

Refinery gas leak irritates some residents

By Jason Kotowski, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Wed., May 25, 2011

A gas leak from a refinery on Rosedale Highway irritated some residents Tuesday morning but caused no injuries, according to authorities.

The hydrogen sulfide leak occurred at the Alon refinery about 8 a.m. and the smell of the gas quickly spread to surrounding areas. Bill Winters, spokesman for Paramount Petroleum, which is owned by Alon, said that while the gas has a strong odor, it's only harmful in high concentrations.

"Once it's in the atmosphere it's diluted by the surrounding air," Winters said.

It's too early to know exactly what caused the leak, but an investigation is ongoing, he said. Some contractors were briefly moved to another area of the facility as a precaution.

"It's very rare for this kind of thing to happen," said Winters, who praised the professionalism of responding emergency crews.

Alon has owned the refinery for six months, and during that time nothing like this has happened, Winters said.

Kern County Fire Capt. Brandon Smith described the odor as "kind of like a rotten egg smell." The odor is noticeable even if there's only a little bit of hydrogen sulfide in the air.

Hazardous materials crews analyzed the air in the area of Truxtun Avenue and Mohawk Street after receiving complaints about the smell. Their monitors didn't pick up any traces of the gas.

"It's more of a nuisance," Smith said. "There's no real significant health hazards."

Several students at nearby Harris Elementary School reported feeling ill, but no one went home or required treatment, said Bakersfield City School District spokesman Steve Gabbitas.

As of 12:30 p.m., students were playing outside during recess. An ambulance and a fire truck were in the school parking lot.

Bakersfield Fire Capt. John Germanetti said two teachers were examined but declined to be taken to a hospital.

Smith said no traces of hydrogen sulfide were detected at the school.

Both city and county firefighters were called out for the incident.

Gas power plant approved

Modesto Bee, Fri., May 20, 2011

State regulators on Wednesday approved a 200-megawatt natural gas power plant in far northeastern Alameda County, about seven miles from Tracy.

Supporters have said the Mariposa Energy Project will burn cleanly and stimulate the economy.

Critics say the plant — one of several that have been proposed just outside of San Joaquin County — will funnel tax dollars to Alameda County while San Joaquin gets whatever comes out of the smokestack.

"We're tired of getting the pollution and not getting the money," said Tracy shoe store owner and clean-air advocate Bob Sarvey.

Barring delay, construction would begin this year, and the plant would be operational by the middle of 2012.

[Sacramento Bee Commentary, Wed., May 25, 2011:](#)

Head to Head: Should California go back to the drawing board with AB 32?

By Pia Lopez and Ben Boychuk

THE ISSUE: A Superior Court judge ruled last week that state air regulators must stop carrying out a cap-and-trade plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Judge Ernest Goldsmith's ruling requires the Air Resources Board to examine alternatives to emissions trading to meet targets under a 2006 law, Assembly Bill 32.

Ben Boychuk: Yes - New rules won't fix a misguided law

Californians will rue the day Judge Goldsmith ordered the Air Resources Board to rethink plans for imposing a cap-and-trade scheme on the Golden State.

No, not because cap-and-trade will miraculously clean our air or halt climate change. As the Europeans have discovered, cap-and-trade for carbon is a bureaucracy-bloating boondoggle.

Goldsmith's ruling is dangerous because as bad as cap-and-trade might be, the alternatives sought by the environmentalist opponents of the new system are much worse.

Here's the challenge: AB 32 requires the state to slash greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020, and another 80 percent by 2050 in a vain attempt to manipulate global temperatures. Under cap-and-trade, the state would set limits on emissions and sell licenses to "polluters." If a company emits less pollution than its license allows, it could sell surplus emission credits to other firms.

The problem with such a system, of course, is that it creates an artificial market by placing arbitrary caps on a substance every living thing generates through the vital act of respiration.

For groups espousing the doctrine of "environmental justice," however, cap-and-trade is too market-oriented and not statist enough. In the interest of equity for poor and minority communities, the lawsuit's plaintiffs would much prefer hard pollution caps on just about everything generating economic activity.

Whether California ends up with cap-and-trade, command-and-control, or something else entirely, poor and minority communities will suffer just the same as AB 32 hobbles the state's economic recovery.

A much-hyped "green jobs boom" may or may not materialize. Meanwhile, employers like Delta Construction in Sacramento are struggling to make payroll in a harsh and uncertain regulatory environment. Delta President Skip Brown notes that Goldsmith's ruling didn't touch a host of air board rules that he claims may bankrupt him by the end of the year.

"We're pretty much done under the particulate matter regulations," Brown told me the other day. Those mandates, imposed in addition to AB 32, would force Brown to retrofit or replace all of his diesel-emitting equipment by 2014 at a cost of \$5 million. "They've destroyed my ability to finance, operate and bond my business," he says.

And that's the point. CARB may return in nine months with the greatest regulations ever to spring from the bureaucracy's hive mind. But Skip Brown and others just like him will still be out of business and their employees will still be out of work. The only climate that new cap-and-trade rules are likely to change is the state's economic climate – from cool to frigid.

Pia Lopez: No - It's better to improve state's program

Ben seems utterly unconcerned about the problem to be solved.

The most recent report of the National Research Council states an indisputable fact: "The concentrations of several greenhouse gases (including carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, and other chemicals) have increased markedly since the start of the 20th century due to human activities."

These increases in greenhouse gases absorb infrared energy that would otherwise escape to space, acting to warm the planet.

California's landmark climate change law, AB 32, aims to reduce gases trapping heat in the atmosphere to 1990 levels by 2020, the same goal as the European Union – a 10 percent reduction during this decade.

To reach that goal, we need to aggressively reduce emissions everywhere – from power plants to factories to transportation. And, no, ramping down emissions does not mean, as Ben implies, ramping down economic activity. It does mean ramping up energy efficiency and low-carbon technologies.

To begin, the judge's ruling has no effect on AB 32's low-carbon fuel standards for automobiles or requirements that utilities obtain a third of their energy from renewable sources by 2020. Full-speed ahead on those.

The judge's ruling affects only one component of AB 32, the so-called cap-and-trade program that would allow power plants, industries, and other major producers of greenhouse gases to purchase permits for carbon emissions. Initially the permits would be free, but later available through auction. Companies that reduce emissions below their allotment (the cap) could sell them on the open market (the trade).

The aim is to provide incentives to update capital equipment and accelerate technological innovation. Isn't that a good thing?

The judge's decision calling upon the California Air Resources Board to show its analysis of alternatives to emissions trading should not cause much of a delay in the January 2012 launch. In fact, it should help improve the program design.

California has learned from Europe's experience and is working hard to establish an accurate inventory of emissions. The state's total statewide aggregated greenhouse gas emissions level in 1990 was 427 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (MMTCO₂e). That is the 2020 emissions limit we're aiming toward.

CARB's latest report shows our 2008 level at 478 million, a small decrease since 2007. Cap-and-trade is a key part of getting to the 427 million target.

Under "no action, do nothing," Ben's preferred scenario, however, California's emissions would increase to a projected 596 million in 2020.

Ben is right that cap-and-trade will not "miraculously clean our air or halt climate change." But it will help.