



Martinez Refining Company

Nov. 24-25, 2022, Spent Catalyst Release

Frequently Asked Questions

3/20/23

What was in the material released that landed on the community during the Nov. 24-25 event at Martinez Refining Company?

Contra Costa Health (CCH) took samples of the “spent catalyst” that landed on the community during the release. Laboratory results show the samples contained elevated levels of metals, including aluminum, barium, chromium, nickel, vanadium and zinc.

Right now, CCH is working to determine if the release did or did not contaminate soil anywhere in the community, or contaminate it in high enough concentrations to cause health concerns.

Is there a community health emergency because of the release?

There is no health emergency related to the release. CCH does not have evidence that material released during the incident poses a risk to the community that requires an immediate emergency response to save lives or protect public health.

If there is no emergency, why did Contra Costa Health (CCH) issue a health advisory on March 7, 2023?

Even though there is no evidence the release created an immediate health emergency, [CCH issued a health advisory](#) out of concern for potential long-term health impacts if the release did contaminate soil.

A community investigation is underway that will include testing of soil at different locations near the release. Until the results are available, CCH recommends following the advice in the advisory, out of an abundance of caution, to avoid exposure if there is contamination.



What long-term health impacts could exposure to the metals in the released material cause?

Long-term exposure to high concentrations of metals, meaning over many months or years, can increase risk of muscular, physical, or neurological health concerns.

CCH does not know or suspect that anyone in the community is exposed to high concentrations of metals due to the release. But because the release created the potential, CCH is facilitating a community investigation to assess its environmental affects and verify the safety of nearby soil.

What does the health advisory say?

The [March 7, 2023 health advisory](#) recommends that, until the community investigation determines whether or not the release contaminated nearby soil, people should not eat produce grown (fruit, vegetables, etc.) on land where the powder-like substance described as “spent catalyst” was visible.

If the community investigation determines there is no danger, the advisory will end.

Does the health advisory say I should not plant a vegetable garden?

It does not. While CCH does not recommend digging in soil on properties that were near the release, growing plants to eat does not pose a health risk – particularly if grown in containers or raised beds with soil from elsewhere.

If the health advisory is lifted, there would be no health risk associated with eating vegetables previously grown in the local soil.

How do I know if the health advisory applies to me?

While the health advisory applies to places where the material landed, so it could be seen on surfaces such as roofs, cars, or the ground, anyone who is concerned about the possibility of contamination from the refinery release can follow the recommendations.

Without more information, CCH cannot determine exactly which properties might be affected, or if any properties are affected. The community investigation will provide that information.

Why did it take so long for CCH to share this health advice?

CCH has remained consistent with its recommendations since it became aware of the release, and shared them at public meetings, in news media interviews, through partners such as City of



Martinez and the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors, online at cchealth.org and via social media.

CCH used a health advisory to emphasize its advice regarding produce grown on land affected by the release in response to questions from the community and because spring is a common time to plant vegetable gardens.

The health advisory applies to my property, and I've already been eating produce grown in my yard. Is my health at risk?

While CCH does not recommend eating the produce in this case, it is very unlikely that isolated or short-term exposure would cause health problems, even if the soil in the yard was contaminated.

If the soil in the yard had elevated levels of metals in it, months or years of regular exposure would be more likely cause elevated risk of health concerns.

The health advisory applies to my property, and I have an unexplained illness or other health concerns that I think may be related. What should I do?

CCH recommends discussing your concern with your healthcare provider.

When will the community investigation into potential health risks be completed?

The MRC Oversight Committee is currently in the process of selecting a consultant to perform an independent risk assessment. There are two phases of this risk assessment. The first phase will be an initial evaluation which will include an initial soil evaluation/testing. CCH anticipates that this will be completed early summer.

Can CCH share a plume model that shows where the material released went, and would that tell me if my property is potentially contaminated?

CCH is partnering with the Bay Area Air Quality Management District to complete a plume model for the deposition of the spent catalyst. We expect a draft final report by the end of March, which will be shared at cchealth.org/hazmat.

This plume model considers many factors, including particle size and weight, weather, wind data and the timing of the release as measured by opacity sensors in the MRC stacks. Although the plume model cannot show us exactly where the spent catalyst was deposited, it will guide the soil and plant testing strategy.



Is the investigation going to test the drinking water?

The City of Martinez has detected no evidence of potential contamination of the source water entering the water treatment plant it operates, which serves most residents. Martinez has conducted testing for metals without finding anything unusual, and has shared public concerns, sampling, testing and results with the state Department of Drinking Water, which has confirmed the water is safe.

For more information, visit the [city's website](#).

Is the investigation going to provide soil testing for all residents?

The work done by the consultant performing the independent risk assessment will include soil testing. However, soil will not be tested for all residents. The risk assessment will provide information on the best methodology to use for soil testing, areas of concern, and other information. CCH will share this information as it becomes available with the community.

Will Martinez Refining Company face any legal or regulatory consequences because of this incident?

CCH referred the matter to the Contra Costa District Attorney's Office in January 2023.

