

Porter Ranch Community Advisory Committee

Meeting #4

Thursday, January 14, 2016
Cal State University Northridge

DRAFT NOTES

First Posted: 1/15/16 at 12:35am

Last Updated:

Paula Cracium, Chair, calls the meeting to order at 6:16pm.

Members Present:

Paula Cracium
Jarrod Degonia
Vivian Ekchian
Tom Johnson (late arrival)
John Lee
Issam Najm
Matt Pakucko
Jane Stanton
Andre Van der Valk

Guest Speakers:

Dr. Cyrus Rangan
Katherine Butler
Gillian Williams
Jimmy Cho

Health Department Presentation

Dr. Cyrus Rangan, Director, Toxics Epidemiology Program at the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health introduced himself and his colleague, Katherine Butler. He expressed that public health is priority #1 at this evolving situation. As time has passed, it has become clear that this is more complex than originally expected.

They first addressed concerns around the health impacts of methane. Katherine indicated that flammability (combustion) is main concern with methane. Data they have seen has shown that levels are well below flammable limits. In respect to trends, methane levels have decreased since the holidays. More agencies are involved in monitoring. California Air Resource Board has been monitoring in real time, which is posted on their website.

There are no long- or short-term consequences of breathing methane. The only concern is displacement of oxygen. Methane is not a poison; there aren't toxic concerns with methane other than displacing oxygen.

It was asked where one can find the studies that show these conclusions.

EPA IRIS doesn't have methane in their database. Katherine indicated that CALEPA is well known for being at the front of toxicology evidence. You can go to [ToxNet](#) to find the studies.

Related to Mercaptans, CalEPA does have some information on mercaptans. [Assembly Bill 1900](#) called for a toxicity study that found it 12 parts per million, 1000 times higher than what is found here. Mercaptans are not listed in EPA IRIS, either; mercaptans are not a high profile toxin.

Andre: It's the lack of oxygen, not the methane, that kills you, not the methane itself?
Answer: Correct.

Andre: Have we seen methane around LA County before, like at a school in Chatsworth or a shopping center in West LA?

Answer: Many situations exist where methane is released in LA County in the last few years alone.

Andre: Does the County monitor those activities for benzene?

A: DOGGR is the regulatory agency. Where public health comes in: we don't have regulatory power. We look to see that they are properly regulated.

Matt asked if there were long-term studies on breathing in from a leak like this.

Katherine indicated a inn Alabama in 2012, a community was effected for 6 months at 200 times higher than what is happening here. The CDC did a study, and the same impacts and effects that were seen there are being seen here. Additionally, "worker studies" have shown longer term exposures for higher rates don't reveal long-term effects in those workers.

Dr. Rangan continued that inhaled Mercaptans aren't accumulated nor do they flow into the bloodstream (unless you were to drink them).

Follow-up from December PRNC meeting: they are looking at other chemicals beyond mercaptan and methane that are being released. They are working with other agencies to coordinate that collection and analysis.

Dr. Rangan then moved on to talk about Benzene. One of the most highly regulated chemicals because it is a one of only 10-12 chemicals that are absolutely known to cause cancer. It is an absolute. It's known to cause leukemia and non-cancer disorders, as well, such as neurological and blood problems.

You have to be exposed to high levels to get short term health impacts. The level is around 3000ppm for a ½ hour or an hour to get to a life-threatening level. Chronic exposure is of more concern. When it's a known carcinogen, they divide the levels by about a thousand so they know they can steer clear of those levels. Chronic reference level is 1ppb, based on a very sensitive population (babies, seniors, pregnant mothers, etc.)

He indicated you don't see a lot of benzene coming out of natural gas operations. The reason for the extensive monitoring is to make sure it doesn't reach to unacceptable levels.

There is regular monitoring in the area, where Benzene ranges from .3ppb to .6 ppb in Burbank and Downtown LA. In the coming weeks, SoCalGas is looking for background monitoring locations to get an idea of what local background levels are like.

Jarrold asked that they let us know when/where the background monitoring locations are when selected?

Katie: Sure.

Matt: Has there been any studies prior to the leak in this area?

Katie: AQMD may have that information

Jarrold: Could there be background monitoring studies at other locations around SoCal like Valencia?

A: We could definitely consider this once the repair is done.

There have been over 1000 samples taken since the beginning of November through January 3rd and an average of .49ppb. There have been only 13 instances where levels exceeded the chronic reference level, with readings up to 5ppb.

In the past, samples have been a "grab sample" of about 10 minutes of air; a "snapshot" of air. In preparing more comprehensive samples by sucking in air for a longer period of time, they can measure what someone is exposed to for an entire day. That will enable a better understanding of the long-term effects. Starting on January 11, these 12hr + 12hr samples were taken. These recent samples won't reveal 12 hour samples from late October or early November, though.

Matt: Why is taken so long to get to this?

They didn't think the repair would take this long when it first started, and then they worked with 6 or 7 agencies to come up with better monitoring as the leak continued. All the agencies had to sign off on the process and labs. AQMD did do more monitoring in targeted areas with high odor complaints, and that data (grab samples) can be used to create a "worst case," or peak exposure, to what benzene levels could be. There will be a gap in measurements, as they have limited data

because they were grab samples. This is why we need more comprehensive samples.

Paula: Even though the levels have been those levels you indicated, has there been a long term health risk at this point?

Answer: You can't draw a conclusion because we don't have the data but we do have some confidence that we aren't looking at an emergency problem. We want to make sure there is comprehensive data from here on out. And we don't know what tomorrow's air will bring.

Regarding other VOCs, there is a large list of VOCs that can be in the plume. The levels have been very low and almost undetectable. Benzene has been most detectable. They are still monitoring other levels, but they don't expect any health effects. SoCalGas will be monitoring a more detailed list of chemicals as part of expanded monitoring.

Regarding the "Oily Mist and Residue," Katherine reporter that in December, SoCalGas sampled spots on a car. They came back as looking as crude oil substance, with heavier hydrocarbons. Now, they've installed 6 monitoring locations along the fence lines, where Plexiglas plates are being inspected daily to see if/how many dots are there. Between 1/2/16 and 1/10/16, there has been no oily dots on the Plexiglas sheets. Additional testing of those dots is being done this week to see if there are any other chemicals (possibly PAHs or Metals). AQMD also put glass plates in the community in December, and they didn't find any.

Regarding who is doing the testing, Dr. Rangan indicated that the responsible party is directed by agencies to perform tests/analysis, but verification is done by agencies to check the responsible party's work.

The likelihood of toxicity in this oily substance is low, so contact it is of more concern.

If one comes across it, first, report it. Don't eat garden vegetables until more testing is done, and they know what's in it. They don't expect people to get sick, but the best precautionary advice is not to eat any home grown vegetables that grow above ground. Also, children should not have direct contact with it.

The oily substance is difficult to remove; SoCalGas has a solvent you can request. You can also try soap and water, but it's not easy to remove and they can't make a recommendation of a specific product to use.

Dr. Rangan concluded saying that based on the short-term impacts, you should look at this with a least common denominator position. It's not about toxic build-up but sensitivity. "We are still looking at levels that are by and large comparable to our regular SoCal air." These are personal, household decisions to relocate. From a medical solution approach, you can either remove the odor or remove yourself from the odor.

There are non-specific symptoms which makes it difficult to interpret. If you're not smelling anything and you're feeling symptoms, you should see your medical professionals.

Paula: Would the Health Department send out information to medical professionals in the area?

A: We are putting that together and will be sending it out soon.

Issam: Is there a County level health advisory level for these types of things?

A: Usually it's through press release, but since this is a known issue, they will use other means to educate health professionals beyond the media alerts.

Has there been sufficient survey of the sensitive subpopulation in the affected area that you can report on?

No activities to define the case because the exposure is known. They are in the mode of being a receptor of that information. 100s of calls have come, and they help people on an individual basis. One's personal sensitivity is the variability, but those with chronic disease (like Asthma) may feel more effects.

Issam: Is the county going to conduct a survey of those exposed?

A: We won't get more information, so we won't be doing that.

What is your take on the reports of dead birds found in back yards?

A: Dead birds happen all the time. Veterinary program will be studying to see if there is spike in this area. There is no way to tell if they died because of exposure to the gases. They are also looking at veterinary hospitals intakes with non-specific symptoms to see if there is a larger impact.

What are emotional/ mental health impact of this issue on the community (particularly children), both those relocated and those still in their homes?

A: If you look at the Alabama study, they looked at behavioral changes. They saw increased agitation and irritation, but those symptoms went away when the issue was resolved.

Paula: Is there a way to address the issue of coming back to their homes

A: We'll coordinate with Dept. of Mental Health to provide that information.

Are there any health concerns related to air scrubbers or the filters put in homes?

A: No. They were involved so that these are certified as non-ozone generating or low-ozone generating. They went on to say that these are not permanent solutions.

We've heard people complain about rash; does that have any connection to the leak?

A: It's unlikely that rashes resulted from this incident.

Paula: What specifically causes the temporary neurological Impacts?

A: Neurological symptoms are resulting from the odor. Benzene can lead to bad neurological impacts, but we're far from those levels.

John Lee: is there any additional risk with children?

A: Contact with the odor is the threshold, not exposure. So, children may show more symptoms because they normally have more nose bleeds, etc.

Issam: Would cleaning surfaces with Bleach take away the mercaptans?

A: Soap and Water could easily remove the remnant mercaptans.

SoCalGas Update

Jimmy Cho updated the committee on the Relief Wells progress.

#1 measured depth, 7600 feet early this morning. Down to 7710 today. Tool creates magnetic field to know where the well is. Like an airplane approaching an aircraft carrier: precision is important as they're intercepting a 7-inch casing.

#2 is there if there is any issue. It is at a slightly higher elevation.; they are finishing the base.

The schedule provided to DOGGR is that the first relief well will be done as early as the end of February.

At the leaking well, they have 70% covered with filter screens. It is like the vent hoods that are 8 inches thick.

Gas Capture—proposal is because of gas leaking at surface, per the governors order they want to see if there is a way to safely capture and put in gathering system. Through a thermal operation, the result would be CO2 and water. The balance would go to a carbon bed which would remove mercaptan but not methane. This is not a flare.

They are not doing measures sequentially; they are continuing with the relief well and as well as lowering the pressure in the well. They are 60% less from a flow perspective. What typically takes months, they did in weeks. They are also focusing on gas capture safely while other measures are also still underway.

Paula: How far away from well site is this capture system?

There is a pad to the west, under a quarter mile away, will be for the incineration. They want to keep them separate, and the number of flat spaces are limited. Wind patterns are also a consideration for the placement of this system.

Gillian reported that relocation numbers are holding relatively stable. 2485 pending, and 1782 assigned to a provider. They have quite a few – 529 – that they contacted and are waiting for the residences to decide on the action they want to take.

Issam: For someone who chooses to go to a hotel, what is the expectation without pets, etc. for them to be placed, once they request that option?

Answer: They should be able to go that night or the next day.

Jarrold reported that the Board of Supervisors directed Consumer Affairs to investigate price gouging. Similarly, the City Attorney has already started investigating. John Lee indicated that they need SoCalGas's help in getting these instances. Gillian indicated that the City Attorney contacted them, and they are going through their data. They know residents have done research, and anecdotally they have heard of some gouging. Overall, they can see that early on rents were reasonable, but they have continued to escalate.

Gillian asserted that they feel transparency is important, but as soon as any number (amount) is out that they are willing to pay, that becomes the typical.

Paula asked about testing on other wells to see if they are leaking. One of the legislators commented that tests were done on other wells.

Jimmy indicated that they test as usual per the rules, so he wasn't sure what it is being referenced. Work over rigs are on site to check the integrity of the wells. (They look like a mini relief well.) Their main purpose is to pull tubing with some magnetic flux. We look at the tubing and perform tests to check integrity of the casing. We are accelerating the program.

Jimmy indicated they have DOT transmission pipelines. These are the ones equivalent to power line with compressors are along the pipeline. Some gas goes to storage; some goes directly into stations.

Pipes coming out and in are transition pipe and required to be inspected. Every seven years every pipe has to be assessed. A robotic tool goes in the pipe with magnetic flux to find any issues and fix it.

Matt asked about AQMD's inspection with an infrared cameras; they'll follow up.

Jimmy indicated that employees will be doing a sweep every 14 days. Normally, every few years you will see someone walking your neighborhood. When a consumer smells gas whether in home or on street, they want them to call. Now, they're concerned that people smell gas but think it has something to do with leak and not something else in their home or neighborhood. They deployed 40 people last week to walk the streets sweeping to check for high levels just 1 inch from the ground (something emanating from the ground!). The instruments used are for immediate locations.

Matt: Are there any measurement at the leak? What is coming out of the ground?

Answer: County HAZMAT has that information; we'll check on that.

Paula: It was said that the odor has gone done. Why?

Answer: Less pressure means less odor. Also, the weather and rain has helped. Wet ground will “capture” mercaptan.

Paula: Are you close to running out of natural gas for customer supply?

Jimmy: The interstate pipeline is not sufficient to supply the need for consumers. 28-29 December was bitter cold and had great demand [as described at the last meeting]. If a day like that happened next month, we want to make sure our system can handle it. I am constantly aware of it.

Issam: Is there a leak in the central tubing?

Jimmy: We believe the tubing is in good condition. We will be able to look at those materials once it's stopped and we can inspect.

Issam: Has there been any consideration to send the mud through the casing?

Jimmy: I have the world's best experts who have done it seven times.

Andre: Will there be peak demand shortages?

Answer: Our priority is to send first to homes and businesses. California energy commission is making sure we think ahead. We do have a sequence, and that plan is published already.

Matt: Is killing a well common. So, if it's so common, could it be considered routine?

Jimmy: I am a geologist; I won't talk about what I don't know. A well kill is a way to overcome the gas pressure with enough fluid head that it outweighs the gas. I can't tell you if it's routine; I'll find out for you.

Tom: Are we taking lessons that we are learning from this to apply to other instances?

Jimmy: Legislators and the governor are engaged, and we're not currently allowed to inject gas until we get to a point where all agencies determine it is safe. Until then, we will work with the agencies to make sure it's safe. Remember, this is just one of 100 wells, and the pressure is less than half than when it started. I want to make sure in the future there is enough pressure to deliver gas.

Issam: Regarding Mileage reimbursement: miles are calculated between dwelling and work. People are going back and forth to check on their homes. Would SoCalGas modify reimbursement?

Gillian: We can look at it. For the per diem, they went to a straight calculated form (a simplified form that could be automatically processed). The complexity would require more individualized documentation.

Issam: Does the default not require them to submit any mileage? Can they submit other mileage?

Gillian: We can look into it.

Issam: Now that the per diem is \$45, is that retroactive?

Gillian: We no longer require receipts from Jan 2nd. From Jan 2 on it is \$45 per person regardless of age.

John Lee: In the office we are getting questions about pets. People are looking at kennels but they are looking for other options for their pets. What is SoCalGas looking at as far as paying for dog sitters? Also, can non-licensed dog kennels receive funds?

Gillian: We are looking for a reasonable expense – we are trying to be sensitive about that which is why we require licensed kennels. If residents want to take on the risk, it might be possible. They would have to waive those protections. We can explore what people are comfortable with their own pets.

Tom: Is there going to be some sort of W2 at the end of the year for those relocated?

Gillian: We will not be issuing W9s for filters and per diem. Residents need to do their own taxes, as SoCalGas does not provide financial advice.

Process Items

The South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD) will be invited to present at the next meeting.

There was discussion about an outside expert speaker suggested by Matt, and the determination was that this was not someone the committee wanted to hear from.

Next meeting will be on January 28th so that committee members can go to the State Committee hearing on January 21st at 5pm at Porter Ranch School.