

INTEROFFICE CORRESPONDENCE
Los Angeles Unified School District
Student Health and Human Services

INFORMATIVE

TO: Ramon C. Cortines, Superintendent

DATE: December 4, 2015

FROM: Student Medical, Nursing, and Employee Health Team,
LAUSD

**SUBJECT: ANALYSIS OF POTENTIAL HEALTH ISSUES STEMMING FROM THE
ALISO CANYON GAS LEAK**

This memorandum is to provide a summary of known public health issues stemming from the Aliso Canyon gas leak and the effect on the following schools in the Northwest: Porter Ranch Community School (PRCS) and Castlebay Lane School (CLS). As you know, there was a memorandum issued by the Interim Director of the LA County Department of Public Health dated December 1, 2015, which describes the results of an environmental health assessment dated November 19, 2015. We have reviewed the County memo, the environmental health assessment, and discussed the findings with the Director of the Bureau of Toxicology and Environmental Assessment. Strictly from a medical standpoint, we have no evidence from previous incidents and environmental testing done at this time that the current exposure has long-term health consequences. Our review of the County memo and preliminary recommendations are summarized below.

Preliminary Environmental Health Assessment by the County: It is clearly stated that the measured levels of methane in the natural gas leak at Aliso Canyon do not pose significant short or long term health risks. The assessment goes on to describe the health issues caused by the odorant added to the natural gas, mercaptans. Mercaptans are known to cause symptoms while present, even in very low concentrations, to varying degrees in different individuals. The County report states that “mercaptan at the levels detected to date are generally not expected to lead to long-term health effects.” The symptoms identified by the assessment and the scientific literature are congruent with the symptoms experienced by some in the Porter Ranch community. We are currently monitoring students and staff health issues that present to the health office at PRCS and CLS. We will have preliminary data on health office visits on December 4th and will have more complete trend data in the weeks that follow.

Since the odor from mercaptans is believed to be causing the symptoms and the short term health effects, the Gas Company is conducting a trial in another part of the city of a neutralizing agent (a natural oil) which degrades mercaptan to a non-odor causing element. This is intended to decrease the odor and the source of the symptoms. However, the nature of the large outdoor area involved and the fact that very small amounts of mercaptan can cause irritation, calls the efficacy of the neutralizing agent into question. In addition, there are potential issues with adding another element into the air in this area. LAUSD already has instituted certain environmental mitigation in the schools and classrooms, including air filtration units and sealing window seams. The Maintenance and Operations department has more information on those mitigation strategies.

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Supplemental Assessment by the County: The County memo also mentions other potential chemical exposures in this gas leak. There is currently additional monitoring for other harmful trace chemicals, such as benzene and toluene, conducted by the Gas Company, regulatory agencies (AQMD) and LAUSD's Office of Environmental Health and Safety (OEHS). These compounds can cause long-term health effects with prolonged exposures at high levels. The testing conducted thus far has not shown any elevated levels of concern, and these will be closely monitored by the County, AQMD, and LAUSD. Results of OEHS monitoring tests are posted daily when received on their website <http://achieve.lausd.net/oehs>.

Assessment and Recommendations:

The County has not issued a directive or recommendation to alter the school calendar, re-locate the school programs or change the current course of environmental mitigation. We concur with this position. Strictly from a medical standpoint, there is no evidence from environmental testing or symptom monitoring that the current exposure has long-term health consequences. In addition, we may find that the mitigation that is occurring at the schools can provide classrooms and school buildings where there is less odor and minimal or no irritation.

However, there are other non-health issues to consider. We believe that the level of parent, staff, and community concern must be acknowledged and addressed. Recommendations include strategies that have already started, including:

- Diligent monitoring/testing of the known chemical compounds and gases.
- Frequent communication or updates that are language accessible to the school and community.
- Continued efforts to address the environmental issues at the school, including filtration, sealing, and any other effective method of reducing the odor irritant.
- Support at the school, including extra support services personnel, which could assist already burdened administration and staff.

Any decision to alter the calendar or relocate the school should certainly take the health issues into consideration. But we acknowledge that the decision on what to do to remediate the concerns at PRCS and CLS must consider other elements, including parent and community choice, and stable and effective instructional environments.

We will continue to monitor all health issues at these sites, and we will update you frequently.