

April 11, 2019

SCAQMD Governing Board Members  
c/o Clerk of the Board



**Re: AQMD communications to communities during and after explosions, fires, spills, and other accidents in the District**

Dear Chairman Burke and AQMD Administrative Committee Board Members,

Thank you for your acknowledgement of the need to enhance communications to community members during and after accidents, explosions, fires, and spills involving air pollution in the District. We were not present at the Governing Board on April 5<sup>th</sup>, but saw your discussion online during the Public Comment period regarding the Phillips 66 Carson fire. We cannot attend your meeting on this issue tomorrow, and so are sending some thoughts now.

The week and weekend of the Phillips 66 Carson fire were particularly eventful:

- First, a few days before the Phillips Carson fire, Alicia Rivera, our Wilmington Community Organizer, reported to the District that the Phillips *Wilmington* refinery was flaring. District staff stated that even Phillips did not know it was flaring, and had to investigate why this was occurring before it could be addressed.
- Next, the major Phillips *Carson* fire and black plumes broke out Friday night, due to leaking high-pressure crude oil pump igniting, spreading fire and smoke.
- Then Saturday another Phillips *Wilmington* flaring event occurred.
- And on Sunday morning the explosion and black plume was seen by millions, from the South LA gasoline storage tank explosion, that was initially reported as a natural gas leak.

These of course raised feelings of alarm in Wilmington, Southeast LA, and many communities. People were texting, looking at news, trying to find out what was happening and what to do.

CBE contacted the District staff during the last few weeks on this issue. We told your staff that our members could not get good information during and after such events from the District. Staff explained it was evaluating improved communications. Staff was sympathetic and helpful in confirming the basic fire cause as reported in the press, but also told us we must do public records requests to get other information, including monitoring reports.

In our discussions with your staff last week, we proposed a few preliminary solutions (not comprehensive), and wanted to forward them to you before the Board discussion tomorrow:

- **Start a community accidents communication plan with community input**, including the best ways to let people know what is happening, and what to do during a fire, explosion, spill, major flaring event, or other disaster involving air pollution in the District.
- **Start a District webpage to report afterward** with at minimum, basic information on the date, location, and cause of accidents including refinery and other sources. BAAQMD has such a webpage, with a link to a report on each accident.<sup>1</sup> (It seems like big metals

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.baaqmd.gov/about-air-quality/incidents-and-advisories>

processing facility fires also regularly crop up, and warehouse fires, in addition to oil refinery accidents.) Monitoring reports and other documents should also be provided.

- **Provide more information to the public without requiring Public Records Requests.** Most community members cannot easily get information this way, and even for groups like CBE which are accustomed to doing this, it takes months.
- **Change the message to the public – people do not believe that black smoke plumes are benign.** While we understand the District does not want to alarm everybody, people have a right to know that they should avoid such clouds, what is in them and what potential invisible emissions are occurring, and that monitoring is not comprehensive.
- **Gather additional community suggestions about accident response.**

We understand that your staff is in the process of responding to such recommendations. Thank you very much for the Board's engagement with community members so thoughtfully on this issue - our thoughts are much in line. We look forward to the results of your Board committee meeting tomorrow.

Sincerely,

Julia May  
Senior Scientist,  
Communities for a Better Environment

3/15/2019 - Phillips 66 Carson Refinery Friday Night Fire ABC7: [Fire Burns Out of Control at Carson Oil Refinery](#)



3/17/19 Sunday morning South LA blast - Daily Breeze: [Gasoline tanker leak, explosion and fire...](#)  
and KNBC4: [Gas Tank Explosion in South LA Creates Giant Smoke Cloud, Panic](#)

