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October 18, 2016

TO: Each Supervisor

FROM: Cynthia A. Harding, M.P.H.  
Interim Director

SUBJECT: **HEALTH STUDIES TO ASSESS POTENTIAL HEALTH IMPACTS OF THE ALISO CANYON NATURAL GAS STORAGE FIELD AND THE EXIDE TECHNOLOGIES BATTERY RECYCLING FACILITY**

This is to provide the Board with an update on the need for prospective health studies to assess the health impacts from the Aliso Canyon Natural Gas Storage Field and the Exide Technologies Battery Recycling Facility. In Aliso Canyon, a major public health disaster forced the voluntary relocation of thousands of residents from their homes in Porter Ranch and surrounding communities. The Exide facility caused long-standing contamination of the air and soil in the City of Vernon and surrounding communities. The Department of Public Health (DPH) is committed to working closely with the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) and the California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) to consult with scientific experts on the scope of potential health studies in these two geographic areas.

**Aliso Canyon Natural Gas Storage Field**

On February 2, 2016, Southern California Gas Company (SoCalGas) committed to fund a health study to assess impacts of the Aliso Canyon gas leak disaster, per the Order for Abatement (Order) issued by the SCAQMD. The Order outlined the scope of work to include: (1) identification of chemicals of potential concern, (2) determination of potential areas of concern and exposure point concentrations, (3) development of chronic toxicity values for the sulfur odorants (tetrahydrothiophene and tert-butylmercaptan), and (4) evaluation of associated uncertainties. The planning stage for this study was moving forward until SoCalGas rescinded its commitment, and in July 2016 SCAQMD sued SoCalGas to enforce the Order.

On September 27, 2016, your Board approved a motion instructing DPH to work with SCAQMD to assemble an independent panel of scientific experts to define the components of a potential health study to analyze health impacts related to the Aliso Canyon gas leak. DPH will also consult with the California Air Resources Board, California Department of Public Health, the California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, and the United States Environmental Protection Agency.

This study is appropriate and necessary for three primary reasons: (1) the Aliso Canyon gas leak was unprecedented in its scale and duration, resulting in public health exposures that have not previously been seen; (2) reports of symptoms from community members are similar to what they experienced during the gas leak, despite reoccupation of their homes after the primary leak was sealed; and (3) SoCalGas' failure to comply fully with a directive from DPH to properly clean all homes of symptomatic and/or relocated residents has impeded recovery of the community's health and wellbeing.

On September 27, 2016, representatives from DPH and SCAQMD convened to discuss the health study, and to begin the planning process. Since that time, DPH has begun reviewing health studies in other jurisdictions to serve as models for how to rapidly organize research efforts in response to major disasters. DPH makes the following recommendations regarding the health study:

1. **Establish an Expert Scientific Advisory Panel.** Due to the complexity and unprecedented nature of the Aliso Canyon natural gas disaster, DPH and SCAQMD recommend tasking an expert advisory panel to address scientific issues and priorities. This panel will be responsible for reviewing the available environmental and health data, determining the most appropriate methodology, and monitoring progress. Subcommittees to the advisory panel will be established on an as needed basis, in order to address specific topic areas.
2. **Prioritize Community Engagement.** A transparent and open process will be central to planning the proposed health study. The study leaders will need to work directly with the community through regular workshops and a community advisory group to share as much information as possible, as quickly as possible. Strategies and resources for community recovery should be incorporated through these outreach efforts.
3. **Electronic Environmental Data Files.** DPH requests that SoCalGas, the Department of Oil, Gas, and Geothermal Resources Division (DOGGR), and the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) release all available environmental and health data to the advisory panel. These include electronic files that contain: (1) analytical data for air, soil, drilling muds and fluids, and well/reservoir gas mixtures collected during the gas leak disaster; (2) addresses of properties with confirmed oily mist residue; and 3) onsite worker environmental health monitoring data.

### **Exide Technologies Battery Recycling Facility**

DPH will be meeting with DTSC in the near future to propose the formation of an independent panel to discuss potential health studies in the communities surrounding the Exide Technologies battery recycling facility. DPH will update your Board on the progress of that effort.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please let me know.

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c: Chief Executive Officer  
County Counsel  
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors