



South Coast Air Quality Management District

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NEWS

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SCAQMD Conducts Hearing on PBF Refinery in Torrance

During a full-day investigative hearing today attended by more than 250 residents and refinery workers, SCAQMD Board members questioned numerous experts and listened to community members to help inform the agency's effort to reduce air pollution and improve safety at the facility.

"Residents have a right to feel safe in their homes," said SCAQMD Governing Board Chairman William A. Burke, Ed.D. "We will use what we have learned today to protect and improve the health of all residents in this community."

Today's hearing was led by SCAQMD Refinery Committee Chairman Dr. Clark E. Parker, Sr., Ph.D, and attended by Refinery Committee members Joseph Lyou, Ph.D., and Rolling Hills Estates Council Member Judith Mitchell. Chairman Burke joined the committee as an ad hoc member for today's hearing and provided opening comments.

During the hearing, SCAQMD Board members and attendees heard from local elected officials, representatives from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, California EPA, Bay Area AQMD, SCAQMD, PBF Refinery, an independent refinery expert retained by SCAQMD, local fire officials, trade unions and the community groups Families Lobbying Against Refinery Exposures and Torrance Refinery Action Alliance.

The Board also heard testimony from several dozen residents and refinery workers. However, since more than 100 asked to speak, a follow-up hearing will be held at 9 a.m. next Saturday, April 8, in the Torrance City Council Chambers at 3031 Torrance Blvd. At that time, the committee will continue to receive comments from members of the public who requested to speak at today's hearing but did not have an opportunity to do so.

SCAQMD will develop or amend three refinery regulations this year to reduce air pollution in the region, specifically:

- Additional requirements to reduce planned and unplanned flaring;
- Requirements for refineries to monitor air quality at their fence line and/or in the nearby community to better assess potential exposure; and
- A requirement for the two refineries that use modified hydrofluoric acid – Torrance Refining Co. and Valero Wilmington Refinery – to phase out the highly toxic chemical.

Chairman Burke called for today's investigative hearing last month after a fire at the refinery – the latest in a series of mishaps at the facility – highlighted the need to gather information about refinery safety and operations from experts and regulators as well as feedback from community groups and residents.

On Feb. 18, 2015, under ExxonMobil ownership, a large explosion in an air pollution control device at the refinery ejected heavy metal parts, narrowly missing a unit that contains highly toxic modified hydrofluoric acid. The explosion also scattered catalyst dust into the community. The refinery was mostly shut down until May 2016.

As a result of air pollution violations during the explosion and subsequent restart of the refinery, ExxonMobil paid a \$5.5 million penalty to SCAQMD, of which \$2.77 million has been committed to fund community benefit projects. SCAQMD is currently evaluating project proposals and expects to announce funded projects within the next three months.

Since the 2015 explosion, the refinery has had 24 incidents of unplanned flaring due to breakdowns and power failures. The facility has the highest flaring emissions of any refinery in the region, and has paid to SCAQMD \$18 million in mitigation fees due to excess flaring.

On Oct. 11, 2016, the refinery lost all power in the early morning and flared thick black smoke for more than four hours. The City of Torrance issued a temporary shelter-in-place order. SCAQMD received 67 complaints from residents and issued a Notice of Violation to the refinery for causing a public nuisance.

On Feb. 16, PBF agreed to an administrative order by the independent SCAQMD Hearing Board requiring the facility to improve power reliability and reduce air pollution from power-related flaring incidents. While the refinery must meet specific milestones and deadlines under the order, the overall effort will take several years to complete.

Most recently, on Feb. 18, the facility experienced a fire in a crude oil unit. SCAQMD has issued seven violations to PBF since July 2016 including two for causing a public nuisance.

For more information on SCAQMD's activities regarding the Torrance Refinery, see <http://www.aqmd.gov/home/regulations/compliance/torrance>.

The SCAQMD is the air pollution control agency for Orange County and major portions of Los Angeles, San Bernardino and Riverside counties.