



- [Chevron to pay for air monitoring system upgrades](#)



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RICHMOND, Calif. (KGO) -- When a unit of Chevron's Richmond refinery went up in flames last month, a huge black cloud sent thousands of people to nearby hospitals but air quality readings showed nothing harmful in the air. That disconnect has led to a major revision of the Bay Area's air monitoring system and the refineries will pay for it. That's the promise after a hearing Monday by the Air Quality Management District on the Chevron refinery fire.

Among the agencies investigating the fire, is the U.S. Chemical Safety Board (CSB). It is to this investigation as the NTBS was to the PG&E San Bruno pipeline investigation. The two cases share in common a ruptured pipe and an investigation of company practices from top to bottom.

By chance, the toxic smoke rose in a plume up into the sky instead of out low across the city of Richmond last month. Either way, there is no argument that the air monitoring system in place was woefully inadequate with gaps and lags in delivering results for people who need them. At Monday's special Bay Area Air Quality Management District hearing on the fire, the board vowed to upgrade the system at no expense to taxpayers and Chevron promised to follow through on a monitor upgrade in the works for the last two years.

"I'm not aware of why it has not been implemented but I can assure you we're working with the appropriate people to try and implement a system the people of the community will be happy with," Chevron spokesman Sean Comey said.

"This gap between information and monitoring has been going on too long and it's time to bridge that gap," Richmond resident Henry Clark, Ph.d. said.

The hearing offered the board a status report on the investigations of a handful of county, state, and federal agencies. Air District Board Chairman John Gioia CSB investigation could lead to changes above and beyond better monitoring. "There is an opportunity to improve air monitoring but we can't forget the ultimate problem here is stopping the release from happening in the first place. That's what we really want to get at, prevention, so this doesn't happen again," he said.

The CSB removed an 8-foot section of the ruptured gas-oil pipe Monday, moving it to a private lab for metallurgical analysis. The CSB has interviewed 80 people and collected tens of thousands of documents. The investigation could take a year or more to complete but the CSB chair said, in a San Francisco Chronicle op-ed piece, that the leaking pipe was aging and thinning, and a section of pipe wall had lost most of its original thickness.

The CSB will look at the entire corporate culture and practices leading up to the break. "We'll look at incentive programs, benchmarking, issues that relate to how decisions were made, why they were made, not just the immediate cause of the pipe broke and hydrocarbons were released," USCSB Western Regional Director Don Holstrom said.

The CSB chairman is coming to California for a Richmond City Council meeting Tuesday night where he may release more facts and details about the pipe.

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