



Press contacts:

Nile Malloy, CBE: 510-926-5737, nmalloy@cbeal.org
Diane Bailey, NRDC: 650-281-7073, dbailey@nrdc.org

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Community Groups Call for Air District to Support Clean Air and Healthy Communities Around Oil Refineries by Pledging Emissions Reductions

SAN FRANCISCO – Community, public health, climate and environmental groups and residents living near oil refineries urge the Air District Board to pass a resolution that supports ongoing clean-up of air pollution from oil refineries. The Air District is on the cusp of bold action to protect workers and communities with a new pledge to require a 20 percent reduction of refinery pollution by 2020.

The Bay Area is being hit hard with an influx of crude oil and fossil fuel related projects despite national attention to reduce climate emissions, and our state's global warming laws to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Oil refining alone is the largest industrial air polluter in the region and the industry's substantial contribution to regional air pollution disproportionately harms communities and workers near its refineries. The oil industry's region-wide move to refine more 'extreme' oil, such as tar sands and heavy gas oil, could increase refinery emissions substantially.

“Chevron's August 12, 2012 fire that sent myself and 15,000 people to the hospital is a reminder of what can go wrong at a refinery and the impact it has on the health of our families,” said Sylvia-Gray White, CBE Richmond member. “We have a vision for a cleaner and healthier community that support community and worker strategies to reduce local pollution. We need the air district and board to work with our community's to achieve this goal.”

The Air District has primary responsibility over direct emissions from industrial sources in the region. Thus, Air District action to reduce refinery emissions is needed to improve

air quality and protect public health. Bay Area residents need proactive strategies to address reducing regional emission.

At the September 3rd Air District Board meeting, the Board made a statement that harmful air pollution [from refineries] should be reduced, when feasible, and without delay. After ongoing discussions with Board members and Air District staff it is clear that Bay Area residents critically need real reductions now to provide real health protections for our communities.

“The level of toxic emissions being spewed by our five Bay Area refineries is just not acceptable, and neither is the amount of greenhouse gas emissions they discharge into the atmosphere” said Shoshona Wechsler, Sunflower Alliance. “The health of our local communities, especially those on the refinery frontlines, demands a 20% reduction of total refinery emissions by 2020, and so does our beleaguered planet. The Bay Area Air Quality Management District needs to stop hesitating and vigorously enforce refinery emission reductions now”.

Currently, all five Bay Area refineries are making major changes in their infrastructure right now that could allow much more extreme and dirty crude oil into the region. To make matters worse, there are several crude oil rail terminals that could speed a transition to extreme, dirty crude in the region as well. We need our air district to get out ahead of these dirty oil industry maneuvers and make a real commitment to worker and community health and clean air.

Groups include: Asian Pacific Environmental Network, Communities for a Better Environment, Pittsburgh Defense Council, California Nurses Association, Natural Resource Defense Fund, Sierra Club, Forest Ethics, Sun Flower Alliance, Crockett-Rodeo United to Defend the Environment (C.R.U.D.E), Global Community Monitor and others