

SoCal Gas pinpoints the site of a leaking well near Porter Ranch

Louis Sahagun, Los Angeles Times, 12-27-15

Southern California Gas Co. officials said Sunday they have pinpointed the location of a leaking natural gas injection well that has displaced thousands of residents in the upscale San Fernando Valley community of Porter Ranch.

Workers were continuing to drill a relief well and had reached a depth of 3,800 feet about midnight Saturday when they discovered the site of the target well using a magnetic ranging tool, said Anne Silva, a spokeswoman for SoCal Gas. The well extends more than 8,000 feet below the surface.

The company is still "not sure of the exact location of the leak," Silva said, "but suspects it is within a shallow level — within the first several hundred feet of the 8,700-foot well."

With the goal of stopping the leak as quickly as possible, the company is creating a secondary relief well as backup to its ongoing drilling operation.

Drilling of the secondary well is slated to begin in January, Silva said, "and should take about three to four months."

But Silva said Saturday's discovery will probably not affect the timeline for stopping emissions.

The gas company has already told state regulators that it would complete drilling of the primary relief well by Feb. 24, but representatives said in an interview last week that repairing the leak could take until the end of March.

The well began spewing mostly methane gas Oct. 23. Silva described the failed well as "a 7-inch diameter steel pipeline that allows natural gas to be put into a naturally occurring underground storage field."

SoCal Gas said the only solution lies in relief wells being drilled to intercept and plug the damaged well.

The company is paying to relocate and house residents and pets sickened by fumes that health officials and independent experts say can cause headaches, nosebleeds, nausea and other short-term ailments but pose no long-term health risks.

Porter Ranch is a 30-year-old master-planned community of 30,000 people, schools, businesses, parks and hiking trails tucked beneath the Santa Susana Mountains at the northwestern tip of the San Fernando Valley.