ALISO CANYON GAS LEAK

Indoor Environmental Testing Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

1. Who is doing indoor environmental testing?

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (Public Health) and UCLA are collaborating to conduct an assessment of indoor air and surfaces in some Porter Ranch homes. The work will be overseen by highly-trained industrial hygienists and environmental health staff in the field. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Indoor Air Quality Program provided technical assistance to Public Health to develop this plan for indoor environmental testing in Porter Ranch.

2. What will Public Health be testing?

Public Health will test for a broad range of chemicals, including volatile organic compounds (VOCs), semi-volatile organic compounds (SVOCs), metals, and sulfur compounds. Two types of indoor environmental samples will be collected: surface wipe samples and air samples.

3. Why is Public Health doing this testing?

Some residents in the Porter Ranch area are reporting symptoms similar to those experienced during the Aliso Canyon gas leak. These symptoms include headache, nausea, dizziness, nosebleeds and eye, nose, and skin irritation. Public Health conducted a Community Assessment for Public Health Emergency Response (CASPER) survey to investigate and characterize current health issues in the community. Of the households interviewed in a 3-mile radius of the gas leak, over 60% reported having at least one person in the household experiencing symptoms in the 30 days following the sealing of the gas leak. These reports of persistent symptoms warrant further investigation of indoor environments.

4. Where will testing take place?

Tests will be conducted in approximately 100 homes in areas identified as having the highest reported symptoms since the well was confirmed sealed on February 18, 2016. Residents will be notified if their home is selected to participate in the study. Tests will also be conducted in approximately 10 homes outside the area of the gas leak to serve as a control group.

5. When will testing occur?

Indoor environmental testing will be carried out in two phases. Phase 1 consists of surface wipe samples beginning on March 25. Phase 2 includes indoor air samples beginning on March 29.

6. What are "surface wipe samples"?

Surface wipe samples can determine if there is a presence of dust (also known as particulate matter) and other substances on floors, window sills or other interior surfaces. Laboratory tests will be performed on the wipe samples to determine the physical characteristics and chemical composition of these substances.

7. How is the potential for health effects evaluated?

Public Health will analyze the results of all households sampled. If chemicals measured in homes are above typical indoor levels or at levels that present an elevated health risk, then Public Health will make recommendations to the residents in accordance with state and federal health protection measures.

8. What are "volatile organic compounds"?

Many volatile organic compounds (VOCs) are human-made chemicals that are used and produced in the manufacturing of paints, adhesives, petroleum products, pharmaceuticals, and refrigerants. These chemicals are described as volatile because they can evaporate or easily get into the air. VOCs are typically found in fuels, solvents, hydraulic fluids, paint thinners, and dry-cleaning agents commonly used in urban settings. Environmental contamination by VOCs is a health concern because many are toxic and are known or suspected human carcinogens.

9. What will the results of the laboratory tests show?

The results will show the levels of VOCs, SVOCs, metals and sulfur compounds present on indoor surfaces and in the indoor air. Laboratory results will be compared to health threat levels and to levels found in homes in the control group selected which because of its distance, would not be affected by the gas leak.

10. When will results be available?

The indoor testing will require up to 1-2 weeks for the laboratory analyses to be complete. Public Health will provide test results to homeowners within 3-4 weeks after testing as well as a general summary report to the public.

11. Will soil samples be collected?

No, this testing plan focuses on the indoor environment because people are reporting symptoms after spending time inside their homes. The chemicals or dust that may be causing irritation inside the home would dissipate more quickly outdoors, and would not be expected to cause symptoms outdoors. Public Health continues sampling outdoor air to monitor levels of various contaminants.

12. What can I do to protect myself and my family from possible contamination of the indoor environment?

Upon returning home, air out your home by opening all windows and doors, and turning on central fan units for 2 hours or longer. Some residents have found that this technique is sufficient to keep the symptoms from reoccurring. You should also look into changing the air filters in your home, as recommended by the California Air Resources Board (ARB). For more ARB information visit: http://www.arb.ca.gov/research/aliso_canyon_natural_gas_leak.htm.

13. What should I do if I see oily residue at my home?

Avoid contact with the residue as prolonged contact can cause irritation. Call So Cal Gas at (818) 435-7707 to send staff to assess and clean-up as needed. You may also call Public Health at (213) 738-3220 to report the oily residue.

14. What should I do if I am still having symptoms?

If you are having symptoms of any kind, it is important that you contact your regular medical provider. Medical providers are encouraged to contact Public Health if they have questions. If your symptoms persist when you move back home, please report them to Public Health at (213) 738-3220.

For More Information

Los Angeles County Department of Public Health at (213) 738-3220 or visit www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/gasleak