

# Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration

Boulder, Colorado  
July 14, 2016

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As a community we were embarrassingly unaware of the potential of our surroundings. On October 23, 2015, everyone got a wake-up call!

## CHASING THE TRUTH

### WHAT'S GOING ON?

- Calls placed into Southern California Gas Company. We were told nothing had happened.
- They admitted the following week -- they have a leak!

### HOW BAD IS IT?

- We were told there was no risk.
- We were told that no methane would make its way into our communities -- something we would later find out was blatantly untrue; we can only assume that So Cal Gas and the other agencies as well knew this. We are in a high wind area and FLIR cameras proved the methane and everything else coming off that mountain was coming right into our communities.
- So Cal Gas told us they will have it fixed in a few days.
- This went on for more than a few days.
- Ultimately we were told the well did not respond to the traditional method of fixing a leak.
- A relief well would be needed -- and it would take up to 4 months.

## WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS?

- It was a struggle to even know what questions to ask.
- Information and misinformation was being hurled at us as we struggled to become experts on the issues relating to the leak.
- Fear of so many unknowns...
  - We heard from various officials and So Cal Gas that “There is no risk to your health.”
  - We heard differing opinions from doctors -- everything from “There is no health risk” to “You are in grave danger – leave immediately!”
  - We heard “It is safe to be in your home” but also “Your homes are contaminated and you should relocate.”
- We were trying to figure out: Are we safe? Are our kids safe?
- We sought out the long term exposure risks:
  - Much was still un-known. There was no long-term health study. We were becoming the long term test group.
  - No one would tell us with certainty that there was NO long term risk.
  - With no definitive information, families were fearful of the future health impacts and were forced to move out of their homes and community.

- Many people were getting sick from Mercaptans and metals that made their way into their homes with the release of the oily mist from the wells. According to the CASPER study done by County Health nearly 60% of those living in their homes – not yet cleaned -- are still experiencing symptoms.
  - Headaches
  - Nose bleeds
  - Stomach ailments
  - Rashes
  - People with existing health conditions were hit particularly hard.
- Oily mist descending and covering homes and playgrounds
  - A side effect of attempting to seal the well.
  - A combination of crude oil (left over from the oil well) and brine used to try to make the seal and other problematic metals.
  - Is it harmful? The county did testing of the residue in the home in our community and found some metals that can cause some of the same side effects as the mercaptans.

- The community was torn apart.
  - People who had no health effects questioned the ones that were suffering.
  - People who were suffering were angered by the casual attitude of those suffering no effects.
  - Families turned against each other as those fearful of what the future risk may be for their children called other parents irresponsible for not sharing their concerns.
  - Parents whose children had no ill effects fought to not have the local school relocated – not wanting their children’s education to be impacted. Meanwhile parents whose children were experiencing effects or who had grave concerns about their children’s short and long term health fought to relocate the school.
  - This rift was devastating to our community, and the effects are still being felt.
- We would ultimately see:
  - Almost half of the families in our community moved out.
  - Two schools were relocated.
  - Parks were closed until they could be cleaned and deemed safe from the oily residue.
  - Merchants were forced to close occasionally due to illnesses of their employees.
  - And many of our small businesses struggled to stay open -- and are still reeling today.

After much delay we started seeing action from many of these agencies. (One thought about the delayed response is due to the fact that there were no dramatic images being splashed all over the media.)

- PORTER RANCH NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL
  - First meeting on October 30 with L.A. County
  - Asked for Public Health to get involved. (They had not been involved since there was “no health concern”.) Asked So Cal Gas to pay for the relocation expenses for those who had to temporarily move.
  - Hosted a number of community meeting where thousands attended.
  - The first was on November 2.
  - Reached out to elected officials.
    - We needed involvement and responses -- to meet the urgency and critical needs related to the leak.
    - This was slow to get started and is ongoing.
  - Meeting with Governor Jerry Brown on January 4<sup>th</sup>

- COUNTY

- Was first to respond – this gas facility is in their purview.
- Brought in critical agencies.
- Ordered So Cal Gas to relocate affected residents.
- Presented at hearings regarding the impact of the leak.
- Sent directives to So Cal Gas:
  - The first to pay for relocated families was successful.
  - The second directive to clean the homes of those who relocated or exhibited health symptoms within the Porter Ranch Neighborhood Council boundaries has not been complied with.
- They did a number of tests. They did an amazing job but it took a long time to get them to see the need for testing of homes, soil and water.
- Filing law suits against So Cal Gas.

- CITY

- Mayor Eric Garcetti's and Councilmember Mitchell Englander's offices called for a resource center, hearings and a number of other actions throughout the crisis.
- City Attorney – filed a law suit
- District Attorney – filed criminal charges

- STATE
  - State lawmakers stepped up to assist with the state regulatory agencies and state legislation that was needed to protect the community.
  - Governor's office...
    - Declaration of emergency on January 6<sup>th</sup>
    - Promised more unified oversight by the Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES). Although well intentioned, this was not as successful as hoped as these agencies are not accustomed to working together and crossing over to work with other agencies.
- FEDERAL
  - Federal lawmakers helped by looking at federal law and legislation as it relates to well sites and getting the White House involved.
  - President Obama announced the creation of a task force to investigate the gas leak led by Departments of Energy and Transportation.
- GRASS ROOTS GROUP
  - "Save Porter Ranch" sounded the alarm of the magnitude of the incident.
  - They continue to work to inform the public of the ongoing risk of this site.
  - They are championing the message to "shut it all down".

- LEARNING CURVE...
  - We had to learn about VOC's (Volatile Organic Compounds), relief wells, air born metals and more
  - SS25 – about 1 mile below the surface
  - Production tubes and exterior casing
  - 115 wells on the mountain are run by So Cal Gas alone
    - Many are old -- some dating back to 1938
  - Shut off valves not replaced
  - The storage facility is a natural land mass
  - It is the second-largest gas storage facility of its kind in the United States
  - It serves 11 million customers across Sothern California and is a vital part of the energy reliability system in Southern California.
- SEALED
  - February 18<sup>th</sup> the leak was finally sealed.
  - What was now said to be the worst natural gas leak in U.S. history in terms of its environmental impact had finally ended.
  - By then the community had endured nearly 4 long months of exposure to these gasses and metals.

- LOOKING TO THE FUTURE
  - Continual chasing of So Cal Gas and billing/payment issues as well as continually pressuring for needed support of the community.
  - Long term health study – hopefully we will not see any long term health issues 5 -10 and 20 years down the line.
  - Testing of soils and water.
  - So Cal Gas to comply with county directive ordering them to clean homes in the community.
  - Continue working for legislation – safer site here and everywhere.
  - State agencies investigating the cause of the break.
  - Evaluating the safety and possible options for relocations of the site .
  - Awaiting the results of the President’s investigation.
  - Working with the Mayor and his Sustainability Plan.
  - Working to get the fines levied upon the Gas Company...to be given to the community...to in turn be spent here on rebuilding and restoring the community.
- For the community...
  - How to rebuild our small businesses.
  - Uniting our community. Division in our community is substantial. This incident has a weird dynamic: some sick, some not; some relocated, some not.
  - The name Porter Ranch once meant an amazing community; now it has an enormous stain on it – one I am not sure we can remove but we’ll do what ever we can to ensure our community is restored.

- We still have a long way to go and a lot of work ahead as we look to a safer, more stable and sustainable future for our community. One where Children and families do not live in fear of what could happen next.
- SOME OF WHAT WE'VE LEARNED...
  - Governmental agencies are more reactive than proactive.
  - These agencies like So Cal Gas have information they are not willing to share with the community. This was extremely devastating and beyond challenging to navigate -- that the agencies do not work in tandem but are all separated and seemingly do not often not communicate.
  - There is no unified command overseeing the management of the incident.
    - We had assumed governmental agencies are all aware of each other's activities and coordinated accordingly in navigating a crisis like this, but they stayed within their departments; this left the community with the responsibility of connecting all the dots and playing a version of "button–button-who's-got-the-button" with these agencies. Although attempts were made to resolve this issue, it remained something we needed to navigate throughout the crisis.
  - That "urgent" does not mean the same thing to everyone.
  - That the utilities spoon feed you as little information as they believe you will accept. This happens with other agencies as well.

- That often people will answer the question they want to and not the one you are asking.
- Utilities are ill equipped and unprepared for an incident like this -- as were many of the responding agencies.
- There is no regulation on how close homes can be built to a storage facility.
- Legislative change does not just happen; we have to press and be involved in the process.
- We all need to be more aware of what is going on in the land around us.
  - Termo (who owns a number of oil wells in Aliso Canyon) knowingly released natural gas during the crisis.
  - Crimson Resources, another oil company in Aliso Canyon, had a leak of both oil and gas shortly after the SS25 leak was capped.
  - Minor leaks from SCG will apparently be a part of our future.
- The future of this site is still being navigated. Investigations are still underway. The community anxiously awaits what its future will be. We understand the importance of reliability, but that cannot trump the safety of the residents. But more oversight is clearly needed if this site is to remain in our community in order to protect the neighboring residents.

THANK YOU!