

Porter Ranch Community Advisory Committee

Meeting #10

Thursday, March 3, 2016
Cal State University Northridge

DRAFT NOTES

First Posted: 3/4/16 at 6pm

Last Updated:

Paula Cracium, Committee Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:08pm.

Members Present:

Paula Cracium
Jarrod DeGonia
Vivian Eckchian
Craig Forray
Tom Johnson
Matt Pakucko
Jane Stanton

Guest Speakers:

Katherine Butler, LA County Department of Public Health
Carrie Tayour, LA County Department of Public Health
Carlos Torres, Deputy Director, Office of Environmental Health and Safety
Andy Carasco, SoCalGas
Darryl Johnson, SoCalGas

LA County Public Health first presented an update. Jarrod spoke first thanking them for their efforts in the health study and program stating that Public health's process will be unprecedented.

Katie talked about the drastic reduction in methane since the well was capped and they continue monitoring the air. When they were here last time, they asked to recruit neighbors to serve as informants. Those residents have not smelled an odor. One of the questions asked by the committee during their last visit was if there is a way to incorporate a symptom survey along with the odor survey. The committee had also expressed concerns about call fatigue because of all the numbers to report and this surveillance was adding to it. They have been monitoring the symptoms. They have received 150-160 health complaints to their office. Now that benzene levels are at background levels, they would expect the number to be zero. They are now engaging in a health survey—CASPER—to see what kind of symptoms they are experiencing currently.

Craig asked about the nature of the complaints.

Carrie said they are similar to those that existed before the leak was plugged. Ear nose and throat issues, etc. The environmental data shows nothing that would have caused the symptoms. The CASPER survey will take place March 10-12. They will go door to door asking questions about the symptoms they are experiencing. As far as the indoor air, they want to know what the exposure could be. That information will inform any sampling they do.

Paula: I spoke to Dr. Rangan this morning, he talked about doing a long-term air sampling in a home to see what happens long term. Are there surfaces, air ducts that may be sampled?

Carrie: Passive samplers that can be put out for several days at a time is one option for the indoor air plan. We have been getting some oily spot reports. If residents see those spots, they need to call the gas company for cleaning and call our office so we can track it. It is important for people experiencing symptoms to go to their primary care physician and that physician can call Dr. Rangan to discuss symptoms.

Paula: People have dirt in their homes and they have pool water. We need to have someone evaluate these to make sure they aren't polluted so people can return to their homes with peace of mind.

Carrie: As for the soil, the elements are volatile and we don't expect them to settle. If they have the oily mist, they need to report it. This is another piece of information we will gather during the survey to see how pervasive they are. The reports we have had have shown the oily spots distributed very broadly.

Paula: The community understands that you rely on data but we want to trust and verify even beyond what the data would dictate. It would make people feel more comfortable if they could see these things have been ruled out. How are you tracking symptom areas?

Carrie: The symptoms are coming from the Porter Ranch area but there aren't any trends. Some sulfur dioxide could get into pools but that wouldn't be toxic.

Matt: You are going door to door. People most affected won't be home.

Kathryn: It won't capture everyone. It is a random strategy to get a sample of the target area.

Paula: Is there an online survey as well?

Kathryn: CASPER is a rapid assessment at people's doors. We want to use that and a more comprehensive survey later on. We want to assess the current health status right now.

Paula: Can we announce those dates so people can be in their homes those days? I assume there will be a strategy.

Kathryn: There will be a strategy. We will leave a note on the doors of people who can contact us. But the goal is to capture the people who are there right now.

Matt: You get to 210 homes and then stop?

Kathryn: Yes, it is meant to be rapid fire with information returned very quickly. There is a limit to make sure it is quickly analyzed. The surveys will take place before dark to ensure safety.

Craig: Do you have any expectation that there will be any contamination to the pool water?

Carrie: We don't expect any in the water.

Craig: What about this surface issue? Would any of the mercaptan residues settle?

Carrie: Because the chemicals are so volatile, they don't tend to settle. The oily mist event was on a few instances based on operations at the wellhead. Based on the leak, there aren't chemicals settling. Even if Benzene had settled into the soil, it would have evaporated already. Volatile means light and gaseous. It dissipates very quickly. Even if it settled onto surfaces, it would lift quickly. Mercaptan is heavier and could settle on surfaces but it also degrades very quickly on surfaces. This is why we recommend people ventilate when they get home to get in fresh air. This would also speed up degradation of mercaptan if it is still there.

Craig: So the survey is to ask about the symptoms?

Carrie: It won't just be symptoms but also the home environment. Physically inspecting the homes could come out of the survey. The results will be ready in 2-3 days.

Tom: Some of the complaints I am getting are that people are uncertain and they have no scientific data on their health status. They aren't sure if they have been exposed to anything or if the data is reliable. We are looking to public agencies to provide some scientific data to see what types of elements were entered into the air and water and their homes. Will there be any data for this? Will this survey translate into that?

Carrie: we issued several reports in February summarizing the data as it comes in. We are looking at a cumulative report to capture the chemical levels in a summary report. We are focusing on the health survey right now and all of these pieces will provide the public with a lot more information.

Tom: Will this be part of the study through AQMD?

Carrie: this is a rapid capture of information and won't be part of the long-term information. We imagine these results will be useful, though.

Paula: Dr. Rangan mentioned that you would have the method for the indoor testing worked out. Could you do that while also doing this study?

Carrie: We have been working on this indoor protocol quickly. It is not as straightforward as we would like it to be. We want to make sure it answers questions. The indoor sampling protocol is still under development. The symptom study is ongoing. These are two parallel paths.

Paula: Who is driving these studies?

Carrie: We hired consultants to do the indoor air study. EPA and AQMD have also weighed in.

Paula: Is there anything we can do to help motivate or move it along? The timing is essential. People want to move back home but they don't want to until they know it is safe.

Jarrold: They are not getting any obstruction. We have pushed them as fast as we can. This is unprecedented. Their limits are science and logistics.

Carrie: We are not waiting long on any feedback. Agencies are getting back to us the same day. We need to make sure we can do a study with sound science. We are still looking at every option.

Paula: Even that long grab, even that would help our families before the clock runs out.

Matt: All the agencies are testing the air and it all looks normal but there are 150 or so still having symptoms. Could people develop allergies or sensitivities to these elements?

Carrie: It's not something we see but not ruled out.

Matt: We get an automated response from Mandy that says it's highly unlikely that your symptoms are related to the leak so you should see a doctor.

Carrie: When the emissions came back down to zero, and there was no odor, we expected to not see symptoms. So, when we hear people talk of health symptoms, it is very important to see their doctors because we can't assume it's related to the gas leak anymore. And, have your doctor call our medical toxicologist. We had a flood of calls the day people had to move back.

Paula: We had a question out to the gas company, are there things that could be released out there that could be a problem? What we think it may be is the outgassing. If they are smelling the odor, could they experience symptoms again?

Kathryn: This is why we have the odor reporters actively looking for the odor and report it. If people still smell the odors we encourage you to have them participate in the survey and give us the information. They can email us at odor@ph.lacounty.gov

Paula: It isn't enormous rise in the monitors but there is a correlation between odor and the increase in the monitoring. Granted, they are really low levels compared to before.

Kathryn: Real-time correlations would be great. If we could get reports from residences and compare them to the monitors.

Jane: What is lighter than air and heavier? Mercaptans are heavier so they are smelling the mercaptan?

Matt: Indoor testing is testing for what?

Kathryn: That's what we are working on right now. It has taken us longer than we want but we want to get it right.

Paula: If you can get us the areas that you will be in we would appreciate that so people could come back for the study.

Kathryn: We would also need help accessing gated communities on those days.

Paula: We can coordinate that. We just need to know where you are going to go.

Vivian reported from LAUSD. LAUSD is very interested in the indoor study and have asked to be first. They receive calls requesting that the schools remain where they are and just as many asking for them to return. They are waiting on the results from Public Health in order to make a decision in the best interest of the students.

Carlos from LAUSD environment answered the question regarding Beckford elementary. Along with 18 other schools, Beckford has been undergoing the monitoring, not every day but a round robin cycle. They have done 5 different days at Beckford. So far, they haven't found any levels that were above regulatory thresholds.

Tom: Have there been any complaints?

Carlos: Yes, during the early parts during the leaks and less so as the pressure dropped. We had staff there in January and February and didn't sense any odors. We do have to rely on our schools and nursing services to let us know if there are any upswings. Beckford did not have any upswings.

Vivian: I can only think of one child who had prior health issues and we transferred that child.

Tom: With the County study, I hope that Beckford becomes a facility that they will utilize because the students all remained there.

Vivian: with the exception of two schools, all schools within the 5 mile radius remained in place during the leak.

Carlos: Our nurse administrator has been actively involved in looking at the schools to make sure the nurses report any issues that could be associated with the leak.

Vivian: We can alter our request to include other schools.

Paula: The plan was to look at the closest schools. If they come back clean then the others should be fine.

Craig: Have there been any complaints since the leak was stopped?

Vivian: I have not received any.

Craig: That should be very reassuring.

Matt: It seems odd since these symptoms would be reported on a clean air day. It seems odd that there are none that would even be caused by other things.

Vivian: I will go back and do additional research. It would have been brought to our attention if anything similar to symptoms before but I will go back and get that information.

Paula: There should be nosebleeds and other symptoms because those symptoms are caused by other issues besides causes associated with the leak. Could you take a look at reports from last year at this time and compare?

Vivian: Many of these schools only have nursing services one day a week. I don't want to overpromise on data I can compare to a year ago.

SCG representatives Andy Orozco and Daryl Johnson reported.

There has been no venting of gas since the sealing of the leak. We did have one occurrence that we had a small amount of gas released for a required test on February 18th.

Paula: What levels are you getting as background during outgassing when you are testing the wells? You are saying there is no release when opening the wells for those tests?

Andy: We are not releasing any gas.

Paula: When I open a jar, there is air that comes out. When you open a well to do the work-over, wouldn't you release some gas?

Andy: That leads into the third question. We have three work-over rigs on site. We have not added any additional rigs but we are planning to add 5 at the end of March.

Paula: So when you service a valve or a part that is leaking, would that cause any sort of seepage?

Andy: Let me circle back to see.

Paula: Are we going to get whiffs when you are doing the work?

Andy: We have a system to notify people when that type of thing will happen and we will make sure that is in place in these instances.

Daryl: There is a small amount that wouldn't be experience even 30 feet away.

Paula: It's hard for me to understand how that works.

Andy: The return home policy, we all understand that the LA Court upheld the order. We ask residences to notify us online to reactivate their eligibility. To date we had 2525 that have been eligible and are back in hotels.

Craig: SCG needs to verify the condition of the oily spots before reimbursing. How would I contact SCG?

Andy: The number hasn't changed since last week. We will go out and assess. We are also in the process of updating our website.

Craig: Were you here for the city plan to mitigate the effects of this? I asked about solar panels for heating pools. Would SCG be involved in funding that?
Andy: We have made commitments to mitigate the environmental impact. I don't have the details of that yet.

Paula: The Mayor's office brought in his sustainability team to come up with a plan. Some of that is solar water heating and windows and a lot of other things. As you look at mitigation, maybe you look at partnering to help them hit their numbers.

Craig: I am representing 18 HOAs and they are interested in getting on the list for solar panels to help mitigate this.
Craig: The Mayor's representative was very theoretical I want to know what we can ask for.

Kevin Taylor (from Mayor's office): The presentation was intended to get some initial feedback and to present the basic idea before moving to the next stage. Tomorrow, a survey will begin to be circulated.
Craig: Is that to tell you what I think you should do?
Kevin: We want your feedback on the format of the survey before we circulate it to the greater community. The potential for partnership will come up down the road but the first step is to engage the community.

Andy: We have made a commitment to mitigate the environmental impacts. I know there are plenty of plans and ideas out there.

Tom: Our stakeholders are concerned about the stability of the gas fields themselves. We knew we had a failure among the wells, what is being done now, what is the state of the 17 similar wells and all the rest of the wells. What is to prevent the mountain from igniting and blowing it apart?

Daryl: I'm not the storage well expert but I can tell you that the wells are being inspected daily as a requirement of the stipulated order and we are being visited daily by AQMD. There is no real issue of an explosion. The gas is 8300 feet below ground. The concern is to ensure there is not emission. If you have 100% methane, as exists in the wells, you have too much methane to ignite.

Tom: The condition of the 17 wells similar to the leaking well, I want to know the safety and reliability of those. They were being treated differently than the other wells out there?

Andy: A few weeks ago we had a visit by DOGGR and the protocol of what that field will have to go through to go back online. Those 18 wells are sealed and no longer operational.

Paula: They are temporarily sealed to go back and inspect. Can you give us an overview of the wells, which ones are plugged? And, a floor camera to ensure that there are no leaking wells. Can you do that?

Andy: At this point I would have to look at your request. There are other regulatory agencies involved. Some of the agencies have that information already.

Paula: Even a map that would show the ones that are plugged and what is up there would be helpful.

John B: DOGGR is putting that information together.

Paula: If you already have that information together, we would like to see that so that people can feel comfortable moving back in. Can you help us understand the sight better?

Andy: The best I can do now is take a look at your request and what can be done on the operations side.

Craig: Is there a difference in testing and inspecting?

Andy: The work-over rig is far more intense. DOGGR described multi level steps to the inspections.

Craig: We just want you to go well by well and give us a report of what is up there and what is going on with it.

Andy: I understand but I am not the operations expert.

Craig: There are only 100 wells, it seems that you should only have to spend 30 minutes on each well to put in a report.

Andy: I know, it has also been requested of DOGGR.

Paula: We just want the information.

Jane: Early on, we had two different evenings where people were smelling mercaptans. When we do all of this, nothing is escaping? What could be happening for this to happen?

Andy: From the dates that I provided, we have no indication of any venting other than those dates.

Paula: The cavern that was pushing out into the air, won't that cavern also outgas through the source? Isn't that what ARP says is what we are smelling? For me, it's trust and verify. I want to verify the information. Could you get us information about the outgassing and how long we will continue to smell those odors?

Daryl: What you are seeing as the spikes, the information on your sites are from a data point and what is noted as background levels. What we see in our analysis is an average. When you are talking about a small point increase in a sample analysis, it is a small variation. That level has been noted as background.

Paula: When you have a community that has gone through what it has gone through, and they smell it again they want to know that is happening. We understand that they are not at toxic levels but people are still smelling it and it affects them. One story says there are no leaks but we have data showing that something is escaping. It may be a lower level but it is still a spike. We don't want people to panic when they smell the odor.

Matt: Two weeks ago James Marshall was here and we asked about the underground survey documents that are supposed to be done for the wells and no one seems to have those documents. We want to see where the gas could migrate.

Paula: They said they don't believe it is migrating. They track what comes in and what comes out and they match. There is no reason for it to migrate. Those wells have been there for millennia.

Matt: Those documents would show where it might migrate. And it has been punched with 118 wells. As far as levels, agencies keep referring to Burbank. I don't think there are any data for prior levels in Porter Ranch.

Paula: The comparisons have AQMD gathering points and those two are constantly monitored. We don't have the level from Porter Ranch. The challenge is that there is not baseline for us.

Paula: Could you get us the information about people who are relocated and who have returned to their homes?

Andy: One thing for certain, that number fluctuated because some went home or changed hotel location. There isn't a constant number. Today, we have 2015 in long term housing and are still there.

Tom: Weatherization mitigations, air purifiers, where does that stand?

Andy: For all of those on the wait list before the 18th, we are committed to getting those to those homes. We are probably near the end of that process of installation and delivery.

Paula: Regarding the pace of reimbursements. The call-backs are much longer, 24-48 hours.

Andy: The number of reimbursements that have come in whether it be mileage or meals, we are working hard to get through them. Customers will receive a letter that we expect to issue checks covering mileage as of February 25th.

Paula: Aren't there leases that need to be paid? Some of those bigger ticket items?

Andy: I can get back to you. I know we have pushed out a high volume for items but I will have to get back to you on the big-ticket items.

Paula: Could you email that to John so we can have that before the next meeting? Is anyone monitoring that?

Andy: It's monitored internally.

Paula: Can we see what is outstanding and what has been paid?

Andy: I will find a mechanism to report back.

Members gave updates... LAUSD shared a quick advertisement for an event.

Jane: The YMCA is having an open house next week as a welcome back.

Saturday, 9-noon.

Matt: Save Porter Ranch is having a rally tomorrow night at the corner of Rinaldi and Corbin.

Paula: The next meeting won't be here. We will cancel next week's meeting so we can go to the VANC event.

Tom: The AQMD study they were saying it is 3-4 months out. We need to stay on top of that.

John B: We have continued to reach out to AQMD. There have been some changes at AQMD lately but we haven't gotten a response from him. After their meeting tomorrow, we hope to hear back from them.

Paula: Andy, do you have any updates for the study?

Andy: We are waiting to hear back from AQMD and it is in their hands.

Tom: Is there going to be a final report from DOGGR providing us with an assurance that the wells are safely being operated?

Paula: When DOGGR was here, they brought the pre-rulemaking form. There is a link for you to weigh in. Is this enough or is there anything you want to see? They are using this to formulate the information that is coming back to us. We want an update and where they are in the process. We need to continue to push on this.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:57PM