



Chevron's new headache: Processing claims

Friday, August 10, 2012

by Nick Smith

RICHMOND, Calif. (KGO) -- Chevron has a new headache on its hands -- processing the claims of as many as 2,000 people who say that they were directly affected by Monday's fire at the refinery.

Since the fire on Monday, hundreds have complained of ailments related to the incident. "I've been very, very weak, nauseated and I have rash on my face and on my arms," said Richmond resident Kathryn Wade.

Rose Loera, another Richmond resident, said: "It's not just the people, it's our animals, it's our crops. Has anybody bothered to check the water lately?"

Chevron opened a temporary office Friday to answer some of those questions. Claim processors will document, record and possibly compensate those who say they've been affected by the fire.

Some claimants were still wearing the wristband from their stay in the hospital. Others wore masks to filter the air for breathing. All were looking to be compensated.

The refinery fire on Monday spilled a dark cloud of thick smoke across the skies of Richmond. The toxic air sent a wave of panic across the community. Early reports by Chevron say that there has been no damage to the air quality, but Bay Area air officials now say there was one toxic agent above federal levels.

Some are questioning the legitimacy of those who say they've been harmed, but Loera defended the claimants.

"We're a low-income, residential area. Nob Hill would not put up with this, neither would Moraga. They're taking advantage of people that are in certain situations that cannot bail themselves out immediately.

"Another threat faces those affected by the fire. A county supervisor warns that scammers pretending to represent the county or Chevron are gathering personal information from claimants.

"Nobody is going to people's homes asking for information. Nobody's going out in the community, so people have two options: call an attorney or go through one of the two official channels established by Chevron to file a claim," said Contra Costa County District 1 Supervisor John Gioia.

Chevron is promising that it will leave no stone unturned. "We want to apologize for the incident that happened on Monday and we want to make this right with our neighbors," Chevron spokesperson Melissa Ritchie said.

Chevron has contacted a demolition company that provided a plan to Cal-OSHA for entering the exclusion area of the unit where the fire broke out, meaning that it is one step closer to investigating the cause behind Monday's fire and the reason why so many people say they are not feeling well.

Help Center Location:

Nevin Community Center
598 Nevin Avenue
Richmond, CA

Hours of Operation:

9:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., Monday through Friday
8:00 a.m. to Noon, Saturday

Live operators are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week for those wishing to file a claim by phone. The number is 866-260-7881.

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