

# Regulators order new steps to contain gas leak near Porter Ranch

Cindy Chang, Los Angeles Times, 1-24-16

Regulators on Saturday approved a comprehensive abatement order that requires Southern California Gas Co. to take immediate steps to contain a massive natural [gas leak](#) in Porter Ranch, permanently shut down the damaged well, establish a leak detection system and conduct an independent health study.

Following a six-hour public meeting in Woodland Hills, the Hearing Board of the South Coast Air Quality Management District voted 4-1 to approve the order.

“As a result of this order, SoCalGas must take immediate steps to minimize air pollution and odors from its leaking well and stop the leak as quickly as possible,” said Barry Wallerstein, SCAQMD’s executive officer. “It also will require the utility to thoroughly inspect all other wells at its Aliso Canyon storage facility to help prevent another major leak in the future.”

Once the leak is stopped and the well is shut down, SoCal Gas will be required to improve air quality monitoring in the San Fernando Valley community and to complete a study on the potential health effects of well emissions on residents in the Porter Ranch area.

The company will also be required to establish a comprehensive leak detection program for all other wells in the Aliso Canyon facility to help prevent future leaks.

The Hearing Board adopted the order after days of hearings, which included testimony from more than 100 residents and elected officials.

But many of the hundreds of residents and activists who attended Saturday’s hearing expressed disappointment with the AQMD’S order, saying it fell short of calling for the gas company to shut down all of its wells on the site.

“SQAMD’s failure to put Californians’ livelihoods first is shameful, and Gov. Brown should intervene swiftly,” said Michael Brune, executive director of the Sierra Club. “There should be no other choice but to shut down the dangerous Aliso Canyon facility and look to close every urban oil and gas facility throughout California and our country, to ensure the health of our communities and our climate is never again sacrificed for corporate polluter profits.”

The damaged well at SoCal Gas’ Aliso Canyon storage facility has been releasing environmentally damaging natural gas since Oct. 23. The company has tried several times to plug the well, but those efforts were unsuccessful. Since Dec. 4, the utility has been drilling a relief well to intercept the damaged one, one of 115 wells on the reservoir.

Sealing the well -- then taking it permanently out of service -- is viewed as a long-term measure. That work is expected to be completed by late February, or possibly earlier, according to a timeline released this week.

The gas leak has displaced thousands of people in the Porter Ranch neighborhood. Many have complained of headaches, nausea, respiratory problems and other health issues.

Complaints about the fumes from the leak in the former oil field, which is used to store gas for distribution to nearly 22 million customers in the L.A. Basin, have drawn national attention.

Health officials have said the gas is not harmful, but the chemicals added to help communities detect such leaks can cause short-term ailments.

Here are some of the details contained in Saturday's abatement order:

- Permanently shut down and seal the well and not inject gas into or withdraw gas from it in the future once the leak has stopped.
- Fund an independent health study to assess any potential health effects to residents from the gas leak, including as a result of exposure to odorants added to
  - the natural gas.
- Fund continuous air monitoring to be conducted by SCAQMD and/or a contractor under the agency's supervision.
- Develop and implement an enhanced leak detection and reporting program for all wells at the storage facility.
- Monitor the leaking well continuously with an infrared camera until 30 days after the leak has stopped;
- Minimize gas leaking from the facility.
- Provide SCAQMD with data on the amount of gas injected and withdrawn from the facility and information necessary to calculate the total amount of methane
  - leaked, once the leak has stopped.
- Submit a plan to SCAQMD for notifying government agencies and the community of any reportable releases of air emissions, as defined in the plan.
- Report all odor complaints to SoCalGas since Oct. 23, 2015, and on an ongoing basis to SCAQMD.
- Not use any odor suppressants or neutralizers in an attempt to reduce odors from the leak, unless approved by SCAQMD.

The Hearing Board will conduct a follow-up hearing to review the status of the order on Feb. 20 at a location to be determined in the San Fernando Valley. The order extends through Jan. 31, 2017, unless SoCalGas has completed all requirements sooner, or the Hearing Board modifies the order.