



South Coast Air Quality Management District

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NEWS

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SCAQMD Issues Violation to Oil Tanker Ship for Fugitive Emissions

South Coast Air Quality Management District inspectors have issued a violation to a crude oil tanker berthed in Long Beach for fugitive emissions in an action aimed at identifying and mitigating elusive coastal odors.

“For the past two years we have devoted extensive resources to finding the sources of periodic foul odors in Long Beach, Seal Beach and Huntington Beach,” said Wayne Nastri, SCAQMD’s executive officer.

“Using a combination of dedicated field staff, advanced emissions imaging technology, atmospheric modeling and in-house laboratory analysis, now for the first time we have confirmed one potential source of these odors.”

On Nov. 6, SCAQMD inspectors issued a Notice of Violation to GAC North America, the Long Beach-based shipping agent for the Nave Photon oil tanker. The 2-million barrel tanker is flagged in Hong Kong and transports crude oil from Middle Eastern countries to the West Coast of the United States.

SCAQMD inspectors found that seven of 10 inspected pressure release devices on the ship were leaking hydrocarbon vapors well in excess of limits in the agency’s [Rule 1142](#) – Marine Tank Vessel Operations. The leaks were documented with portable hydrocarbon detection devices as well as gas imaging cameras.

According to SCAQMD officials, representatives of Tesoro – the operator of the terminal where the ship was berthed – said they would contact the ship owner to ensure that leaking valves are repaired.

SCAQMD started tracking the ship on Oct. 26, when it received three complaints of petroleum-type odors in the Long Beach area. Based on the location of the ship in the Long Beach harbor, which was upwind of the complainants, as well as gas images captured by inspectors showing vapor leaks from the vessel, SCAQMD decided to follow up with an onboard inspection when the ship docked on Nov. 3 at Tesoro’s marine terminal.

SCAQMD's investigation is ongoing and inspectors are continuing to evaluate potential violations of other agency rules.

Since Jan. 1, 2016, SCAQMD has received more than 2,000 complaints from residents in Long Beach, Seal Beach and Huntington Beach of petroleum, sulfur and/or chemical-type odors. During these odor incidents, SCAQMD inspectors were not able to identify a source; however, an analysis of wind patterns strongly suggested an offshore source of the odors.

SCAQMD partnered with fire departments in Long Beach, Seal Beach and Huntington Beach and trained their personnel to collect air samples during odor incidents. Analysis of these samples in SCAQMD's laboratory showed higher levels of chemical compounds including several hydrocarbons and sometimes hydrogen sulfide, all indicative of an odor source from crude oil and/or unprocessed natural gas. Crude oil contains dissolved hydrocarbon and sulfur gases that can be released to the atmosphere if not properly contained in the vessel's storage tanks.

Hydrocarbon levels found in the majority of the air samples were not expected to cause short-term health problems because the levels were below acute reference exposure levels. In addition, short-term exposures to these pollutants are unlikely to have much impact on an individual's risk of chronic health problems, such as cancer, SCAQMD officials said. But these odors may still cause temporary health effects such as headaches and dizziness.

"Foul odors can significantly impact residents' quality of life," Nastri said. "We will continue to investigate ships and any other potential sources in an effort to identify and mitigate these coastal odors."

Residents who detect foul odors along the coast or anywhere within SCAQMD's four-county jurisdiction should call the agency's 24-hour complaint line at 1-800-CUT-SMOG or file a complaint at www.aqmd.gov.

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