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## **Incident Update – Hazardous Materials Release July 14, 2023**

Contra Costa Health (CCH) provides the following update regarding the July 11, 2023 release of coke dust, a petroleum refining byproduct, from Martinez Refining Company (MRC).

### **What happened**

MRC activated the county's Community Warning System at about 10:20 a.m. on Tuesday, July 11, 2023 reporting that it had released refinery coke dust, and that some of the airborne material had drifted off the refinery property into surrounding neighborhoods.

The refinery activated a Level 1 alert, which is the system's lowest-level alert, used for hazardous materials releases when there are no expected off-site health consequences.

CCH's Hazardous Materials Programs immediately deployed a team to investigate and contacted MRC. MRC reported that the release had actually occurred at about 8:30 a.m. on July 11, and lasted approximately one minute.


CCH and the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, responding after the 10:20 a.m. notification, found a black, sooty residue on ground-level surfaces in residential neighborhoods around MRC.

Investigating agencies responding after the release did not detect any immediate cause for concern about community health, so the community warning system alert level was not changed.

CCH collected multiple wipe samples of the material for laboratory analysis which were analyzed for metals that can be harmful over long periods of exposure. The lab results did not show elevated levels of metals, indicating that there is not an increased risk to public health. Read the analytical report [here](#).

MRC must submit its 72-hour incident report, as required by the county's Hazardous Materials Notification Policy, by the end of business Friday, July 14. CCH will review the report and post it Monday at [cchealth.org/hazmat](http://cchealth.org/hazmat). This report will include additional details about how and why the release occurred and how MRC responded.

### **Coke Dust**



Coke dust is a black, sooty or powdery residue created during petroleum refining that primarily contains carbon and is similar chemically to charcoal.

The primary health concern regarding the release of coke dust from a refinery is irritation to the throat, lungs and the respiratory system while the release was occurring and the material was in the air, particularly for people with respiratory conditions such as asthma.

Anyone who believes they have symptoms or health concerns due to breathing coke dust should contact their healthcare provider.

Long-term exposure to coke dust also can lead to chronic health concerns. Based on currently available information, CCH does not believe the duration and circumstances of the July 11 release at MRC constitute long-term exposure.

Coke dust can be safely washed off surfaces with soap and water.

### **Next Steps**

CCH's Hazardous Materials Programs and the air district are each conducting investigations to determine whether the July 11 release from MRC violated regulatory laws relating to public and worker health and safety, and air pollution standards, respectively.

As part of its investigation of this incident, CCH will also determine whether MRC properly followed the county's notification policy and properly used the Community Warning System, as required by law.

Elements of this investigation will be publicly reported through a series of reports submitted by MRC to the county in coming weeks and months. These reports aim to provide further insight as to the contributing causes of the incident, actions immediately taken, and proposed actions to prevent a similar incident from occurring. The first report will be available Monday at [cchealth.org/hazmat](http://cchealth.org/hazmat).


Regulatory violations can result in fines and other enforcement actions.

### **Oversight Committee**

The oversight committee conducting public investigations of the Nov. 24-25, 2022 hazardous materials release at MRC will next meet at 10 a.m. on Thursday, Aug. 10, 2023.

Committee meetings are held virtually and open to the public through [this Zoom link](#). The agenda for the meeting will be posted at [cchealth.org/hazmat](http://cchealth.org/hazmat) in early August. Agendas, minutes and recordings of previous committee meetings are available on [this page](#).

In addition to its normal business, the committee will receive an informational update on Aug. 10 from the Contra Costa District Attorney's Office about its investigation of the November release, and CCH will provide an informational update regarding the investigation of this week's release.



Sign up for non-emergency email updates regarding MRC incidents and incident-related investigations at [cchealth.org/hazmat/mrc](https://cchealth.org/hazmat/mrc).