

Chevron refinery fire aftermath: More monitors to be added

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"People have a right to know what's in the air they breathe," said John Gioia, a Contra Costa County supervisor and chairman of the nine-county air board.

The extra monitors should be able to pick up routine long-term pollution as well as toxic releases during emergencies, or during accidental releases, members of the Bay Area Air Quality Management District board said.

Everything from portable sniffing machines to balloon monitors that could be released into smoke plumes will be evaluated, agency managers said at a meeting attended by dozens of West Country Costa residents and environmental leaders.

"We need an expanded monitoring system to know what's in the air after incidents like this," said Gioia, of Richmond.

Gioia said refineries will pay for the new monitors.

Air district board members said they will examine options for new monitoring devices as they create a new rule to regulate what pollution information refineries will be required to collect and report to the public.

The air district had been scheduled to take more than a year to come up with the rule. In the wake of the Chevron fire, the air district now intends to enact the rule in 2013, said Jack Broadbent, the district's executive director.

After the Chevron fire, more than 15,200 people visited hospitals with complaints of lung, eye and throat irritation and headaches and dizziness.

Because the smoke went up 1,000 to 5,000 feet in the air and then dispersed, air pollution monitors in West Contra Cost failed to detect any big jump in smoke particles, air district officials said.

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