

June 22, 2019

Via Email

Attn: Heather Farr
South Coast Air Quality Management District
HFarr@aqmd.gov



Re: AQMD Refinery Committee Meeting / Use of Hydrogen Fluoride

Dear Ms. Farr and Board Members:

Kindly receive this statement for submission at the meeting today on the use of hydrogen fluoride at refineries in urban Southern California.

This statement is from Alex Bomstein, Senior Litigation Attorney of Clean Air Council, on behalf of Clean Air Council. Clean Air Council is a nonprofit environmental organization based in Philadelphia that is dedicated to protecting and defending everyone's right to a healthy environment.

We write from Philadelphia in solidarity with all those living and working within the South Coast Air District who are put at risk by the use of hydrogen fluoride. For a long time we have known of the dangers of the use and storage of HF at Philadelphia-area refineries. Ten years ago, a release of just 22 pounds from a suburban refinery put 13 workers in the hospital. Earlier again this year, at the same refinery in Trainer, a similar incident put more workers in the hospital. How many more workers are to be killed or injured? Just yesterday, I woke up to news of massive explosions and fires at the refinery two miles from my open bedroom windows. I went up onto my South Philadelphia roof and saw a black plume of smoke snaking south of me and trailing for miles. What I didn't yet know was that the explosions happened in the HF alkylation unit at the Philadelphia Energy Solutions refinery and that firefighters were then, while I was up on my roof, struggling to contain the fire.

We don't yet know for sure whether any HF was released. The latest news is that five workers were injured, from what we don't know. We do know that my neighborhood of densely-packed rowhouses and apartment buildings, and the other densely-packed residential neighborhoods in South and Southwest Philadelphia did not experience mass casualties--and for that I am grateful. Philadelphia dodged a bullet yesterday, but we're sick of this Russian Roulette. Over 1.8 million people live within a ten-mile radius of that alkylation unit. Air quality experts said an evacuation should have been ordered, but it wasn't. The first official

notice I received was that the shelter-in-place was lifted. I was never notified to shelter-in-place in the first place. And how could we have evacuated anyway? South Philadelphia is essentially a peninsula, surrounded by wide rivers on three sides and the second-densest downtown on the East Coast on the fourth side.

Clean Air Council yesterday called on the PES refinery to halt its use of HF. We have asked the members of Congress with the refinery in their district to join that call. We have asked for an investigation from the Chemical Safety Board, and they announced later that day they are dispatching a team to investigate.

We should not have to live in fear of a catastrophe looming over us merely for the profit of a polluting industry. Philadelphians deserve better. Californians deserve better. We all deserve better. Our hearts go out to you in this fight. We are counting on the South Coast Air Quality Management District to make the right decision and put an end to the use and storage of hydrogen fluoride. It's just not worth it. In solidarity, Clean Air Council and the people of the Philadelphia area.

Sincerely,

Alexander G. Bomstein, Esq.
Senior Litigation Attorney
Clean Air Council
135 South 19th Street, Suite 300
Philadelphia, PA 19103
215.567.4004
abomstein@cleanair.org