on their families, and little return on long tenure. These burdens, described by workers and public documents, have shaped daily life in Tallassee.

Some workers say these conditions have always been part of Neptune's culture and others believe the company has lost its more family-oriented culture. This tension between workers' deep frustration and real appreciation for their jobs was a consistent theme in the study. As one long-term employee of over a decade put it, management needs to "listen to employees more. We keep the doors open...I wish it could be better, but it takes more than me to make it better."

This ledger of trade-offs can and should be rebalanced to create a fairer local economy, a safer workplace, stronger environmental stewardship, and deeper respect and dignity for workers and neighbors alike.

To accomplish this, Neptune should adopt all the recommendations included throughout this report. Neptune should also agree to negotiate a structure for all these solutions with local community and worker organizations. Such a structure for solutions exists and has proven successful in Alabama's manufacturing industry before: a Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) with the local and statewide partners which together form the Good Neighbors Alabama coalition.

This tension between workers' deep frustration and real appreciation for their jobs was a consistent theme in the study. As one long-term employee put it, management needs to "listen to employees more. We keep the doors open...I wish it could be better, but it takes more than me to make it better."

A CBA offers a proven framework for resolving community concerns and establishing partnerships between employers and community groups. Neptune should pursue a CBA to ensure that sustainable, equitable, and tangible benefits are delivered to its workforce and the Tallassee community. Without limitation, Neptune's CBA should include measurable, enforceable commitments to:

- **Remove the barriers** workers face to their family time, and commit to providing new and accessible in-house training and family-supporting resources. To address workers' fear of reprisal, Neptune should commit to allowing workers to speak freely among themselves and with representatives of non-profit and worker organizations, and to adopt other solutions workers call for;
- **Institute comprehensive health and safety practices,** including regular safety training, the creation of a worker health and safety committee and other measures to reduce injuries. Neptune should also commit to pay for employees to attend quarterly safety training sessions conducted on site by an independent organization. Neptune should set the goal of

measurably increasing the number of OSHA 10- and OSHA 30-authorized workers in the plant;

- **Institute ambitious and measurable hiring and promotion goals** to ensure people from historically disadvantaged groups are offered jobs and opportunities for promotion. Neptune should also commit to a discrimination audit to determine if these occupational segregation issues violate state and federal equal opportunity and civil rights, including Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. Neptune should also commit to accepting other solutions identified by its workers and community-based stakeholders;
- **Join community organizations and workers** in an initiative to grow the next generation of factory leadership and workers in highly paid positions; advocate for and accept new degree and certificate options at local community colleges; and lay out a clear pathway to employment at Neptune through local education.
- **Gain an understanding** of the impact of lead disposal on the area around its ultimate destination;
- **Significantly reduce** its use of the Emelle and Stone's Throw landfills and the Tallassee Sewer Stabilization Pond and immediately institute the practice of recycling, recovering or treating the vast majority of its metal-contaminated waste rather than dumping it; and
- **Conduct a comprehensive environmental audit** of all the impacts of their waste disposal practices, make the findings public and quickly remedy any problems identified.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PUBLIC AGENCIES:

Public Utilities Purchasing Equipment from Neptune (including the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power) should:

- **Make future purchases contingent on Neptune negotiating a Community Benefits Agreement** with local non-profits and workers to ensure oversight returns and continues, for the benefit of Neptune's neighbors and their local environment;
- **Initiate an investigation and audit** of Neptune's use of toxic metals in the manufacture of the water meters. Make future purchases contingent on the reduction of dumping by instituting recycling and reuse practices and full, documented compliance with the Clean Water Act.

Regulatory agencies, including the U.S. EPA and ADEM, should:

- **Evaluate and enforce** Neptune's compliance with all municipal, state, and federal water regulations, including the Clean Water Act;
- **Require a facility investigation** to assess the presence and extent of legacy lead in soil, sediment, and water infrastructure, and remediation of any contamination found.

PART SIXTEEN

Acknowledgments

This report is the result of more than two years of research and field work. Sherah Faulkner, Ph.D., and Will Tucker are the primary authors. JMA Research Director HeeWon Brindle-Khym served as a primary editor. Data research and analysis was led by Faulkner. JMA organizers Luis Robledo, Matt Fullone, Haeden Wright, Larry Hodge, Jasmine Keith, Calvin Cullen, and Hastin Crosby conducted field work and spoke to many Neptune workers, former employees, and Tallassee community members. JMA Executive Director Madeline Janis and outside counsel Paul More provided editorial and legal review and guidance on the report. JMA also thanks Tracy Egoscue, Bob Bowcock and Damon Mullis for their external review of the section of the report regarding environmental practices. The report was designed by Squared Lightning.

JMA wishes to express special gratitude to all workers who spoke with us for this report, including by responding to surveys and engaging with us in meaningful conversations.

JMA would also like to thank our coalition partners with Good Neighbors Alabama, including especially Warren Tidwell, Kathleen Kirkpatrick, Bradley Davidson, Alabama Rivers Alliance and the River Region Central Labor Council.

ENDNOTES

1 "Sally Sue" (pseudonym of a worker who requested anonymity due to fear of retaliation by the company), interview by JMA researcher, 23 April 2025, Tallassee, Alabama.

2 For descriptions of lead-free operations, see Neptune Technology Group, company communications and marketing materials. https://www.neptunetg.com/resources/press-releases/neptune-celebrates-15-years-of-lead-free-metering-excellence/; https://www.neptunetg.com/resources/press-releases/neptune-lead-free-bronze-alloy-water-meters-already-meet-current-and-planned-regulatory-standards/; and https://www.neptunetg.com/resources/press-releases/neptunes-lead-free-tru_flo-compound-meters-receive-ansi_nsf61-certification/.
Information about the foundry comes from interviews with Neptune workers and management, as well as communication with Mike Peterson, Investor Relations, Roper Technologies.

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8 Roper Technologies, Inc. 2024. 10-K. https://www.sec.gov/ix?doc=/Archives/edgar/data/0000882835/000088283525000008/rop-20241231.htm#fact-identifier-1449

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13 The injury hazard rate reflects how likely a worker is to be injured on the job, based on the number of injuries relative to total hours worked.

14 A. E. Dembe, J. B. Erickson, R. G. Delbos, and S. M. Banks, "The Impact of Overtime and Long Work Hours on Occupational Injuries and Illnesses: New Evidence from the United States," *Occupational & Environmental Medicine* 62, no. 9 (September 2005): 588–97, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/16109814/.

15 "Sally Sue" (pseudonym of a worker who requested anonymity due to fear of retaliation by the company), interview by JMA researcher, 23 April 2025, Tallassee, Alabama.

16 Based on survey data, Figure 3: Heat Map of wage Segregation by Race and Gender illustrates the distribution of workers across wage bands by race and gender.

17 Based on coverage rate of survey sample and the deeply significant p-value (< 0.0001) of a Chi-square test for independence on the full 5x4 wage band by race/gender.

18 Based on survey data, FIGURE 5: LOWESS Curve for Wage by Tenure traces the progression of wage growth by years of work at Neptune.

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