

Cap Bay Area refinery emissions now

By **Andrés Soto and Sandy Saeteurn** | June 12, 2016 | Updated: June 12, 2016 3:07pm



Photo: Carlos Avila Gonzalez, The Chronicle



The Richmond Chevron Refinery

East Bay residents know what it's like to rush, choking, to the emergency room when a refinery fire poisons our air because oversight is too lax. We know that from Chevron's 2012 Richmond refinery fire, which sent 15,000 people to seek medical help after a corroded pipe failed and caught fire. The Bay Area knows we need air pollution reductions to protect our climate and our health.

Cap Bay Area Refinery Emissions, continued...

The real shocker, though, is that there is no limit on overall emissions for the five major Bay Area refineries. The Bay Area Air Quality Management District admitted to this gaping loophole, with a promise to close it, three months before Chevron's 2012 disaster. Four years later, the agency is set to decide whether to act on that promise at a [public meeting](#) in San Francisco on Wednesday.

The air district must close this loophole in air and climate protection now.

Oil refining is the biggest industrial air and climate polluter in the Bay Area, the second largest refining center in western North America. The air quality management district is the agency responsible for curbing the industry's emissions.

Since 2012, the industry has launched at least 10 proposals that could increase emissions region-wide by expanding capacity to refine low-quality oil, even the dirtiest tar sands oil. Dirtier oil sends more toxics into our air, worsens catastrophic hazards as the Chevron fire demonstrates, and burns more of each barrel in making tar-like oils into gasoline. Science shows tar sands oil can double or triple a refinery's greenhouse gas emission intensity, increasing toxic emissions along with greenhouse gases. If refineries are rebuilt to process this dirty oil, this long-lived infrastructure could commit us to more pollution for a generation.

On Wednesday, the air board will consider "Option 3" on a proposed update of a rule that would foreclose such irreversible harm. Under this option, each refinery would have a limit (based on actual emissions) on greenhouse gases, particulate matter, nitrogen dioxide and sulfur dioxide, thus preventing any increase in its emissions. The refineries would not have to do anything different to meet these limits. But if they switched to dirtier oil, they would have to do more emission control work.

The caps would work with the district's options 1, 2, and 4, which require actions to reduce, not just hold the line on, emissions. But those actions will take years.

The oil companies seeking to refine dirtier oil oppose the caps. They claim capping emissions here will make other refineries increase production, and shift emissions elsewhere. They're wrong. Here and across the West Coast, gasoline use isn't rising — it's dropping.

Community, health, environmental and climate groups have joined with the state nurses union and the region's biggest refinery workers local to support the caps. We need refinery emission caps now.

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What you can do

Support refinery emission caps, as listed on the air district's agenda as "Option 3" for its planned update of Regulation 12, Rule 16:

Cap Bay Area Refinery Emissions, continued...

Attend the air district Board of Directors meeting at 9:45 a.m. Wednesday at 375 Beale St., San Francisco.

Call or write your [elected representative](#) on the board.