

Agencies studying geothermal gas releases

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LAKEPORT -- Lake County Family Resource Center's recently vacated its facility in Clearlake in response to indoor air quality health concerns raised by health officials. The move prompted questions from the public about possible health impacts of geothermal gas releases on the surrounding neighborhood.

Natural geothermal activity is not uncommon in Lake County and residents of the Burns Valley neighborhood in the City of Clearlake have seen the signs of bubbling gas releases in puddles and smelled the rotten egg odor associated with sulfur gases for years.

Occasionally those gases accumulate in enclosed spaces, causing health and safety concerns. Although the smell of sulfur can be a tip-off that geothermal gas vents are in the area, the odor does not correlate with the level of danger. In fact, the human nose can detect hydrogen sulfide gas at levels even lower than what is measurable with detection equipment. Other geothermal gases may not produce any odor.

Local agencies have responded to occasional geothermal gas concerns in Lake County for decades. They stepped up the frequency of air quality testing in the Burns Valley neighborhood starting two years ago in order to better understand the patterns and significance of the geothermal gas releases.

Over the years, Konocti Unified School District also monitored the air quality at Burns Valley Elementary School and twice arranged for indoor air quality studies by an outside party. Neither study detected measurable levels of concern in classrooms. A continuous outdoor air monitoring device is operating at Burns Valley Elementary school under the supervision of the Lake County Air Quality Management District. The Konocti Unified School District plans to do further indoor monitoring.

Ongoing evaluation continues to be a subject of interest to agencies, including Lake County Environmental Health and Public Health, Lake County Air Quality Management District, Konocti Unified School District, Lake County Fire Protection District and the City of Clearlake.