

# Cerritos air isn't a toxic hot spot

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**POLLUTION:** Metal plant doesn't pose big cancer risk, new readings show. Data corrects an EPA report.

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CERRITOS — Two weeks after a leaked federal report sent shockwaves through a quiet Cerritos neighborhood said to suffer the nation's worst air quality, a new analysis offers a very different picture.

Results of air monitoring tests from Heraeus Metal Processing Inc. in Santa Fe Springs show that it does not pose a significant cancer risk to the surrounding community, South Coast Air Quality Management District officials said Thursday.

"After extensive investigation of the facility in question, we found that EPA's findings were inaccurate in regards to air quality in Cerritos today," said AQMD spokesman Sam Atwood of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's June 24 report. "The EPA based their report on 20-year-old data that was likely even somewhat flawed at the time.

"The bottom line is that Cerritos is not a toxic hot spot," Atwood said.

Inadvertently released from an EPA press office, the June 24 report blamed the community's woes on dangerously high levels of a rocket fuel additive and probable carcinogen known as hydrazine.

The study based its findings on air quality samples collected in the early 2000s, about the time the hydrazine plant was being fined for improper storage of the potent chemical.

In response to the EPA report, AQMD investigators collected air samples at Heraeus, 13429 Alondra Blvd. in Santa Fe Springs, and in nearby Cerritos during the last week of June.

The analysis showed that the facility currently emits less than two pounds per year of hydrazine, a toxic chemical used in rocket fuel and a wide range of industrial applications.

Computer modeling of these emissions shows that they would result in a maximum lifetime cancer risk in the community of 0.5 in 1 million. That is 20 times lower than the threshold for public notification (10 in 1 million) and 50 times lower than the threshold for reducing toxic emissions and health risk (25 in 1 million) both required by AQMD rules.

AQMD source testing engineers took air samples from air-pollution-control exhaust stacks at Heraeus and also from outdoor air downwind in Cerritos.

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AQMD field inspectors and engineers confirmed that hydrazine is introduced into equipment in a closed system where it reacts with solution to form harmless compounds in the metals recovery process.

The EPA report had stated that Heraeus emitted 1,250 pounds of hydrazine in 2002 but the facility has not reported that amount of annual emissions since about 1991 when it was operated by a previous owner, PGP Industries Inc., according to the AQMD.

Because calculations of emissions at that time were crude in comparison to today's methods, AQMD officials now are trying to determine if the facility ever emitted that much hydrazine. Based on the facility's operations history, its emissions in 2002 and possibly as early as 1991 were likely similar to today's emissions of less than two pounds per year of hydrazine.

Overall, AQMD scientists report air quality in Cerritos is roughly equal to average emissions levels in the Los Angeles basin — higher than the national average but far below levels recorded near the ports, downtown Los Angeles and Riverside.

In a landmark Multiple Air Toxics Exposure Study last year, the AQMD found the average cancer risk across the region is about 1,200 in 1 million during a lifetime exposure. It also found that about 84 percent of the cancer risk is due to diesel fuel combustion from trucks, trains and ships.

AQMD used the latest emissions data from facilities, as well as tens of thousands of air samples collected during a 24-month period.

Cancer risk from diesel was not included in EPA's report.

The AQMD plans to work closely with the EPA as the EPA prepares its 2005 emissions study for release later this year.

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

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