

# Metals found in dust of Porter Ranch homes linked to post-leak symptoms

**Susan Abram, Los Angeles Daily News, 5-12-16**

Some Porter Ranch residents learned late Thursday that the dust samples collected in their homes more than a month ago showed evidence of metals that were consistent with those found at the natural gas well that blew out near their neighborhood last year.

Officials with the Los Angeles County Department of Health told a small group of residents at a community meeting that while they weren't concerned with the air testing inside homes, the presence of metals could have caused the short-term health effects residents experienced, such as headaches, nausea and nosebleeds. But none of the chemicals were at levels that were of concern, said Dr. Jeffrey Gunzenhauser, interim director for the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health.

He said the health department tested for 250 particles in the dust and almost all were at normal levels.

"We didn't find anything that would cause long-term health effects," he said. "I don't think the levels of metals should be a barrier to return home. We're working now to try to work this out."

Gunzenhauser said the presence of 13 different metals were found in 20 percent of the homes. One of which was barium.

"The presence of these metals was in the dust and this was something that we didn't expect," he said. "These metals should not be in the home. Metals can cause symptoms."

Health officials collected dust from window sills and the corners of floors from inside 111 homes in late March, some vacant and others occupied. In addition, about a dozen homes in Northridge were used as the control group to compare samples as well as two schools.

The public health department worked with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and professor Michael Jerrett, chairman of environmental health sciences at the UCLA Fielding School of Public Health. Jerrett began collecting outdoor air quality samples throughout the Porter Ranch community early on during the gas leak, including indoor dust swab sampling at seven homes. Benzene and hexane were found in two of the homes, health officials had said.

Public Health officials have called the massive gas leak an unprecedented event. Natural gas began leaking from one of 115 aged wells at the Aliso Canyon storage field in October, spewing tens of thousands of metric tons of methane to become the largest event of its kind in the nation. Operated by SoCalGas, the wells and the storage facility sit high up in Aliso Canyon, above residents who live in Porter Ranch.

There were reports of headaches, nosebleeds and vomiting during the leak, and at least 6,000 residents relocated. But after the leak was controlled on Feb. 11 and capped on Feb. 18, health complaints continued from residents who moved back, while some residents refuse to return until they know the results of all the health testing. Preliminary results from a door-to-door survey of more than 200 homes found that 71 percent those residents reported having headaches. Almost half had nosebleeds.

Gunzenhauser said the health department is recommending that residents have their homes cleaned of all dust.

Despite Gunzenhauser's assurances, the presence of the metals are troubling to Matt Pakucko, a resident and co-founder of the group Save Porter Ranch who attended the meeting.

"They said that as far as indoor chemicals and air testing they didn't find anything to be alarmed about," Pakucko said. "But they don't know what all those metals can do when they're found at the same time."

Pakucko said SoCalGas has not released a list of chemicals used when refilling the storage wells.

"We don't know what's in there," he said. "There's that big hole of data and SoCalGas will not release it. People are still getting sick. There has been little relief for me personally."