



South Coast Air Quality Management District

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NEWS

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Air Quality Study Initiated To Analyze Cancer Risks Related to Air Pollution in Southland

The South Coast Air Quality Management District recently began its fifth year-long initiative to study levels of toxic air pollutants and their health risks to Southland residents.

“Although we have seen a steady decrease in the risk from toxic air contaminants, the remaining risks are still unacceptable,” said Dr. William A. Burke, SCAQMD’s Governing Board Chairman. “We are using the most advanced air monitoring and analysis techniques to identify the long-term risks of exposure to harmful air toxics.”

The SCAQMD began its fifth Multiple Air Toxics Exposure Study (MATES V) at the beginning of January. As with the four previous studies, results from this effort will provide an assessment of air toxic exposure and trends.

Monitoring will be conducted for a minimum of one year at 10 fixed sites. The monitoring data will be used in a regional emissions and modeling analysis to assess air toxic risk at all locations within the SCAQMD jurisdiction. A final report is expected by 2020.

The first MATES study was conducted in 1987, and the MATES program continues to be an important component of SCAQMD’s environmental justice initiatives. The MATES V study will include a significant advanced monitoring component that will use cutting-edge technologies to measure air toxics near refineries and other major sources.

To gather detailed air pollution information at a community scale, SCAQMD will be partnering with community residents to install portable air sensors outside of their homes. Portable sensors are already a part of SCAQMD’s community-based collaborative efforts to engage communities in environmental justice areas.

The previous MATES IV study conducted in 2012 and 2013 found that the average cancer risk from air pollution across the region declined 65 percent since MATES III in 2005 using similar methods of analysis. The increasing use of cleaner heavy-duty trucks – including those funded by SCAQMD and state incentives – is a significant driver behind the risk reduction.

The highest air toxics cancer risk was found in and around the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, the region's hub of goods movement activity powered by ships, trucks and locomotives. Central Los Angeles and transportation corridors including freeways and rail lines also had some of the highest risks. The lowest cancer risks were found in central and south Orange County, southwest Riverside County and the Coachella Valley. Since MATES III, the greatest reductions in air toxics cancer risk have occurred in areas with the highest overall risk, including the areas near ports.

MATES IV found that diesel particulate emitted from diesel trucks and other diesel-powered vehicles and equipment was responsible for 68 percent of the total cancer risk. Fully 90 percent of the risk is due to mobile sources, which includes everything from cars and trucks to ocean-going ships, locomotives, aircraft and construction equipment.

“This will be SCAQMD's furthest reaching MATES study yet. We are going to study areas that are hardest hit by air pollution, and for the first time, residents will be able to play an active role in the study,” said Burke. “We have come a long way, but there is still more work to do.”

SCAQMD is the air pollution control agency for Orange County and major portions of Los Angeles, San Bernardino and Riverside counties.

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