

# SoCalGas stops withdrawing natural gas from facility near Porter Ranch to ensure future supply

**Brenda Gazzar, Los Angeles Newspaper Group, 1-29-16**

Following an order by state regulators, Southern California Gas Co. has stopped withdrawing natural gas from the Aliso Canyon storage facility near Porter Ranch to ensure area residents will have enough supply for future use, company officials said.

The California Public Utility Commission directed the gas company on Jan. 21 to take reasonable steps to stop withdrawals when the level of working gas in the field reaches 15 billion cubic feet. The goal was to ensure “energy reliability requirements so that customers are not left without heat and hot water and electricity outages do not occur,” according to a state regulator’s letter to the Gas Co.

SoCalGas “is also ordered to work with state and local agencies to develop all possible alternatives to reliance on Aliso Canyon for natural gas service,” the letter stated.

An 8,000-foot-deep well at the Aliso Canyon facility known as SS-25 that was found to have sprung a leak on Oct. 23 has sickened many residents and forced the relocation of nearly 3,000 households and students at two schools.

The leak has called attention to residents’ reliance on the Aliso Canyon storage field, the fifth-largest natural gas storage facility in the country, and how residents get the energy they need to power their homes.

The Gas Co. said it stopped withdrawing gas last week but said it did not know exactly how much is in the field “because we don’t have a calculation for how much has leaked,” SoCalGas spokeswoman Kristine Lloyd said.

Based on how much gas the company has withdrawn, the field has 20 billion cubic feet minus the amount that has leaked, Lloyd said.

“We allowed for a 5 (billion cubic feet) proxy for the amount of gas that leaked to comply with the order” but she noted that the proxy is “not an estimate of gas lost.”

Rep. Brad Sherman, D-Sherman Oaks, who lives in Porter Ranch, said he is concerned that gas levels emitted from the leak, instead of decreasing as they have been in recent months, will now start leveling off until the Gas Co. is able to plug the well.

“As long as they are pulling the gas out, they are reducing the pressure (in the well) and so less gas is escaping from the hole and going into the air over Porter Ranch,” Sherman said.

The estimated level of methane leaking into the air has decreased more than 60 percent since late November, according to the California Air Resources Board. But for the first time since November, the estimated amount increased from 19,600 kilograms of methane per hour on Jan. 21 to 20,700 kilograms on Jan. 26.

Meanwhile, the CPUC — which is among the entities investigating the cause of the leak — is working to ensure there is a reliable supply of natural gas to the area in the short and long term, a spokeswoman said.

“This includes an analysis of how reliability issues can be addressed if Aliso Canyon is not operational next winter and beyond,” spokeswoman Constance Gordon said in an email.

“We are doing this so that we are aware of all the possible options to assure reliability, and in accordance with the governor’s proclamation that directed state agencies to report on the long-term viability of all storage facilities in the state.”