

Assembly California Legislature



AL MURATSUCHI
ASSEMBLYMEMBER, SIXTY-SIXTH DISTRICT

March 15, 2017

Governing Board
South Coast Air Quality Management District
21865 Copley Drive
Diamond Bar, CA 91765

RE: Rule 1410: HYDROGEN FLUORIDE STORAGE AND USE.

Dear Governing Board Members:

We are urging the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) to adopt a rule to phase out the use of hydrofluoric acid, including modified hydrofluoric acid, from refineries. Hydrofluoric acid is a highly toxic chemical that can potentially threaten the lives and health of hundreds of thousands of workers and residents within the vicinity of refineries that use it. Only two refineries in California, the Torrance Refinery and the Wilmington Valero Refinery, use modified hydrofluoric acid. The ongoing use of this potentially deadly chemical, even in a modified form, is simply not compatible with the densely populated residential neighborhoods surrounding the refineries, nor with the safety and health of the hundreds of workers who are employed at these facilities.

Hydrofluoric acid is used as a catalyst in processing high-octane gasoline. According to the United States Chemical Safety Board, hydrofluoric acid is one of the most hazardous and deadly chemicals used in petroleum refining.¹ The Federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes, "Hydrogen fluoride gas, even at low levels, can irritate the eyes, nose, and respiratory tract. Breathing in hydrogen fluoride at high levels or in combination with skin contact can cause death from an irregular heartbeat or from fluid buildup in the lungs."² People who survive after being severely injured by breathing in hydrogen fluoride may suffer lingering chronic lung disease or prolonged or permanent visual defects, blindness, or the total destruction of the eye.

Hydrofluoric acid vaporizes and forms a ground-hugging cloud that can drift for miles, causing severe burns and death. According to ExxonMobil, the previous owner of the Torrance Refinery, a worst-case scenario at the Torrance Refinery could involve the release of 5,200 pounds of modified hydrofluoric acid that could spread 3.2 miles and threaten the lives of more than 250,000 people.

¹ <http://www.csb.gov/us-chemical-safety-board-finds-multiple-safety-deficiencies-led-to-february-2015-explosion-and-serious-near-miss-at-the-exxon-mobil-refinery-in-torrance-california/>

² <https://emergency.cdc.gov/agent/hydrofluoricacid/basics/facts.asp>



Today, 616,000 residents live within 3.5 miles of the Torrance and Wilmington refineries that together store more than 60,000 lbs. of hydrofluoric acid.³ Since 1979, there have been more than 80 incidents at the Torrance refinery involving hydrofluoric acid.

Rule 1410 was originally adopted on April 5, 1991, by a unanimous vote of the SCAQMD governing board. The adoption of the rule was invalidated by the Superior Court on a technicality – failing to take public comments for thirty days. Rule 1410 should be reinstated to phase out the use of hydrofluoric acid. Most recently, Kern County has banned the use of hydrofluoric acid at refineries in and around Bakersfield.

For the reasons stated above, we urge the Governing Board of the South Coast Air Quality Management District to adopt a new rule to phase out HF at refineries in California.

Sincerely,

Adam Muehle AD66

AD 63

Clayton AD24

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Scott Wiener SD11

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³ <https://safetorrancerefinery.wordpress.com/maps/>