



NEWS

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Air District lab completes PM sample analysis from Chevron fire

SAN FRANCISCO – The Bay Area Air District today released results of particulate matter sampling from the San Pablo air monitoring site. This was the closest particulate sampling location to the refinery fire and is located approximately two miles from the Chevron facility.

The data from the filter sample collected beginning at midnight August 7 through midnight August 8 was analyzed for elemental carbon, organic carbon, weight and other chemical components of particulate matter.

Results from the extensive two week laboratory analysis show slightly elevated levels of elemental carbon, a marker for combustion. Results show some evidence of potential smoke particles lingering in the air after the fire was extinguished.

“The particulate results are what we expected to see given that the monitoring began at midnight after the fire was out,” said Dr. Wendel Brunner, director of public health for Contra Costa Health Services. “These results, however, do not suggest there were not health impacts experienced by residents in the immediate area.”

The result shows concentrations below state and federal air quality standards, but do show marginally higher levels of fire related particulate for this time of year. The Bay Area generally experiences elevated particulate matter pollution in the winter months when weather conditions trap PM near ground level.

“Weather conditions the night of the fire helped push much of the particulate pollution from the fire high into the atmosphere,” said Eric Stevenson, director of air sciences for the Bay Area Air District. “And the public responded appropriately by sheltering in place and seeking medical attention if they experienced breathing difficulty or concerns about their health.”

Contra Costa Health Services issued a shelter-in-place during the refinery fire and recommended people experiencing trouble breathing seek medical attention.

The Bay Area has one of the densest air monitoring networks in the country designed to measure daily air quality readings in the nine-county region. The network often does not capture localized impacts from a short duration incident like the Chevron fire. In a large industrial fire like the one at the refinery, smoke may impact residents in downwind neighborhoods where air monitoring stations are not located.

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The result from the San Pablo filter sample was consistent with measurements taken from the nearest continuous real-time ambient air monitors stationed in Vallejo, Oakland and San Rafael, which did not show high levels of fine particulates on the night of the fire.

In contrast to the continuous monitors, the filter sampler at San Pablo operates every six days on an EPA mandated schedule, and must be analyzed in the laboratory to determine concentrations.

The Air District and Contra Costa Health Services are investigating new monitoring technologies to better capture the full air quality impacts from localized incidents like the Chevron fire. The Air District and the County hope to improve monitoring capabilities in a cost-efficient way, possibly adding mobile monitoring capabilities to better assess incidents in the future.

Additional information can be found at <http://www.baaqmd.gov/Divisions/Communications-and-Outreach/Air-Quality-in-the-Bay-Area/Incident.aspx>.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District (www.baaqmd.gov) is the regional agency responsible for protecting air quality in the nine-county Bay Area.

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