

California gas leak forces relocation of thousands since October

December 25 2015, by Jocelyne Zablit



Trucks enter the gates of Southern California Gas Company property where Aliso Canyon Storage Field is located in the of the San Fernando Valley region of Los Angeles, California, on December 22, 2015

A massive natural gas leak has forced the relocation of more than 2,000 families in a California community, with many reportedly falling ill from the noxious fumes spewing into the air since October.

Under a court-ordered settlement reached this week between the gas company and Los Angeles city attorneys, Southern California Gas (SoCal Gas) must find temporary housing within 72 hours for any residents of Porter Ranch who ask to be relocated.

As of Wednesday, the company said it had relocated 2,147 families in temporary housing, while hundreds more have left the area on their own.

The gated community, located some 30 miles (48 kilometers) northwest of downtown Los Angeles, sits near one of the largest natural gas storage fields in the United States, where a leak was detected on October 23.

SoCal Gas says it would take several more months to repair the leak at its Aliso Canyon site, while insisting that it poses no danger to human health as methane dissipates quickly into the air.

But many families report falling ill from the fumes—with symptoms including nose bleeds and nausea—and have filed a [class action suit](#) against the company and pulled their children from area schools.

'Potential health consequences'

Residents also fear that property values in the area—described by the local council as an idyllic "dream" community—will plummet because of the leak.



A bicyclist passes Porter Ranch Community School which is closing as students are moved to another school in response to a massive natural-gas leak in the neighborhood of the of the San Fernando Valley region of Los Angeles, on December 22, 2015

The Los Angeles city attorney earlier this month filed suit against SoCal Gas saying that no community "should have to endure what the residents of Porter Ranch have suffered from the gas company's continued failure to stop the leak."

"It's not only the odor, it's the potential health consequences from the long-term exposure to chemicals like benzene," attorney Mike Feuer added.

According to the California Air Resources Board, the leak is releasing between 44,000 and 58,000 kilograms (97,000 and 127,000 pounds) of

methane into the air per hour. The last estimate on December 22 showed 30,300 kilograms of methane released per hour.

The board estimates that the leak is so large that it has increased the West Coast state's greenhouse gas output by 25 percent—this in a state that prides itself on being an environmental leader nationwide.

The Federal Aviation Administration has meanwhile banned aircraft flights over the area as a precaution.

A spokesman for SoCal Gas told AFP that the company's priority was to stop the leak while addressing the needs of the community and the environmental impact.



A neighborhood where many people have left their homes because of a massive natural-gas leak is seen in Porter Ranch, California, on December 22, 2015

Michael Mizrahi said the relief well being drilled to intercept and plug the damaged well—at more than 8,000 feet underground—could be completed by late February or late March

"The relief well drilling process is expected to operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week," he said. "A second relief well is being prepared as a backup operation, and drilling is expected to begin in January."

He added the possibility of pumping fluids directly down the affected well to stop the flow of gas was also under consideration.

Attorney Matthew McNicholas, who has filed suit on behalf of several Porter Ranch families, said the [gas](#) company had acted recklessly by not informing the community immediately as to the nature and extent of the leak and by not implementing appropriate safety measures.

"SoCal Gas did not maintain their facility properly, leading to issues involving the health and safety of residents and the community at large," he said in a statement.

"They created the conditions allowing the well to fail, causing children and families to suffer."

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