

Richmond Residents Concerned Over Chevron Refinery Modernization Plans



Chevron refinery in Richmond. (Justin Sullivan/Getty Images)

RICHMOND (KPIX 5) — Three weeks after Chevron released an **environmental impact** report detailing a \$1 billion modernization project at its Richmond refinery, the public spoke out about the impacts the project could have on the community.

Richmond residents, environmentalists and labor leaders packed a Planning Commission meeting at the Richmond civic center Thursday night, with most

speakers urging the commission to reject the plan.

“It just seems like this is a classic case of environmental injustice,” said Andres Soto, a community organizer for Communities for a Better Environment.

Soto pointed out that Chevron’s new project would allow the refinery to process dirtier crude oil than it already does. The EIR proposes doubling the sulfur **content** of the crude Chevron processes from 1.5 percent on average to 3 percent on average.

“Why would we want them to have a license to actually bring more pollution?” said Soto. Sulfur corrosion of piping in Chevron’s crude oil unit is what caused a **massive fire at the refinery in August 2012** that sent a plume of black smoke over Richmond and put 15,000 people in the hospital complaining of respiratory problems.

Chevron has argued that the modernization project would simply replace old equipment in the refinery, including some piping, and any increases in emissions would be off-set by cap and **trade**.

“Our commitment is for no net increase in criteria air pollutant, health risk and greenhouse gas emissions,” said Nicole Barber, a Chevron spokesperson.

But environmentalists are also concerned that Chevron has plans to process heavier crude like Canadian tar sands, which is considered some of the dirtiest crude oil there is.

Barber said the modernization project is not suitable for tar sands and that Chevron had no plans to process that type of crude “at this time.” She did not rule out the possibility of processing tar sands at the refinery in the future.

The modernization project has been in the works for a decade and was delayed in 2008 when environmentalists filed a lawsuit, claiming Chevron’s previous Environmental Impact Report failed to specify what types of crude the refinery would process after the modernization and whether emissions would increase.

The public has until May 2 to submit comments on the project. The Planning Commission is expected to make a decision on the report by June.