

After Action Review of San Diego County's Air Monitoring Response to the July 2020 USS Bonhomme Richard Fire

September 2022 Report Fact Sheet

California Air Resources Board
California Environmental Protection Agency



What does the report do?

This report assesses the effectiveness of the air monitoring response to the July 2020 fire aboard the Navy's USS Bonhomme Richard and provides recommendations to improve emergency preparedness in the San Diego area. The report also includes an analysis of the air monitoring data collected during the response and review of potential health impacts.

Why was this report prepared?

The Environmental Health Coalition (EHC), a San Diego community-based organization, requested the California Air Resources Board (CARB) conduct an after-action review to address concerns raised by community members about San Diego Air Pollution Control Districts (APCD or District) air monitoring response and potential health impacts of the smoke. In response, CARB created a working group which included local, State, and federal agencies to review the response and develop the report's recommendations.

What were the health effects of the fire?

CARB staff analyzed ten air monitoring datasets including criteria pollutants, particulate matter, volatile organic compounds, metals, and meteorological data. Based on the available data, no pollutants exceeded known health values. However, there were data gaps and a lack of information on health effects that precluded a finding that there were no adverse health impacts from the fire.

What is the source of the information?

CARB relied on information from local communities, from the original EHC letter, various local meetings, and from a public workshop held with the community to guide the review process. CARB convened the working group that developed the report's recommendations to improve emergency preparedness in the San Diego area. In parallel to the working group's efforts, CARB conducted a data analysis and health impact review utilizing all available air quality data.

What are the key recommendations?

The working group identified and organized its recommendations into four main categories shown below with the key questions raised by the community (○) and summary of the recommendations (➤):

Preparedness

- Are the APCD's response plans adequate?
 - APCD should expand and revise plans to make them more comprehensive.
- Are the District's capabilities adequate?
 - APCD should review and document its capabilities in its response plan.
- Does the District practice its response plans?
 - The District should continue to conduct periodic incident training, drills, and exercises with partner agencies with an emphasis on hazards and scenarios specific to the port and other industrial areas.

Coordination

- Is the interagency coordination adequate?
 - APCD and responding agencies should clearly define roles in incident response plans and operate within the incident command framework.
- Did the District have a dedicated 24-hour response hotline?
 - District should collaborate with local, state, and federal response agencies on strengthening and improving internal notification procedures.

Response Operations

- What types of pollutants can be measured and how quickly can APCD report the results?
 - APCD's incident response plan should clearly define its air monitoring and reporting capabilities and how they complement those of other responding agencies.
- Does APCD have the proper resources to monitor, analyze, and report results during air quality incidents?
 - APCD's response plan should identify potential hazards in the District and anticipate resource needs to react to these hazards.

Public Communication

- Was public messaging appropriate and timely?
 - The District's incident response plan should clearly define its role in an incident command structure during emergencies to communicate timely, actionable messages in a format and language that the public can easily understand.
- Was the health information in public communication of monitoring results adequate?
 - Incident command structures established during emergencies should include the County Public Health Department so that coordinated messaging includes detailed health information.

What has happened in the intervening months?

The District has developed and adopted an enhanced incident response plan and has been collaborating with the U.S. Navy and other local response agencies to improve emergency preparedness by revising response procedures and developing improved public communication and messaging protocols for use during emergency air quality episodes. San Diego County's Office of Emergency Services is in the process of updating its response planning protocols to include clarifications of the District's role in emergency response. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is enhancing its public health assessment program for use during environmental emergencies. The U.S. Navy has taken action to reduce fleetwide risk of fires on ships undergoing maintenance while also enhancing their emergency response capabilities.

Where can one access the full report?

Link to full report: https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/sites/default/files/2022-09/USS_Bonhomme_Richard_Fire_AAR_Report_Final_2022_09_28.pdf