



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

REGION IX

75 Hawthorne Street  
San Francisco, CA 94105-3901

OFFICE OF THE  
REGIONAL ADMINISTRATOR

The Honorable Brad Sherman  
United States House of Representatives  
1030 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Sherman:

Thank you for your letter of December 10, 2015, to Administrator Gina McCarthy regarding the gas leak at the Southern California Gas Company (SoCal Gas) Natural Gas Storage Facility in Aliso Canyon, Los Angeles County. Administrator McCarthy has asked me to respond on her behalf.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency shares your concern about the public health and environmental effects of the gas release and has already been investigating the incident. In addition to sending an information request under the authority of the Clean Air Act to SoCal Gas on December 18, U.S. EPA Region 9 is participating in daily operational calls with State and local regulators to stay abreast of developments in controlling the gas release and assisting local residents. Two Region 9 on-scene coordinators toured the Aliso Canyon site with the Los Angeles County Fire and Hazardous Materials Unit and representatives from Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory.


Given that the Aliso Canyon Natural Gas Storage Facility is regulated under the federal Pipeline Safety Act, U.S. EPA also contacted the U.S. Department of Transportation, Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration regarding its authorities to take action. We are in contact with the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) and the California Department of Conservation, Division of Oil, Gas, and Geothermal Resources (DOGGR). DOGGR has issued two orders to SoCal Gas, requiring it to provide information on the leaking well, develop plans for expeditiously capturing the escaping gas, stopping the leak, and communicating with state and local regulators. The CPUC is also conducting an investigation to assess SoCal Gas actions before and after the well failure that resulted in the methane gas release. This includes public notification and issues related to operation and maintenance of the storage facility. CPUC has requested information from SoCal Gas and, in coordination with DOGGR, directed SoCal Gas to hire an independent third party to conduct a root cause analysis of the well blowout.

Local authorities such as the South Coast Air Quality Management District and the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health have also issued orders to SoCal Gas. The latter order requires SoCal Gas to provide temporary relocation to residents, and hundreds of households have either relocated or are in the process of relocating. SoCal Gas has established a community center in the nearby Porter Ranch community to answer questions and assist residents with temporary relocation and claims.

We are pleased that our state and local partners are taking these important steps to protect public health and safety, and we will continue to investigate and monitor the situation. We stand ready to help in any way if our assistance is requested pending the results of our investigation.

If you have further questions, please have your staff contact EPA's Congressional Liaison, Brent Maier, at (415) 947-4256, [maier.brent@epa.gov](mailto:maier.brent@epa.gov), or Dan Meer, Assistant Director for Emergency Response, Preparedness and Prevention, at (415) 972-3132, [meer.daniel@epa.gov](mailto:meer.daniel@epa.gov).

Sincerely,

  
for Jared Blumenfeld 24 Dec. 2015





BRAD SHERMAN  
UNITED STATES CONGRESS

PH: (202) 225-5911  
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December 10, 2015

The Honorable Gina McCarthy  
Administrator  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
1200 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.  
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator McCarthy:

I am writing to request that the Environmental Protection Agency immediately investigate the unresolved gas leak at the Southern California Gas Co. natural gas storage facility in Aliso Canyon. I ask that the Environmental Protection Agency investigate the cause of the leak, and propose action to mitigate the threat to public health, and expedite the leak's repair.

For over six weeks, noxious gas emanating from a leaking well has been sickening residents of the Porter Ranch neighborhood of Los Angeles, causing headaches, nose bleeds and dizziness<sup>12</sup>. A preliminary Environmental Health Assessment by the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health has confirmed the health threat, noting the "neurological, gastrointestinal, and respiratory symptoms that may result from the inhalation." More than 2,800 residents have inquired about relocation and over 1,200 have already relocated. The situation will only worsen, as Southern California Gas Co. estimates that the leak could continue for months.

The California Air Resources Board estimates that the leak is responsible for nearly 25% of California's daily methane emissions; as you know, methane is an important cause of global climate change. I am also concerned about reports of radon gas and benzene being released into the air.

An immediate investigation has become necessary due to the prolonged period of the leak, the apparent health impacts, and the lack of certainty over when the leak can be stopped.

I am aware that 40 CFR § 68.3 excludes storage facilities from regulation under the Risk Management Program. However, we believe that 42 U.S. Code § 7603, which allows the EPA to "issue such orders as may be necessary to protect public health or welfare or the environment," controls the determination here. A statutory provision inherently trumps any regulation. To be even clearer, the statute explicitly states, "Notwithstanding any other provision of this chapter, the Administrator... may... take such other action as may be necessary."

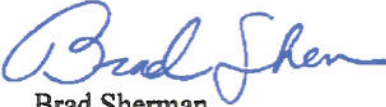
<sup>1</sup> Mendoza, Javier. "Natural gas leak that's sickening Valley residents could take months to fix." *Los Angeles Times*. November 20, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Favot, Sarah. "Health officials: Porter Ranch gas leak may cause long-term health effects." *Los Angeles Daily News*. December 2, 2015.

Accordingly, it seems clear that you have the statutory authority to:

1. Commence an investigation,
2. Determine all necessary steps to protect the environment and public health, and
3. Require Southern California Gas Co. to implement all such steps.

Sincerely,



Brad Sherman  
Member of Congress

CC:

Department of Oil, Gas & Geothermal Resources  
California Public Utilities Commission  
South Coast Air Quality Management District  
Los Angeles City Councilman Mitchell Englander  
Los Angeles County Supervisor Michael Antonovich