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ONE HUNDRED FOURTEENTH CONGRESS

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
2125 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515–6115
Majority (202) 225–2927
Minority (202) 225–3641

January 6, 2016

The Honorable Anthony Foxx
Secretary
US Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

The Honorable Gina McCarthy
Administrator
US Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Secretary Foxx and Administrator McCarthy:

Since at least October 2015, the Aliso Canyon natural gas storage field in Los Angeles, California has been leaking substantial amounts of methane into the environment.[1] Methane is a potent climate pollutant that traps more than 25 times as much heat as carbon dioxide. According to multiple press reports, the Southern California Gas Company, a Sempra Energy subsidiary which owns the leaking facility, estimates it will not be able to plug the leak until late February or March 2016. The leak may be emitting between 40 and 64 tons of methane every hour, increasing California's methane emissions by a quarter.[2] As of January 5, over 78,000 metric tons of methane are estimated to have escaped, the equivalent of burning more than 737 million gallons of gasoline.[3]

In addition to these significant climate impacts, thousands of residents have been forced to evacuate their homes in the surrounding neighborhoods. More than 2,000 households have already been relocated, and the Southern California Gas Company is working on at least another 1,500 relocations.[4] Nearby residents are reportedly suffering from nausea, nosebleeds, headaches, and vomiting from breathing in the chemicals added to the gas.[5] Press reports further

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[1] *Can an Invisible Gas Leak Draw Attention to a Climate Problem?* National Journal (Jan. 4, 2016).

[2] *Id.*

[3] Environmental Defense Fund, *California's Massive Methane Leak* (accessed Jan. 5, 2016) (online at https://www.edf.org/climate/californias-massive-methane-leak).

[4] *Residents Sue Over 'Negligent' Practices By Gas Company, As Pipeline Leak Goes Into Third Month*, Think Progress (Jan. 5, 2016).

[5] *Can an Invisible Gas Leak Draw Attention to a Climate Problem?* National Journal (Jan. 4, 2016).

indicate there may be toxins such as hydrogen sulfide and benzene present in the air, which can cause severe short- and long-term health effects.[6]

It is our understanding that the jurisdiction of this matter may involve both state and federal agencies, including the Department of Transportation under the Pipeline Safety Act and the Environmental Protection Agency with regard to emissions under the Clean Air Act.

To the extent that your agencies are involved in the response to the leak, we request a briefing on this event and a description of your agencies' roles in the matter. We ask that you provide this briefing by January 13th. Please contact Ryan Gottschall or Jean Fruci with the Committee Democratic staff at (202) 225-3641 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Frank Pallone, Jr.
Ranking Member
Committee on
Energy and Commerce

Diana DeGette
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Oversight
Investigations

Bobby Rush
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Energy and
Power

cc: Chairman Upton
Chairman Murphy
Chairman Whitfield

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[6] *2016: California's 'Staggering' Leak Could Spew Methane for Months*, Inside Climate News (Jan. 4, 2016).