

Richmond Chevron Refinery Targeted by EPA

Chevron allegedly allowed flaring without monitoring

By [Jodi Hernandez](#) and [Bay City News](#)

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At a packed public meeting in Richmond tonight, the community accused Chevron of knowingly endangering their health. Monte Francis reports. Monte Francis reports.



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The Richmond Chevron Refinery is under fire again tonight. This time the refinery is the target of a federal criminal investigation.

The investigation is still underway into last month's fire that sent plumes of smoke into the air, sickening hundreds.

Now the EPA has issued a criminal investigation into the company for allegedly allowing flaring to happen without monitoring pollutants.

Local air quality investigators fined Chevron \$170,000 last year for 27 violations, but now the feds are taking a closer look as well.

"We know that something went wrong. The refinery did something wrong. Whether it rises to the level of criminal, we'll wait and see what the EPA says, but clearly what they did was a problem," said Contra Costa Supervisor John Gioia.

Chevron says they fixed the problem as soon as investigators brought it to their attention. The refinery's general manager says he can't explain why the flaring was not being monitored.

Representatives from Chevron held a news conference at the company's Richmond refinery Monday afternoon in advance of a meeting planned by a number of regulatory agencies this evening.

Nigel Hearne, general manager of the refinery, spoke to reporters about the corroded pipe that caused the explosion and massive fire on Aug. 6 and a new federal criminal investigation by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The fire started when a 5-foot section of pipe that was part of a 200-foot-long pipe failed because of high-temperature sulfidation corrosion, Hearne said.

The pipe had last been inspected in November 2011. Nineteen spots along the 200 feet of pipe were examined, but the particular 5-foot section that failed was not one of the parts inspected.

Hearne said Chevron officials did not realize that the pipe could potentially cause problems.

"If we had known, we would have repaired that pipe," he said.

He said Chevron has learned from the mistake and will take steps to ensure that a similar accident doesn't happen again.

"We learned what went wrong, and we'll take appropriate corrective action," Hearne said.

He said Chevron has already found another defective pipe that is now being replaced, and that the company has created an enhanced inspection program.

"We take exception to anyone" who says that Chevron is not concerned about the safety of its pipes, Hearne said.

A community meeting is scheduled later Wednesday to update residents about the ongoing investigations into the Chevron fire and to address concerns over environmental and health hazards caused by the fire.

Speakers at the meeting will include representatives from Contra Costa Health Services, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, the U.S. Chemical Safety Board, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Contra Costa County Sheriff's Office.

The meeting is scheduled for 6 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at the Richmond Memorial Auditorium and Convention Center at 403 Civic Center Plaza.

Bay City News contributed to this article.

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