region6news

Friday, September 15, 2017

Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, and 66 Tribal Nations

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Hurricane Response:

1 Independent Monitors Found Benzene Levels After Harvey Six Times Higher Than Guidelines, ProPublica, 9/14/17
http://projects.propublica.org/graphics/harvey-manchester
As a longtime resident of Manchester, Guadalupe Hernandez is used to the chemical smells that waft through his southeast Houston, Texas neighborhood, a low-income, predominantly Hispanic community near a Valero Energy refinery. But when Hurricane Harvey blew in the weekend of Aug. 26, the stench became noticeably stronger for about five hours, a scent like "glue or boiled eggs," he said.

2 EPA won't release benzene levels collected post-Harvey; private tests show elevated levels, Texas Tribune
https://www.texastribune.org/2017/09/14/epa-wont-release-benzene-levels-collected-after-harvey-private-monitor/
As a longtime resident of Manchester, Guadalupe Hernandez is used to the chemical smells that waft through his southeast Houston neighborhood, a low-income, predominantly Hispanic community near a Valero Energy refinery. But when Hurricane Harvey blew in the weekend of Aug. 26, the stench became noticeably stronger for about five hours, a scent like "glue or boiled eggs," he said.

3 Valero Houston Plant Underestimated Harvey Benzene Leak, NY Times,
https://www.wsj.com/articles/valero-houston-plant-underestimated-harvey-benzene-leak-1505432176
The chemical plant that released a cloud of a carcinogenic chemical amid Hurricane Harvey and its aftermath in Houston's Manchester neighborhood in August emitted far more of the chemical than it had previously disclosed, environmental regulators said Thursday. The plant, Valero Energy Partners ' Houston refinery, suffered a hurricane-related spill Aug. 27 from the damaged roof of a light crude storage tank, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency concluded in an investigation.

4 EPA/TCEQ: Updated status of systems affected by Harvey
http://www.gilmermirror.com/view/full_story/27479023/article-EPA-TCEQ--Updated-status-of-systems-affected-by-Harvey?instance=home_news_bullets
Working together, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality continue to coordinate with local, state and federal officials to address the human health and environmental impacts of Hurricane Harvey and its aftermath, especially the water systems in the affected areas. The TCEQ has approximately 500 people and EPA has 263 people assisting in response to this natural disaster.

5 Oil and chemical spills from Hurricane Harvey big, but dwarfed by Katrina, Reuters
http://www.reuters.com/article/us-storm-harvey-spills/oil-and-chemical-spills-from-hurricane-harvey-big-but-dwarfed-by-katrina-idUSKCN1BQ1E8
More than 22,000 barrels of oil, refined fuels and chemicals spilled at sites across Texas in the wake of Hurricane Harvey, along with millions of cubic feet of natural gas and hundreds of tons of other toxic substances, a Reuters review of company reports to the U.S. Coast Guard shows. The spills, clustered around the heart of the U.S. oil

industry, together rank among the worst environmental mishaps in the country in years, but fall far short of the roughly 190,000 barrels spilled in Louisiana in 2005 after Hurricane Katrina - the last major storm to take dead aim at the U.S. Gulf Coast.

6 Hurricane Harvey floodwaters loaded with E. coli from sewage, fecal bacteria, WMAR
http://www.abc2news.com/news/national/hurricane-harvey-floodwaters-contain-sewage-fecal-bacteria
Hurricane Harvey and its aftermath have dumped trillions of gallons of rain across Texas and Louisiana over six days. Homes, office buildings and other structures along the Gulf Coast and in Houston's Harris County, were flooded, their occupants forced to find higher ground. To reach safety, most local residents waded through the murky streams, in some cases for hours.

7 Harvey's Poorest Victims Will Never Rebuild. They're Getting Evicted, Mother Jones
http://www.motherjones.com/environment/2017/09/harveys-poorest-victims-will-never-rebuild-theyre-getting-evicted/
Hilton Kelley has been sounding off on Facebook Live the past few days about families who evacuated their homes to escape Hurricane Harvey and are now getting eviction notices. The families live in Port Arthur, Texas, the small Gulf Coast city about 90 miles east of Houston, but are currently scattered across Louisiana and Texas. Kelley himself had to evacuate—his fourth time doing so in the last 15 years due to hurricane flooding—but was able to make it back to his home last week. He's now trying to locate as many dispersed families as possible via social media to find out who hasn't come back and why. That's when he found out about the eviction notices.

8 Include Superfund site in Harvey relief efforts, Baytown Sun
http://baytownsun.com/opinion/guest_columns/article_5d22a702-998b-11e7-b9e6-97f822faed76.html
We expect some basic things from government: most people agree that protection from enemies, both foreign and domestic describes one key role. We have spent huge amounts to fight foreign enemies, but combating the problems we face at home does not come easy for Austin or Washington, and our community hurts because of it.

9 Harvey and Irma present nearly perfect conditions for Zika-spreading mosquitoes, AP
http://wtop.com/government/2017/09/harvey-and-irma-present-nearly-perfect-conditions-for-zika-spreading-mosquitoes/
Even as the floodwaters from Hurricanes Harvey and Irma begin to recede, significant but less obvious health threats remain. The standing water the storms have left behind will almost certainly cause an explosion of the mosquito population. In addition to the already difficult task of recovery, the affected areas will need to stem the mosquito population growth to avoid the potential for a disease outbreak.

10 Lingering threats to health, Houston Chron
http://www.houstonchronicle.com/opinion/editorials/article/Lingering-threats-to-health-12199200.php
It took about two weeks for firefighters to start dying from radiation sickness at the Chernobyl nuclear plant. As they rushed into the flames in the Ukrainian morning, the crew didn't know if they were responding to an electrical fire or a core meltdown, nor were they informed about the radioactive threat posed by the debris and smoke. To date, seven firefighter deaths have been attributed to the 1986 disaster - the most recent in 2004, when one of the heads of the fire brigade died from cancer.

11 Planned closure of Houston EPA lab draws protests, Houston Chron
http://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/houston-texas/houston/article/Planned-closure-of-Houston-EPA-lab-draws-protests-12199382.php

Conservationists and labor union officials argued Wednesday that the potential closing of the Environmental Protection Agency's regional lab in Houston, which is expected to play a key role in Hurricane Harvey recovery, is among harmful impacts of the Trump administration's drive to slice staff and mission in the agency. The EPA's Region 6 Environmental Services Laboratory, which serves a five-state region, is scheduled for closing when the lease on its rented, 41,000 square-foot space in southwest Houston expires in 2020, officials of the American Federation of Government Employees said they were told.

Around the Region:

12 Highway 84 Landfill opponents, city clash on pollution record of existing landfill, Waco Tribune, 9/15/17
http://www.wacotrib.com/news/city_of_waco/highway-landfill-opponents-city-clash-on-pollution-record-of-existing/article_71108abb-fb01-55e3-97a5-741883db3ec8.html
The campaign against a new landfill off Highway 84 has opened up a new front, as opponents allege that past city mismanagement of the existing landfill next door fouled Lake Waco. In a press release this week, Citizens Against the Highway 84 Landfill cite environmental violations that state regulators found in 2001 and 2003 as evidence that runoff from the landfill polluted Waco's drinking water source.

13 Belton: Dog Ridge Water Supply Corp issues boil order, KWTX, 9/14/17
http://lubbockonline.com/local-news/news/2017-09-13/cattle-company-won-t-move-dairy-facility-panhandle-amid-resident
The Dog Ridge Water Supply Company issued a boil order Thursday for some of its customers. The order affects customers in the Whispering Hollow subdivision, off FM 1670 and the streets of Whisper Trail and Whisper Hollow Road.

14 Governor tours Austin FEMA Command Center, Fox 7, 9/14/17
http://www.fox7austin.com/news/local-news/governor-tours-austin-fema-command-center
A small army of 2000 emergency response managers with FEMA has set up shop in what was the corporate office for Golfsmith. What's being teed up by the 2000 workers is part of a unified effort to help the communities damaged by Hurricane Harvey. Gov. Greg Abbott was briefed on the recovery work coordinated out of this central location in N Austin.

15 Texas A&M Notification Of Sewage Spill, WTAW, 9/14/17
http://wtaw.com/2017/09/14/texas-notification-sewage-spill/
On Tuesday, September 5, 2017, a sewage line back up caused a spill to occur in a small, isolated area of the Texas A&M University campus in College Station. There is no indication of any resulting problem with local domestic water systems. Immediately upon discovery, Texas A&M notified the City of College Station about the incident, and shortly thereafter notified the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) regional office in Waco.

16 Air quality alert issued for New Orleans; sensitive groups urged to avoid outdoor activity, WGNO, 9/14/17
http://wgno.com/2017/09/14/air-quality-alert-issued-for-new-orleans-sensitive-groups-urged-to-avoid-outdoor-activity/
The New Orleans Health Department has issued an Air Quality Alert for New Orleans until midnight tonight, Thursday, Sept. 14. An upper-level ridge of high pressure, warm temperatures and sunny skies will enhance ozone formation allowing pollutants to accumulate.

17 U.S. and Mexico set to sign landmark Colorado River water-sharing deal, Desert Sun, 9/13/17
http://www.desertsun.com/story/news/environment/2017/09/13/u-s-and-mexico-set-sign-landmark-colorado-river-water-sharing-deal/663017001/
The U.S. and Mexican governments are close to signing a landmark Colorado River deal that will establish rules for sharing water over the next decade and lay out cooperative efforts intended to head off severe shortages. Mexican and American officials have scheduled a signing ceremony on Sept. 26 in Ciudad Juárez, officials at California water districts said this week. They said that formal event will be followed by a ceremonial signing in Santa Fe, New Mexico, on Sept. 27 attended by representatives from U.S. states.

18 Local electric car owners express frustration over lack of EV infrastructure in Louisiana, WAFB, 9/14/17
http://www.wafb.com/story/36370415/local-electric-car-owners-express-frustration-over-lack-of-ev-infrastructure-in-louisiana
As of May, there were about 940 electric cars (or EVs) in Louisiana, according to Ann Shaneyfelt, the executive director of Louisiana Clean Fuels. We talked to some local EV owners at an event the organization was hosting in downtown Baton Rouge Thursday to raise awareness about the benefits of electric cars. The EV owners we spoke with say they're pleased with their electric cars but are frustrated with the lack of charging stations in the city and across the state.

19 Owasso Wastewater Treatment Plant kicks off $13M overhaul with engineering approval, Owasso Reporter, 9/14/17
http://www.tulsaworld.com/communities/owasso/news/communitynews/owasso-wastewater-treatment-plant-kicks-off-m-overhaul-with-engineering/article_48f21351-f9af-5786-9b92-7771568cd686.html
Earlier this month, the Owasso Public Works Authority (OPWA) approved engineering services for its Wastewater Treatment Plant and Main Plant Lift Station Expansion Project. The newly passed proposal calls for making improvements to a number of critical systems at the facility due to aged equipment and to accommodate increased usage across the community.

20 Hurricane Harvey flood insurance payouts could top $11 billion, Times Picayune, 9/13/17
http://www.nola.com/environment/index.ssf/2017/09/flood_insurance_losses_from_hu.html#incart_river_index
The head of the National Flood Insurance Program said Wednesday (Sept. 13) that early estimates show Hurricane Harvey will result in about $11 billion in payouts to insured homeowners, mostly in southeast Texas. That would likely put Harvey as the second costliest storm in the history of the program, after more than $16 billion was paid out for Hurricane Katrina.

21 New Orleans mayoral candidates talk flood risk, climate change, Times Picayune, 9/14/17
http://www.nola.com/environment/index.ssf/2017/09/new_orleans_mayoral_candidates.html#incart_river_index
Mayoral candidates promised a complete overhaul of the Sewerage and Water Board at a forum on flooding and adapting to environmental change Thursday (Sept. 14) night. But dumping on perhaps the most hated department of the city was about as far as many candidates got. The mayoral forum was moderated by the director of The Greater New Orleans Water Collaborative, Nathan Lott, and took place at the New Orleans Jazz Market, Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard.

22 THREE WAYS TEXAS COULD SAFEGUARD AGAINST TOXIC EMISSIONS DURING THE NEXT MAJOR STORM, 9/13/17
http://www.texasstandard.org/stories/categories/energy-environment/
While we're still a long way from understanding the full environmental impact of Hurricane Harvey, the damage has been done, and experts say Harvey has highlighted inconsistencies in Texas' ability to contain hazardous materials in the face of future storms. The storm was responsible for 600,000 gallons of spilled gasoline statewide, much of it in

Houston. More than 7 million pounds of toxic chemicals were released into the air. Rain from Harvey flooded Superfund sites, raising questions about the government response. And explosions and fires at the Arkema chemical plant west of Houston sent more than a dozen first responders to the hospital.

23 Newtron Group, founder commit $1.5 million to Water Campus, Advocate, 9/14/17
http://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/business/article_9daa8f3e-9962-11e7-ab95-bb4ccdef99b1.html
The Newtron Group and founder Newton B. Thomas have committed $1.5 million to the Water Campus, a 35-acre science campus on the riverfront downtown. The Baton Rouge Area Foundation and its real estate division, Commercial Properties Realty Trust, are building the Water Campus where scientists and engineers can work together to find ways to adapt to climate change, rising seas and flooding coastlands.

24 Enel brews up Oklahoma wind power agreement with Anheuser-Busch, Oklahoman, 9/14/17
http://newsok.com/enel-brews-up-oklahoma-wind-power-agreement-with-anheuser-busch/article/5563970
Budweiser, this wind is for you. Anheuser-Busch and Enel Green Power said Wednesday they have signed a power agreement for electricity from an under-construction wind farm in northern Oklahoma.

25 Little-known agency integral to hurricane prep, response, Victoria Advocate, 9/15/17
https://www.victoriaadvocate.com/news/2017/sep/14/little-known-agency-integral-to-hurricane-prep-res/
The amount of water flowing down the Guadalupe River in Victoria after Hurricane Harvey is record setting. There was 82,900 cubic feet of water flowing per second Aug. 30, the day the river peaked at 31.25 feet.

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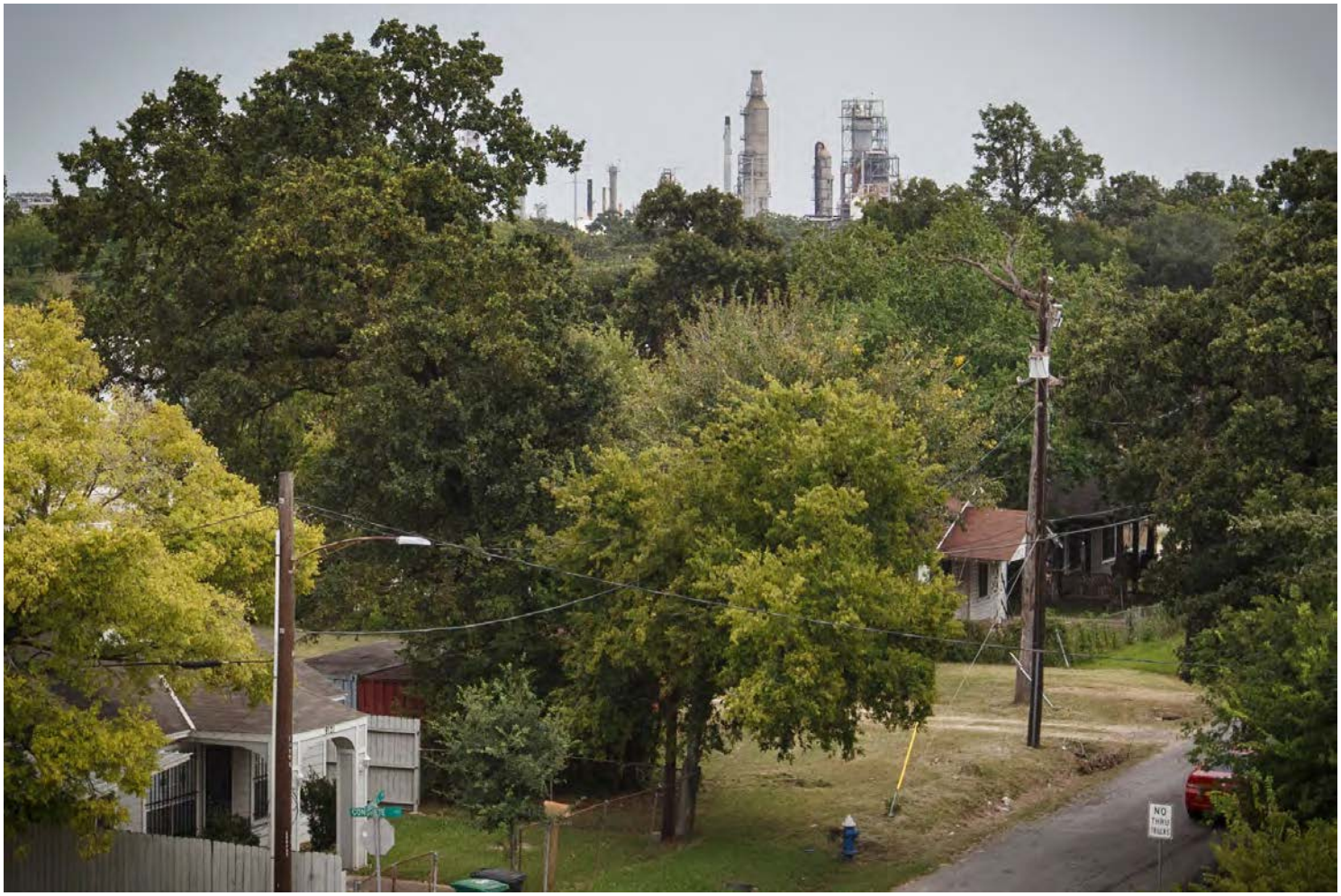


The Valero refinery, seen from across the ship channel in Houston on Wednesday. (Michael Stravato/The Texas Tribune)

Independent Monitors Found Benzene Levels After Harvey Six Times Higher Than Guidelines

After an oil tank in Houston's Manchester neighborhood caved in, private monitors found levels that far exceeded California's health guidelines

By Lisa Song and Al Shaw, ProPublica, and Kiah Collier, The Texas Tribune, Septmber 14, 2017

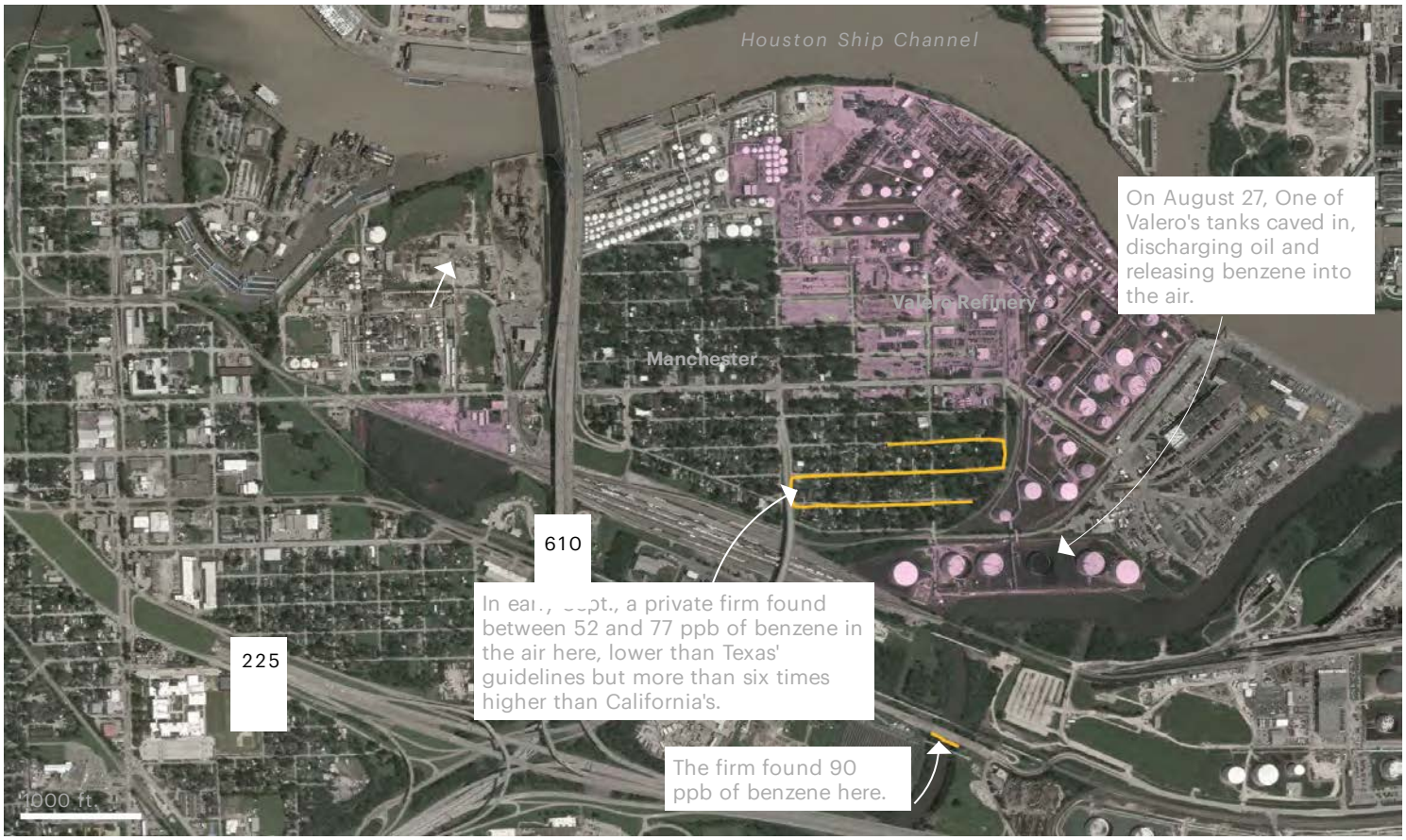
As a longtime resident of Manchester, Guadalupe Hernandez is used to the chemical smells that waft through his southeast Houston, Texas neighborhood, a low-income, predominantly Hispanic community near a Valero Energy refinery. But when Hurricane Harvey blew in the weekend of Aug. 26, the stench became noticeably stronger for about five hours, a scent like "glue or boiled eggs," he said.

The Environmental Protection Agency has assured the public they looked into complaints in the area a week after the storm hit, and spent several days taking air pollution measurements with a mobile laboratory. The agency didn't release any

specifics, but said concentrations of several toxic chemicals, including the carcinogen benzene, met Texas health guidelines.

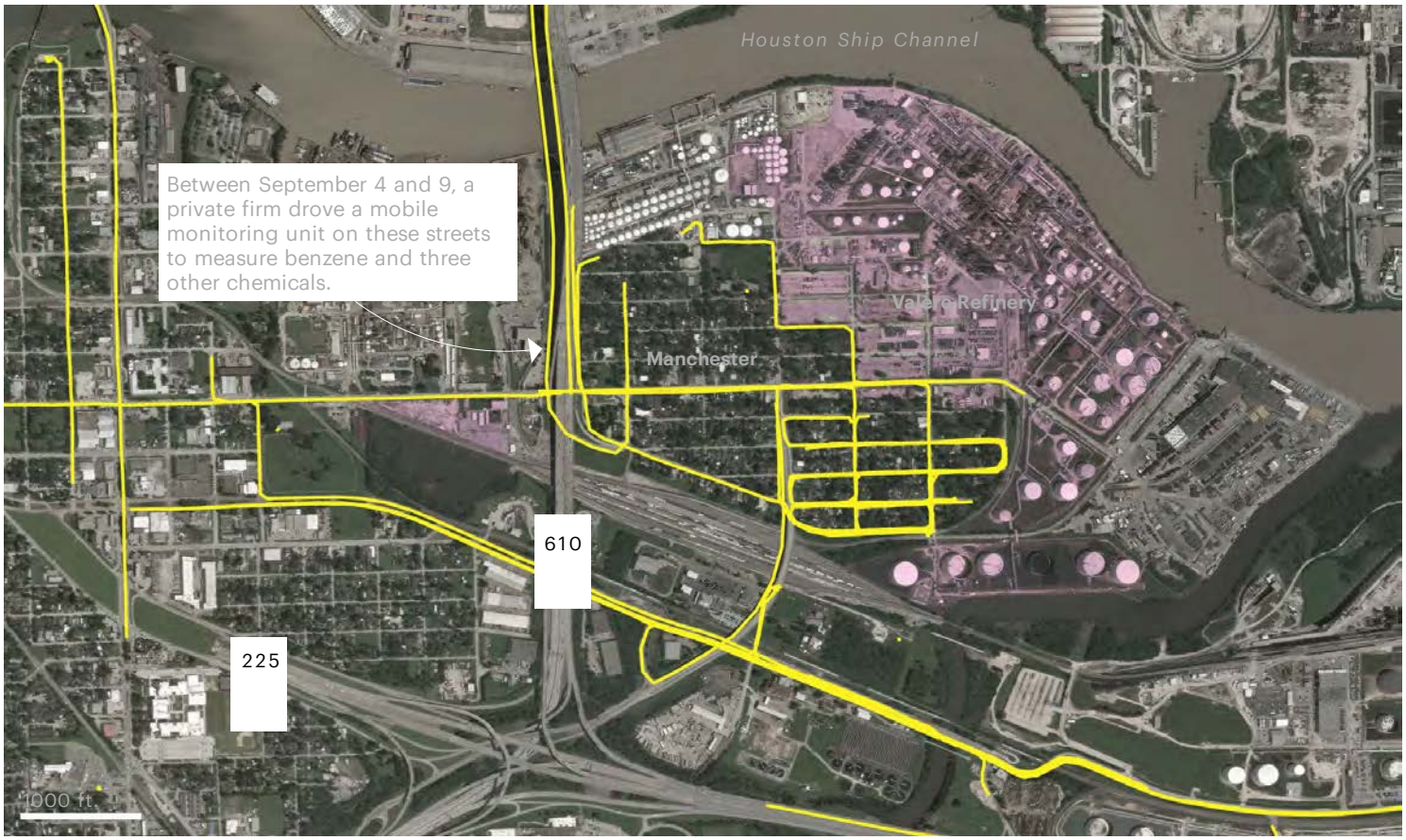
Now, environmental advocacy groups have shared their own, detailed data with ProPublica and the Texas Tribune, based on air sampling from the same Manchester streets over six days. It shows a more nuanced picture than the one given by the EPA: in numerous locations, benzene levels, though under the Texas threshold of 180 parts per billion, far exceeded California's guidelines, which is 23 times more stringent and is well-respected by health advocates nationwide.

Where a Private Monitoring Firm Found High Benzene Levels Near Valero



Where the EPA Monitored

Where the Private Firm Monitored



About 10 of the benzene measurements exceeded California's limit of 8 ppb. (Neither California's nor Texas' guidelines is legally enforceable; both are thresholds that can trigger regulatory scrutiny).

The readings may not have exceeded Texas' guidelines, but they're still higher than usual, "and they are concerning," said Elena Craft, a senior health scientist at the Environmental Defense Fund, which sponsored the monitoring with Air Alliance Houston. "Did we actually capture the highest concentrations that blew into the neighborhood or not? We don't know."

The two highest benzene concentrations, 90 and 77 ppb, were detected within 1,600 feet of a damaged storage tank at the Valero refinery. At the time the data was collected, the wind was blowing from the direction of the tank toward the monitoring sites.

Valero reported on Aug. 27 that the rain from Hurricane Harvey had submerged the tank's floating roof, releasing benzene and crude oil. Satellite images from Aug. 31 released by DigitalGlobe show the caved-in tank at the refinery.

Air pollution experts say much of the benzene would have dissipated by the time the advocates began monitoring on Sept. 4. The EPA started its sampling a day later. Days before either monitoring effort, the city of Houston detected a single benzene concentration of 324 ppb in Manchester.

Hernandez said he believes the fumes he noticed during the hurricane came from the refinery. Margarita Zepeda, another Manchester resident, also remembers a strong smell during the storm.

"During normal rains it would never smell bad but during [the hurricane], it did — chemicals, I guess. And I'm not the only one. All the neighbors" could smell it, too," Zepeda said.

Margarita Zepeda, center, with her mom Teresa, left, and brother Gilberto, right, have lived in the Manchester area of Houston for over 20 years and say the smell, possibly from area refineries, was stronger than usual during Harvey. (Michael Stravato/The Texas Tribune)

The EPA said Thursday that Valero had significantly underestimated the amount of benzene that leaked out, the Houston Chronicle reported. Valero did not respond to a request for comment.

Craft said EDF and Air Alliance Houston decided to take air samples after the hurricane triggered the release of millions of pounds of air pollutants from industrial facilities. They hired Entanglement Technologies, a California-based firm with a mobile monitoring lab, for $20,000, with the bulk of the funds coming from EDF.

“It’s resource-intensive to bring folks from California, but we felt the threat was real enough to warrant it,” Craft said.

The researchers monitored four different air pollutants, but the focus remains on benzene, a compound so potent that the American Petroleum Institute, a trade group for the oil and gas industry, acknowledged in 1948 “the only absolutely safe concentration ... is zero.”

Jill Johnston, an environmental health professor at the University of Southern California who wasn’t involved in the monitoring, said because the samples were taken over a period of minutes, it’s hard to tell if the elevated levels were brief spikes or

representative of longer-term air quality. If those concentrations persist over days or weeks, then the community would be at much higher risk, she said.

Bakeyah Nelson, executive director of Air Alliance Houston, said the benzene is an added burden for "fenceline" communities near industrial sites that already have higher-than-average rates of asthma, cancer and other illnesses associated with continuous chemical exposures. The eastern side of Manchester, where most of the measurements were taken, is wedged between the refinery, two highways and multiple railroad tracks.

"This is real stuff, this is not theoretical. If you go there and try to breathe you can literally taste the petroleum and gasoline that's in the air," said Mustafa Ali, a former EPA environmental justice official who is now senior vice president of climate, environmental justice and community revitalization at the Hip Hop Caucus.

There are families in these communities who can reach through their backyard fence and touch the piping of the nearest facility, Ali said.

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, the state environmental regulator, has dozens of stationary air monitors across Texas, but the ones in Harvey-affected areas were temporarily turned off during the storm. That's why mobile, on-the-ground monitoring is so crucial, and the EPA and TCEQ should have "every available unit out there," Craft said.

She was frustrated when TCEQ officials told her in a meeting on Tuesday that a sophisticated TCEQ air monitoring unit—capable of gathering real-time, precise data in the field—has been in Austin since the storm, and wasn't deployed to Houston.

"If not now, when?" she said. "I feel like we've been doing the agency's job."

TCEQ spokeswoman Andrea Morrow did not respond directly to inquiries about the unit, but two other environmental advocates who attended that meeting confirmed TCEQ told them it was sitting in an Austin garage.

Morrow, in an emailed statement, said TCEQ and EPA investigators have used handheld monitoring equipment to survey facility fence lines, and sponsored aerial surveys to spot potential pollutant leaks. She said TCEQ would release its data once it's validated.

The EPA didn't respond to inquiries about the detailed data that came from its Manchester monitoring. The agency has posted maps showing additional monitoring it has conducted in other communities, but not the concentrations it found, only that all levels met Texas guidelines.

Aside from Manchester, Entanglement found another high benzene reading of 76 ppb at an industrial zone in Port Arthur, several miles from a residential area.

Hilton Kelley, a well-known community organizer in Port Arthur, said he noticed "a very pungent odor of sulfur dioxide and other toxic chemicals" during the week

Entanglement was monitoring the air. “It makes your eyes water, it stings your sinuses, and it creates a scratchy feeling in your throat,” he said.

The Port Arthur area is a hub of industrial activity including the largest refinery in the United States and a facility that processes petcoke—a byproduct of oil refining.

Since the hurricane, local health concerns have been overshadowed by the more pressing need for housing, as hundreds of residents were evicted from damaged homes, Kelley said. “When your stomach’s growling and you’re sitting on the curb with three or four kids in the hot-ass sun, pollution is the last thing on your mind.”

In the long-term, Kelley said he wants the TCEQ to put continuous air monitors at facility fence lines in Port Arthur. The current TCEQ monitors in Port Arthur only sample benzene once every six days.

Additional GIS work was contributed by Jeremy Goldsmith.

Map Sources: DigitalGlobe, Entanglement Technologies, EPA

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EPA won't release benzene levels collected post-Harvey; private tests show elevated levels

> Environmental groups hired a private firm after the flooding and found higher than normal levels of dangerous chemicals in the air around a refinery.

BY BY KIAH COLLIER, THE TEXAS TRIBUNE, AND LISA SONG AND AL SHAW, PROPUBLICA
SEPT. 14, 2017 17 HOURS AGO

19

The Valero refinery, seen from across the ship channel in Houston on Wednesday, Sept. 13, 2017.
Michael Stravato for The Texas Tribune

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smells that waft through his southeast Houston neighborhood, a low-income, predominantly Hispanic community near a Valero Energy refinery.

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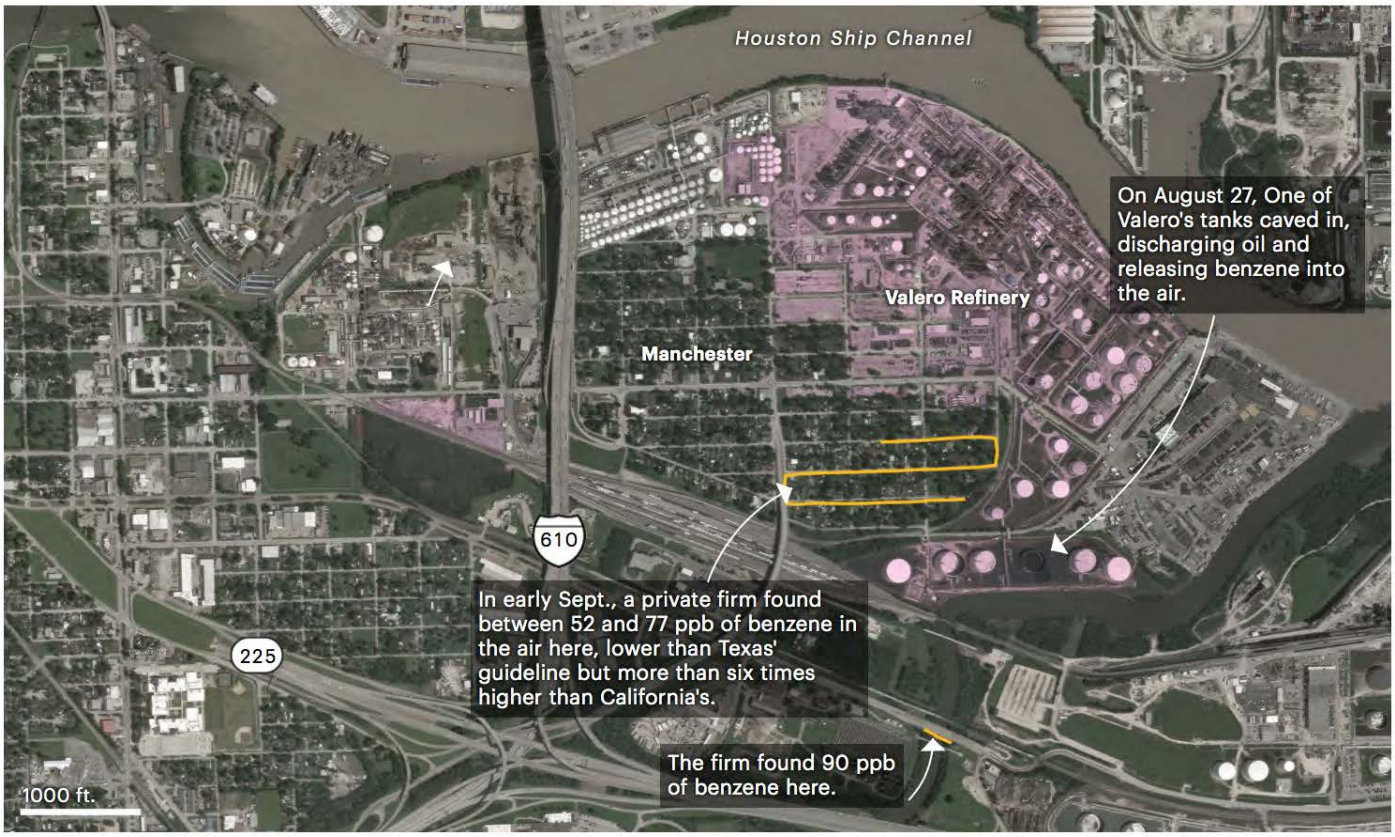

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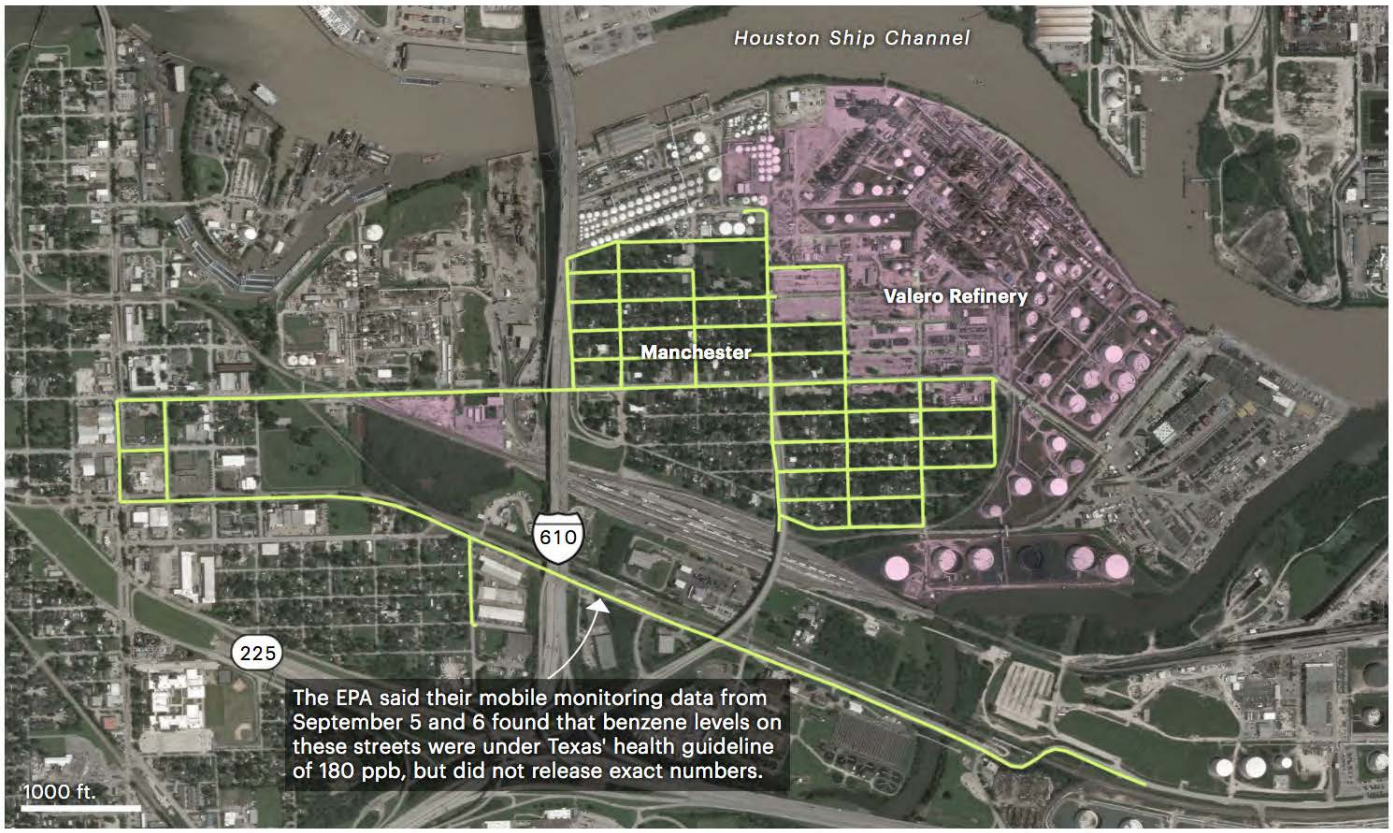

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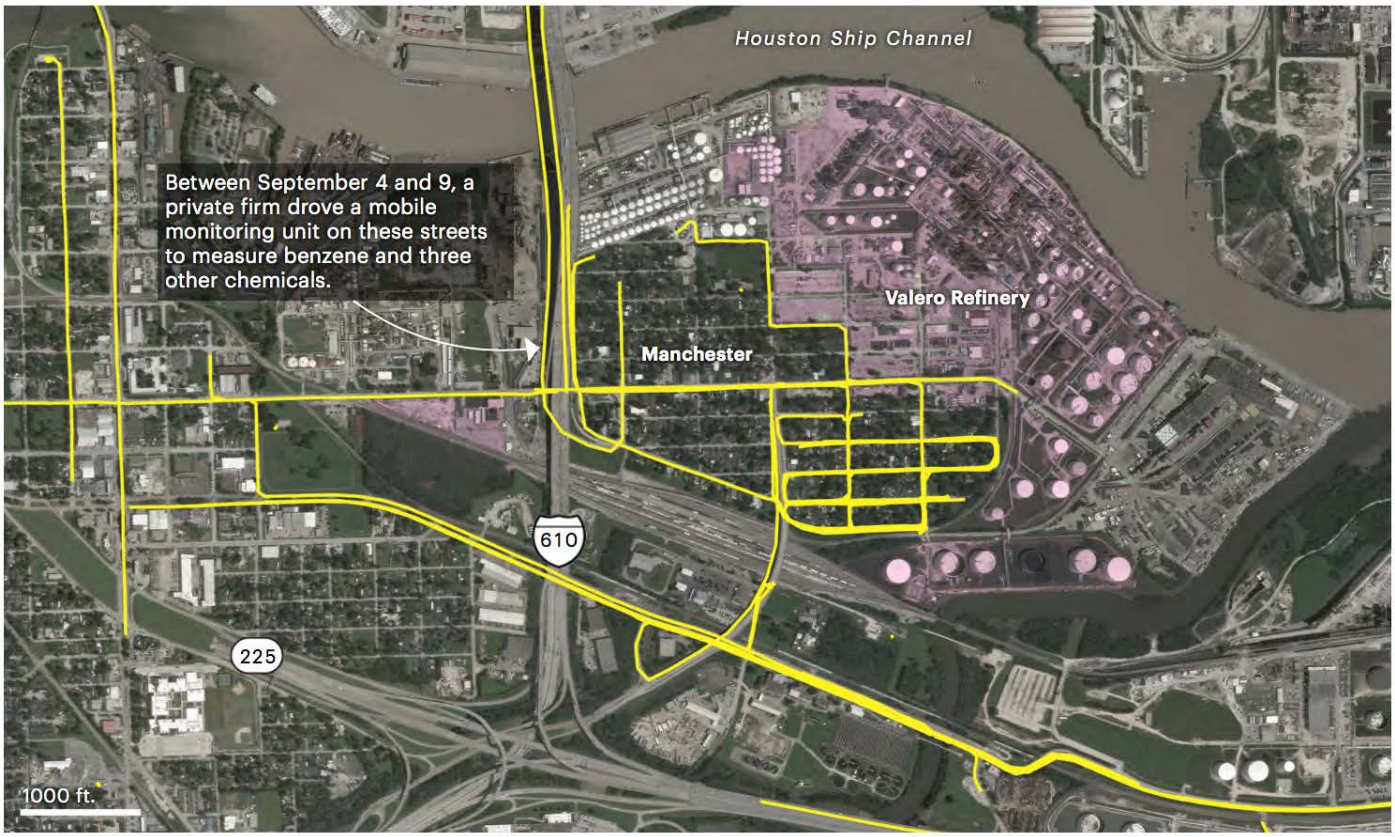

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The EPA said in a statement they inspected the refinery last week and were satisfied the company was making the necessary repairs. Valero did not respond to a request for comment.

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The EPA didn't respond to inquiries about the detailed data that came from its Manchester monitoring. The agency has posted maps showing additional monitoring it has conducted in other communities, but not the concentrations it found, only that all levels met Texas guidelines.

Aside from Manchester, Entanglement found another high benzene reading of 76 ppb at an industrial zone in Port Arthur, several miles from a residential area.

Hilton Kelley, a well-known community organizer in Port Arthur, said he noticed "a very pungent odor of sulfur dioxide and other toxic chemicals" during the week Entanglement was monitoring the air. "It makes your eyes water, it stings your sinuses, and it creates a scratchy feeling in your throat," he said.

The Port Arthur area is a hub of industrial activity including a Motiva refinery and an Oxbow facility that processes petcoke — a byproduct of oil refining.

Since the hurricane, local health concerns have been overshadowed by the more pressing need for housing, as hundreds of residents were evicted from damaged homes, Kelley said. "When your stomach's growling and you're sitting on the curb with three or four kids in the hot-ass sun, pollution is the last thing on your mind."

In the long-term, Kelley said he wants the TCEQ to put continuous air monitors at facility fence lines in Port Arthur. The current TCEQ monitors in Port Arthur only sample benzene and other air toxics once every six days.

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- Oil refineries and chemical plants across the Texas Gulf Coast released more than 1 million pounds of dangerous air pollutants in the week after Harvey struck, according to filings. [Full story]
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U.S.

Valero Houston Plant Underestimated Harvey Benzene Leak

Environmental advocates say state should have done more to assess safety of situation sooner

Valero Energy Partners' Houston refinery suffered a hurricane-related spill Aug. 27 from a light crude storage tank, the Environmental Protection Agency said. PHOTO: NICK OXFORD/REUTERS

By Alexandra Berzon

Updated Sept. 15, 2017 12:11 a.m. ET

The chemical plant that released a cloud of a carcinogenic chemical amid Hurricane Harvey and its aftermath in Houston's Manchester neighborhood in August emitted far more of the chemical than it had previously disclosed, environmental regulators said Thursday.

The plant, Valero Energy Partners ' Houston refinery, suffered a hurricane-related spill Aug. 27 from the damaged roof of a light crude storage tank, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency concluded in an investigation.

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carcinogenic chemical benzene were released into the air.

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Subsequently, Valero "has informed the EPA that it believes it significantly underestimated the amount of [volatile organic chemicals] and benzene released in its original report to the State of Texas Environmental Electronic Reporting System," a state official said in an emailed statement Thursday.

The state said it didn't yet have the amount the company had underreported.

A spokeswoman for Valero didn't respond to requests for comment Thursday.

The company believes that the emissions were high immediately after the roof failure and diminished over time as the company pumped residual crude material from the tank and assessed how to safely remove the crumpled roof from the tank, according to the state official.

A spokesman for the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality said Valero hadn't yet filed its final report on the incident, including an explanation of the cause of the damage.

Environmental advocates said the state should have done more to assess the safety of the situation sooner. Plants are supposed to report the highest possible amounts of emissions during unusual events and then revise them lower as more information comes in, said Elena Craft, a scientist at the Environmental Defense Fund who inspected the air around the plant with a mobile unit that came from California.

State air monitoring systems were shut down for several days during the storm. The state began using a specially equipped bus to analyze atmospheric gases on Sept. 5,

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a state official.

The tests showed air toxin readings below levels of health concern, he said.

Twenty residents from the Manchester area called a city hotline to report disturbing gas odors between Aug. 25 and Aug. 31, which prompted the city to take a reading of the area's air quality on Aug. 31, said Loren Raun, chief scientist for the city of Houston's health department.

While that reading didn't find anything unusual, a subsequent measurement Sept. 2 showed high levels of benzene, which increased in a reading two days later to 325 parts per billion, said Ms. Raun.

According to the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, amounts of nearly twice that in a 15-minute period can cause acute health effects such as dizziness and headaches. Still, it is unclear how much exposure there was and over what period of time, so the possible effects are difficult to assess, Ms. Raun said.

The benzene levels varied based on the wind and later disappeared, she said.

"The concentrations were concerning," Ms. Raun said. "We really want to make sure the community is protected from benzene at levels like that."

"We just don't know, and we did have the opportunity to know sooner than we did," said Ms. Craft, whose organization assisted in the city effort.

Other plants outside Houston also had significant outlays of benzene emissions during the storm period.

The environmental group Environment Texas, which tracks emissions reports to the state, said as of Wednesday companies had estimated in initial reports that there were 5.9 million pounds of emissions, primarily from shutdown and startup operations, because of the storm, including 55,000 pounds of benzene and 212,000 pounds of the carcinogen 1,3-butadiene.

That data are likely to be revised as companies update their initial reports in the coming days.

Corrections & Amplifications

Valero's Houston plant underestimated its benzene leak during Hurricane Harvey. An earlier version of the headline on this article incorrectly spelled the chemical as benzine. (Sept. 14, 2017)

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Appeared in the September 15, 2017, print edition as 'Texas Firm Underestimated Plant Leak.'

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EPA/TCEQ: Updated status of systems affected by Harvey

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EPA/ TCEQ: Updated status of systems affected by Harvey

Working together, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality continue to coordinate with local, state and federal officials to address the human health and environmental impacts of Hurricane Harvey and its aftermath, especially the water systems in the affected areas. The TCEQ has approximately 500 people and EPA has 263 people assisting in response to this natural disaster.

As part of this coordination, a Unified Command was established between the EPA, the TCEQ, the General Land Office, and the U.S. Coast Guard to oversee all emergency response efforts. This Unified Command is supported by three operational branches in Corpus Christi, Houston, and Port Arthur. In addition to the EPA, the TCEQ, the GLO, and the USCG, multiple agencies and groups are supporting each of the operational branches, including the Texas National Guard, 6th Civil Support Team; the Arkansas National Guard, 61st Civil Support Team; the Oklahoma Task Force 1; and the Texas State Guard Engineering Group. Branch personnel are working to continuously monitor water and wastewater systems, as well as assess spills or discharges as a result of the storm.

As of Thursday Sept 14, the following information is available:

Drinking Water: To date, about 2,238 drinking water systems have been affected by Harvey. Of those: 2,014 systems are fully operational, 77 have boil-water notices, and 19 are shut down. Both the EPA and the TCEQ are contacting remaining systems to gather updated information of their status. Assistance teams are in the field working directly with system operators to expedite getting systems back to operational status.

Wastewater and Sewage: The TCEQ has made contact with 1,219 wastewater treatment plants in the 58 counties within the Governor's Disaster Declaration. Of those, 31 are inoperable in the affected counties. The agencies are aware that releases of wastewater from sanitary sewers are occurring as a result of the historic flooding and are actively working to monitor facilities that have reported spills. Additionally, the agencies are conducting outreach and providing technical guidance to all other wastewater facilities in flood-impacted areas. Assistance teams will continue to be deployed to work directly with system operators to expedite getting systems back to operational status.

On September 12, EPA approved the Texas Water Development Board proposed approaches to utilized State Revolving Funds from EPA to address immediate recovery and future resiliency efforts in Texas.

Flood Water: Water quality sampling will be focused on industrial facilities and hazardous waste sites. Floodwaters contain many hazards, including bacteria and other contaminants. Precautions should be taken by anyone involved in cleanup activities or any others who may be exposed to flood waters. These precautions include heeding all warnings from local and state authorities regarding safety advisories. In addition to the

drowning hazards of wading, swimming, or driving in swift floodwaters, these waters can carry large objects that are not always readily visible that can cause injuries to those in the water. Other potential hazards include downed power lines and possible injuries inflicted by animals displaced by the floodwaters.

Critical Water Infrastructure: The TCEQ has made contact with the owners of the 340 dams in the impacted areas. There are 15 dams that have reported some type of damage. There have been no reports of downstream damage or loss of life. The TCEQ will be meeting with affected dam owners in the next week.

Additional EPA/TCEQ updates include:

Superfund Sites: The EPA and the TCEQ continue to get updates about the status of specific sites from the parties responsible for ongoing cleanup of the sites. The TCEQ has completed the assessment of all 17 state Superfund sites in the affected area. There were no major issues noted. The TCEQ will continue to monitor sites to ensure no further action is needed in regards to the storm.

The EPA completed site assessments at all 43 Superfund sites affected by the storm. Of these sites, two (San Jacinto Waste Pits and U.S. Oil Recovery) require additional assessment efforts. Underwater inspections by the EPA Dive Team at the San Jacinto Waste Pits site started this week and are continuing. No final determinations have been made by the Dive Team and their assessment is on-going. Repairs are underway on armored layer of the cap continue. The security cameras have not been restored and repairs are on-going. Yesterday, an EPA On-scene coordinator conducted an inspection of Vince Bayou to follow up on a rumor that material was offsite and did not find any evidence of a black oily discharge or material from the U.S. Oil Recovery site. The responsible party has been directed to sample the water standing in the open tanks and remove the excess storm waters. The responsible party has conducted operations to remove the excess water, and ensure that all materials in the former wastewater treatment tanks is secured.

The EPA or responsible parties have completed sampling the 34 Superfund sites in Texas and will finish sampling the 9 site in Louisiana tomorrow. Post-hurricane Superfund site summaries based on preliminary data results are being released.

Debris Management: The TCEQ, supported by EPA, launched a social media blitz to encourage the separation of debris today. The TCEQ has approved 118 Temporary Debris Management Sites in areas under the Federal or State Disaster Declaration designations. TCEQ regional offices and local authorities are actively overseeing the siting and implementation of debris and waste management plans in the affected area. EPA, TCEQ and Army Corps of Engineer field observers are visiting staging and landfills to ensure compliance with guidelines. View a map of all Temporary Debris Management Sites.

Reconnaissance/Orphan Containers: The TCEQ continues to lead in monitoring facilities that have reported spills. Orphan containers, which include drums and tanks, found floating in or washed up near waterways continue to be gathered, sorted and grouped by type, prior to shipping them off for safe, proper treatment and disposal. Reconnaissance and assessment of facilities and vessels are being conducted to identify any leaks or spills and responded to accordingly. The Unified Command is also working to ensure the disposal of oil and hazardous materials is conducted properly. Response personnel operating out of Corpus Christi are expected to complete their work this week.

Air Quality Monitoring: One of the many preparations for Hurricane Harvey included the EPA, the TCEQ, and other monitoring entities temporarily shutting down several air monitoring stations from the greater Houston, Corpus Christi, and Beaumont areas to protect valuable equipment from storm damage. Since then, state and local authorities have been working to get the systems up and running again as soon as possible. As of Monday, Sept. 11, the TCEQ's air monitoring network is operational 100 percent in Corpus Christi, 96 percent in Houston, and 86 percent in Beaumont. The TCEQ is working to get the complete network fully operational as soon as possible and we will notify the public when the 3 remaining monitors are online. Of the available air monitoring data collected from Aug. 24 through Sept. 14, all measured concentrations were well below levels of health concern. The EPA conducted air monitoring using the TAGA mobile air monitoring bus in southeast Houston neighborhoods nearest industrial sources and data reports for September 5, 6, 7, 10, 12, 13 are available online at www.epa.gov/hurricane-harvey . EPA has concluded that the probable source of benzene and volatile organic compound readings in the Manchester community in Houston was the roof failure and spill from a light crude storage tank at the Valero Houston Refinery during Hurricane Harvey. EPA investigation into Valero Houston Refinery response and cleanup activities will continue.

Today, TAGA mobile air monitoring bus began monitoring air quality around three additional industrial sources near Deer Park, Texas.

EPA also sent its aerial surveillance aircraft to conduct a screening level assessment to evaluate unreported or undetected releases from facilities with Risk Management and/or Response Plans within the hurricane impacted areas. EPA's plane instrumentation measured 13 chemicals. The Airborne Spectral Photometric Environmental Collection Technology (ASPECT) aircraft found no exceedances of the Texas comparison values. The screening level results from ASPECT were compared to the ASPECT list of the TCEQ's short-term Air Monitoring Comparison Values and found no exceedances of the short-term AMCVs.

Refineries/ Fuel Waivers: EPA approved the request from the State of Texas to continue to waive requirements for fuels in Texas through the end of the month to help address the emergency circumstances in Texas from Hurricanes Harvey and Irma.

For additional information please visit the: https://www.tceq.texas.gov/response/hurricanes

View the EPA Story Map about Hurricane Harvey Response activities: https://response.epa.gov/site/site_profile.aspx?site_id=12353

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SEPTEMBER 15, 2017 / 6:20 AM / UPDATED 15 MINUTES AGO

Oil and chemical spills from Hurricane Harvey big, but dwarfed by Katrina

Emily Flitter, Richard Valdmanis

FILE PHOTO: A car dealership is covered by Hurricane Harvey floodwaters near Houston, Texas, U.S. on August 29, 2017. REUTERS/Rick Wilking/File Photo

NEW YORK/BOSTON (Reuters) - More than 22,000 barrels of oil, refined fuels and chemicals spilled at sites across Texas in the wake of Hurricane Harvey, along with millions of cubic feet

of natural gas and hundreds of tons of other toxic substances, a Reuters review of company reports to the U.S. Coast Guard shows.

The spills, clustered around the heart of the U.S. oil industry, together rank among the worst environmental mishaps in the country in years, but fall far short of the roughly 190,000 barrels spilled in Louisiana in 2005 after Hurricane Katrina - the last major storm to take dead aim at the U.S. Gulf Coast.

Harvey slammed ashore in Texas on Aug. 26, unleashing record flooding around Houston that destroyed countless homes, displaced around a million people and killed scores.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency warned people affected by the storm to avoid floodwaters, saying they could contain bacteria and other dangerous substances, but the agency has so far provided few details about spills. The EPA said earlier this week it was responding to more than a dozen spills in the wake of Harvey, but said it could not immediately provide volume estimates.

The U.S. Coast Guard reports showed over 22,000 barrels of crude oil, gasoline, diesel, drilling wastewater, and petrochemicals spilled from refineries, storage terminals and other facilities in the days after the storm.

Nearly half of those came from a 10,988-barrel spill of unleaded gasoline from Magellan Midstream Partners' storage facility (MMP.N) in Galena Park, Texas, according to the reports, confirmed by a company official.

"We expect clean-up operations to be completed within a few weeks," the company said in an email on Thursday. Most of the gasoline had been removed, it said, including quantities that spilled offsite and into the Houston Ship Channel, and remaining work was mainly focused on removing contaminated soil.

The Coast Guard filings also showed some 365 tons of toxic chemicals like sulfur dioxide, ammonia, toluene, benzene, and carbon monoxide escaped from facilities during the storm.

In addition, some 27 million cubic feet (765,000 cubic meters) of natural gas, 1,000 tons of asphalt, and unknown quantities of other substances from more than 200 other incidents also

escaped, according to the data.

Officials for the Coast Guard and the EPA did not immediately respond to requests for comment on the filings.

As some spill estimates were preliminary, it was too early to assess pollution damage from the storm, said Tom Pelton, a spokesman for environmental advocacy group the Environmental Integrity Project.

One company is already raising its spill estimates: Valero Energy Corp (VLO.N) told the EPA it probably underestimated the emissions of dangerous chemicals when the roof of a tank at its Houston refinery collapsed in the storm.

Katrina caused 190,000 barrels of oil spills along the Louisiana coastline, according to Donald Davis, the administrator of the Louisiana Applied Oil Spill Research and Development Program, who presented his findings to the EPA in 2006.

Reporting by Emily Flitter and Richard Valdmanis, Editing by Rosalba O'Brien

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NEW ORLEANS, AUGUST 29 – A garbage truck makes its way through standing water as New Orleans prepares for flooding from Hurricane Harvey on August 29, 2017 in New Orleans, Louisiana. Today marks 12 years since Hurricane Katrina made landfall which killed at least 1836 people. (Photo by Chris Graythen/Getty Images)

NEW ORLEANS, AUGUST 29 – A garbage truck makes its way through standing water as New Orleans prepares for flooding from Hurricane Harvey on August 29, 2017 in New Orleans, Louisiana. Today marks 12 years since Hurricane Katrina made landfall which killed at least 1836 people.

Chris Graythen

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Hurricane Harvey and its aftermath have dumped trillions of [illegible] ys. Homes, office buildings and other structures along the Gulf C[illegible] heir occupants forced to find higher ground. To reach safety, mos[illegible] some cases for hours.

Scientists, including Lane Voorhies, a senior environmental s[illegible] about what this water might contain.

"The potential for contamination is everywhere," Voorhies to[illegible] ent. In particular, he worried about the health effects among people [illegible] might have gotten cut while walking through the murky depths. Pe[illegible] lerly and young children would also be more susceptible to illness[illegible]

Based on sampling he'd done during previous flooding events, Voorhies took three samples on Thursday of floodwaters from different locations in Houston, though all in close proximity. He sent the samples to A&B Environmental Services, Inc. to be laboratory tested for sewage-related bacteria, chemicals and heavy metals, including arsenic, lead, mercury, cadmium, chromium and silver.

On Friday, Senthilkumar Sevukan, lab manager and microbiologist at A&B Lab, delivered the results.

Coliform and E. Coli

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Hearing these numbers, Wilma Subra, president of the Subra Company, an environmental consulting firm, audibly gasped.

"First of all, the drinking water for coliform should be non-detect and here you have these very, very elevated levels," she said. "These levels indicate the potential for sewer plant malfunction or sewer plant continuing to discharge untreated or partially treated waste."

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Mother Jones

Harvey's Poorest Victims Will Never Rebuild. They're Getting Evicted.

Houston's zoning has left them defenseless.

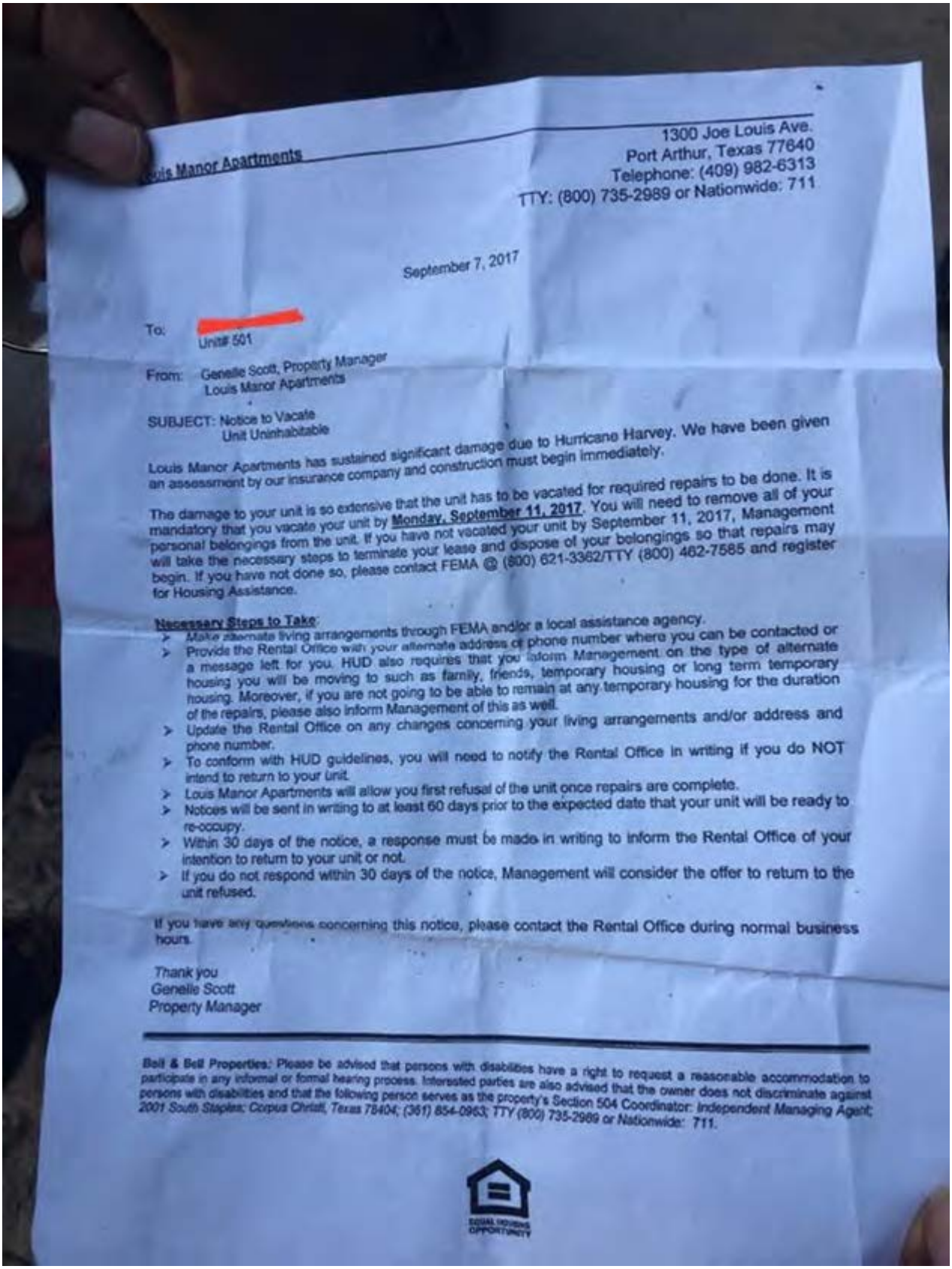
BRENTIN MOCK SEP. 15, 2017 6:00 AM

Matt Rourke/AP

This story was originally published by CityLab *and appears here as part of the* Climate Desk *collaboration.*

Hilton Kelley has been sounding off on Facebook Live the past few days about families who evacuated their homes to escape Hurricane Harvey and are now getting eviction notices. The

families live in Port Arthur, Texas, the small Gulf Coast city about 90 miles east of Houston, but are currently scattered across Louisiana and Texas. Kelley himself had to evacuate—his fourth time doing so in the last 15 years due to hurricane flooding—but was able to make it back to his home last week. He's now trying to locate as many dispersed families as possible via social media to find out who hasn't come back and why. That's when he found out about the eviction notices.



uis Manor Apartments

1300 Joe Louis Ave.
Port Arthur, Texas 77640
Telephone: (409) 982-6313
TTY: (800) 735-2989 or Nationwide: 711

September 7, 2017

To: [redacted]
Unit# 501

From: Genelle Scott, Property Manager
Louis Manor Apartments

SUBJECT: Notice to Vacate
Unit Uninhabitable

Louis Manor Apartments has sustained significant damage due to Hurricane Harvey. We have been given an assessment by our insurance company and construction must begin immediately.

The damage to your unit is so extensive that the unit has to be vacated for required repairs to be done. It is mandatory that you vacate your unit by **Monday, September 11, 2017**. You will need to remove all of your personal belongings from the unit. If you have not vacated your unit by September 11, 2017, Management will take the necessary steps to terminate your lease and dispose of your belongings so that repairs may begin. If you have not done so, please contact FEMA @ (800) 621-3362/TTY (800) 462-7585 and register for Housing Assistance.

Necessary Steps to Take:

- Make alternate living arrangements through FEMA and/or a local assistance agency.
- Provide the Rental Office with your alternate address or phone number where you can be contacted or a message left for you. HUD also requires that you inform Management on the type of alternate housing you will be moving to such as family, friends, temporary housing or long term temporary housing. Moreover, if you are not going to be able to remain at any temporary housing for the duration of the repairs, please also inform Management of this as well.
- Update the Rental Office on any changes concerning your living arrangements and/or address and phone number.
- To conform with HUD guidelines, you will need to notify the Rental Office in writing if you do NOT intend to return to your unit.
- Louis Manor Apartments will allow you first refusal of the unit once repairs are complete.
- Notices will be sent in writing to at least 60 days prior to the expected date that your unit will be ready to re-occupy.
- Within 30 days of the notice, a response must be made in writing to inform the Rental Office of your intention to return to your unit or not.
- If you do not respond within 30 days of the notice, Management will consider the offer to return to the unit refused.

If you have any questions concerning this notice, please contact the Rental Office during normal business hours.

Thank you
Genelle Scott
Property Manager

Bell & Bell Properties: Please be advised that persons with disabilities have a right to request a reasonable accommodation to participate in any informal or formal hearing process. Interested parties are also advised that the owner does not discriminate against persons with disabilities and that the following person serves as the property's Section 504 Coordinator: *Independent Managing Agent; 2001 South Staples; Corpus Christi, Texas 78404; (361) 854-0963; TTY (800) 735-2989 or Nationwide: 711.*

EQUAL HOUSING OPPORTUNITY

Hilton Kelley

Those kinds of blindsiding evictions are a rootshock that many renter families in New Orleans know too well, as the same happened for Hurricane Katrina. Plenty of New Orleanians didn't even get a notice—instead they found out via TV that they would not be able to return to their

homes. This certainly was true for tenants of the city's "Big Four" public housing projects, which were closed for good during Katrina even though many of them collected no floodwaters.

This is the kind of displacement that Kelley fights to help families avoid, through his nonprofit Community In-Power and Development Association(CIDA), which advocates on behalf of families living under the constant threat of environmental disasters.

That doesn't just mean flooding and hurricanes. Port Arthur is saturated with oil refineries and petrochemical plants, many of them located within yards of homes, schools, and playgrounds. The Carver Terrace public housing projects in Port Arthur were completely surrounded by these poisonous industries before they were torn down just last year, which Kelley had been petitioning the federal government to do for years. All of Carver Terrace's tenants were relocated, to finally remove them from the clouds of air pollution molesting their lungs and nostrils every day.

That kind of displacement was necessary—requested, even, from the tenants themselves. The involuntary kind of displacement, however, that's becoming a more frequent event in Port Arthur due to heavier and harsher storms, is getting harder for Kelley to weather. He contemplated for a moment not returning to his home and restaurant that he runs after his most recent evacuation from Harvey. He changed his mind only after considering what he'd lose and how difficult it would be starting over in another city.

"There are sharks out there waiting for us to let loose what we have here and swoop in as we migrate out," says Kelley. "Industries will just engulf this land and then we've lost what we've owned. I own property here. When I leave here, I don't own anything in Dallas, or Colorado, or New York. And I can't imagine trying to buy a restaurant or a home there in this present situation."

Displacement like this is increasingly becoming inevitable for people of color, not just because of climate change and extreme weather events, but because of discriminatory policies that push them into unlivable conditions. It's a reality that is rarely confronted when it comes time to map out where people can and can't rebuild. But ignoring it likely means that policies for rebuilding will suffer from the same disparities that have predated recent storm recoveries by several decades.

The problem of displacement is even more pronounced for Latinos. At the same time that Harvey was devastating the land, Trump decided to recall DACA, which put thousands of

immigrant children at even greater risk. If Congress approves Trump's request, then those children will face the kind of relocation that doesn't just send them to another city, but rather, to a detention center, and then to another country that they, in many cases, have no real connection to, if they grew up in the U.S.

Bryan Parras, an organizer with Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services (t.e.j.a.s), is working a lot these days with Latino families who are bracing for recovery from both Harvey and Trump's restrictive immigration policies. Displacement is a threat that always lurks around Latino communities, and their options for sanctuary are growing more limited, especially as new storms keep gathering in the Gulf.

"That's what disaster does—it really destroys the fabric of a community and that's even deeper destruction, because it's psychological, it's spiritual, it's cultural," says Parras. "Even if they stay, that place is different. It's been traumatized, so staying doesn't guarantee that you'll be able to maintain those cultural ties to your neighbors."

"There is no true security"

An equitable recovery will be especially difficult in Houston given that the city doesn't believe in zoning. It's because of that absence of zoning restrictions that pollution is concentrated in the east side of the city, all the way down the Shipping Channel to Port Arthur, along which lives the heaviest concentration of Latino and African-American families. This is also where the heaviest concentration of petrochemical facilities, toxic Superfund sites,overflowing sewers, garbage incinerators, and landfills are located.

"This no-zoning policy has allowed for a somewhat erratic land-use pattern in the city," wrote environmental justice scholars Robert Bullard and Beverly Wright in their 2012 book, *The Wrong Complexion for Protection: How the Government Response to Disaster Endangers African American Communities*. "Houston's black neighborhoods were unofficially 'zoned' for garbage."

And now that hash of toxic chemicals and trash are spilled across those same neighborhoods in Houston, where black and Latino families have fewer resources for recovery. Public health officials are telling people not to touch the floodwaters, particularly in those places where volatile, flammable, and poisonous chemicals have spilled.

These problems were avoidable. Environmental justice advocates had been petitioning the federal government for years to update the chemical disaster rule in EPA's risk management

program, to better protect families living on the fenceline of these refineries and chemical plants. Obama issued an executive order in 2016 requesting the EPA to begin making these risk management program adjustments. However, one of the first orders of business for Trump when he took the White House this year was to delay those updates.

Nine months later, families' homes are surrounded by a toxic stew created from the discharges of oil refineries, overflowing sewers, and exploding chemical plants. We've not yet seen the toxicology report to see what kind of short- and long-term effects these spills and explosions will have on people's health. Meanwhile, the 29th congressional district that includes these communities has been known for a long time as the district with the least number of people with health insurance in the state with the least number of uninsured people.

Not only that, but these families are also living in cities where the infrastructure for stormwater and flood management is aged and in disrepair. This only deepens the racial disparities at play when it comes to exposure to environmental risks and the increased likelihood of displacement. New Orleans is a prime example of this—flooding was caused by the levees that burst during Katrina twelve years ago, and the city suffered massive flooding again just last month despite the multi-billion dollar reconstruction of those levees. African Americans in the city have the hardest time recovering their homes and communities.

"There is no true security—we can, at best, reduce risk, not eliminate it," says the New Orleans-based geographer Richard Campanella. "Engineering devices (such as levees and floodwalls) enabled this deltaic city to become a modern metropolis. But they also tended to produce a false sense of security. People took for granted that those engineering devices would always work as designed. At least twice in the past twelve years, they didn't."

New Orleans' recent flooding was the culprit of a faulty drainage system—one that was considered the "best in the world" a century ago, according to Mark Davis, director of Tulane University's Institute on Water Resources Law and Policy. But it was a system that did not keep up with the rapid growth and urbanization of New Orleans in the decades following. Similar was true in Houston for Harvey, where flooding on the west side of the city was the consequence of an inadequate reservoir system that engineers said was badly in need of updating decades ago.

"What we're seeing in Texas is a reminder that they could easily have had this much rain with no hurricane force winds whatsoever," says Davis. "It was a slow moving storm with enough low pressure that essentially [water] rises and it makes it hard for the place to drain. We're really

going to have to start thinking in terms of what natural risks we're running and what reasons we're running them for and whether we're being honest with ourselves about what that really means from an investment and justice standpoint."

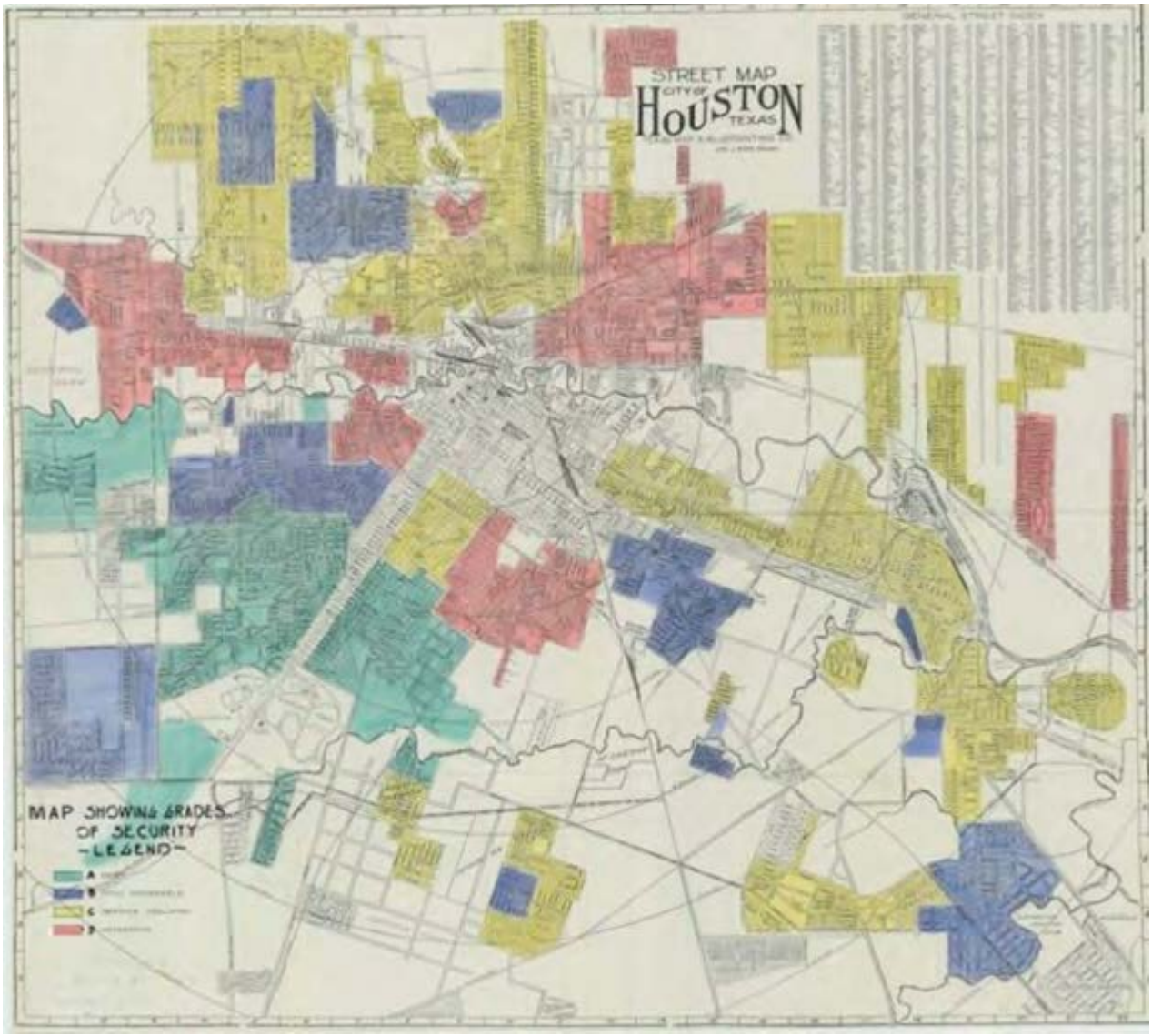
Indivisible Houston

Bullard, a noted environmental justice activist and scholar, has been talking about these problems since his first book, *Invisible Houston*, published 30 years ago this month. The "invisible" parts of the city are those black and Latino neighborhoods overlooked or ignored when making decisions about new urban development. These are places where people of color live not because they chose to, but because of racist policies like redlining. Bullard warns that these communities could be rendered invisible again during the Harvey recovery phase.

"When you start talking about how you are going to rebuild and recover, that has to be watched closely because if not it's just going to be a rebuilding on top of inequity," says Bullard, who today is based in Houston as a professor of urban planning and environmental policy at Texas Southern University. "If we're not careful, those areas might be rebuilt with all kinds of protections, greening them up with more resiliency, but it will push out people who lived in those neighborhoods for a long time—so you get that rebuilding gentrification going on."

The phenomenon Bullard references is called "climate gentrification" in some corners—and this is a major concern for black communities in south Florida, as Irma takes its destructive path. It seems wrong to give climate change that kind of credit, though. The people of these heaviest-hit communities are vulnerable to displacement because of the injustices they lived with long before any floods and storms. They live in flood-prone communities because of racist policies like redlining that piloted the segregation still seen today.

As Susan Rogers explained in the blog OffCite last year about the Homeowners' Loan Corporation redlining maps of Houston from the 1930s, "the racism is clearly evident" in the areas designated for disinvestment. The maps with the cooler colors (blue, green) were assigned to neighborhoods that the HOLC determined were safe for lending. The warmer colors (yellow, red) were labeled as "declining" or "hazardous" neighborhoods that lenders should avoid. This was one kind of zoning that apparently Houston was willing to live with.



Courtesy of Offcite

As it happens, neighborhoods with high concentrations of African Americans were painted as not cool for investment. One of the documents culpable in that redlining process was the Federal Housing Administration's "Planning Profitable Neighborhoods," guidance created for homebuilders, primarily for the suburbs. Writes Rogers:

> The "Planning Profitable Neighborhoods" bulletin describes and illustrates in a series of drawings "good" and "bad" development practices. Without fail, these drawings define the now-typical suburban models of discontinuous streets, large lots, and strip malls as "good" and traditional urban typologies as "bad." In effect, the combined policies and practices such as "redlining" ensured that central cities, mixed-use areas, and neighborhoods of color would decline.

That decline didn't only come from the denial of lending and investment in those neighborhoods. It also happened because the models recognized in "good" neighborhoods—those "large lots," for example—are what ended up making the city even more prone to flooding. Besides the city's faulty storm water management, Houston also suffers regularly from urban flooding due to the copious levels of parking lots and impervious surfaces paved over the city. So, what was "good" and profitable for sprawl and the suburbs is what also increased the vulnerability of these redlined neighborhoods, making their designation as "hazardous" somewhat of a self-sealing premise.

Pinning displacement or gentrification on climate change only absolves the direct state and city actors who pushed black and Latino families into "hazardous" living conditions to begin with. That history should not be simply paved over in the recovery.

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Include Superfund site in Harvey relief efforts

Posted: Friday, September 15, 2017 12:00 am

We expect some basic things from government: most people agree that protection from enemies, both foreign and domestic describes one key role. We have spent huge amounts to fight foreign enemies, but combating the problems we face at home does not come easy for Austin or Washington, and our community hurts because of it.

I'm not talking about more funds for firefighters, police, and teachers, though they need it. I'm also not talking about ensuring that we can all find affordable healthcare that gives us comprehensive coverage and does not threaten financial ruin.

I'm talking about the invisible problems that we live with. Poisons emitted by industry to our air, water, and soil that can be controlled in normal conditions but have been made exponentially worse by natural disasters like Hurricane Harvey where they cause harm to our families, reduce our property values, and make us all less healthy and prosperous.

Stop and ask yourself: Should we be surprised that Superfund sites like the San Jacinto Waste Pits flooded during Hurricane Harvey and spread their pollution onto nearby people, the river and the bay?

The storm was predictable and so are the results. Our protection system, the EPA and state regulators, have made decisions over the years that have allowed industry to save money at the cost of putting our community and people at risk. Harvey has made that "hypothetical" risk a reality and has poisoned our community.

Rather than sit idly while Washington and Austin continue to let the poisons linger in our water, we should be demanding that these flooded sites be cleaned as a part of the Hurricane Harvey relief effort.

The San Jacinto Pits, containing uncontrolled dioxin (a very toxic and persistent poison) wastes, has been bogged down in a regulatory morass for almost 20 years while the appropriate method of cleanup was studied and debated, and liability for costs was litigated and assigned to the polluters.

During this time, everyone knew that our area, with the San Jac Pits and 40 other Superfund sites, 13 of which that also flooded during Harvey, was likely to experience hurricanes and flooding that could spread the pollution and expose more people to danger. After all, destructive hurricanes hit our coast on average every 15 years.

Congress and our state lawmakers must act now to make protection of the people and cleanup of these vulnerable sites a priority. We must demand that disaster recovery funds be allocated to begin this process immediately. Our lawmakers know that even after a site is designated a Superfund site, cleanup can take decades.

For sites like the San Jac Pits, waiting for the process to inch along has real life consequences for communities. With immediate attention, cleanup can be accomplished in a few years. Recovering the costs from the polluters can and should take place; but that process is slower and that can be done once the public is protected.

I'm a geologist and an environmental and risk management consultant, so I understand the problem and know the solution.

If our leaders, who are charged with the responsibility of domestic protection, really want to help make America great, they can start by taking immediate steps to resolve the current situation and clean up the mess caused by Harvey.

Just as important, they need to address the likely recurrence of this mess by requiring industry and other parties responsible for the pollution to have realistic and enforceable contingency plans and systems in place where predictable natural hazards can overwhelm protections that would be adequate under normal conditions. That would protect us from serious harm to our people and communities.

We have the opportunity to make it happen, but only if we demand that flooded Superfund sites are included in the Harvey relief efforts. We also must demand that our leaders use this as a learning event where they will modify the requirements on other sites to avoid a similar situation in the future. That is the only way to force our leaders in Washington and Austin to do their job to protect us from domestic problems – problems literally in our own backyard.

Jon Powell is a geologist and former mayor of Taylor Lake Village.

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EDITORIALS

Lingering threats to health

Houstonians have a right to know about the toxic effects of Harvey's floodwaters.

Copyright 2017: Houston Chronicle | September 14, 2017 | Updated: September 14, 2017 7:23pm

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Photo: Mark Mulligan, Staff Photographer

Houston firefighters use a borrowed canoe to search for evacuees during extreme flooding in Meyerland in the wake of Hurricane Harvey on Aug. 27. (Mark Mulligan / Houston Chronicle)

It took about two weeks for firefighters to start dying from radiation sickness at the Chernobyl nuclear plant. As they rushed into the flames in the Ukrainian morning, the crew didn't know if they were responding to an electrical fire or a core meltdown, nor were they informed about the radioactive threat posed by the debris and smoke.

To date, seven firefighter deaths have been attributed to the 1986 disaster - the most recent in 2004, when one of the heads of the fire brigade died from cancer.

First responders to disasters are not only heroes, but often the first victims.

As Houston recovers from Hurricane Harvey, we have to wonder what toxic chemicals and dangerous bacteria are hiding in the muck and have become ticking timebombs to the long-term health of our firefighters, police officers and cleanup crews. Federal, state and local government must ensure that our public servants and volunteers don't succumb to some hidden illness.

We already know that the waters were dangerous.

"Everybody has to consider the floodwater contaminated," Dr. David E. Persse, the chief medical officer of Houston, said after the storm. While area homes are drying out, the floodwaters' toxins may linger. They could settle into sediment, seep into our groundwater, or drain into our bayous, rivers and bays.

In the Clayton Homes public housing development downtown, along the Buffalo Bayou, an analysis paid for by the New York Times found startlingly high levels of E. coli in standing water in one family's living room - levels 135 times those considered safe.

More troubling: The team of scientists found elevated levels of lead, arsenic and other heavy metals.

One volunteer nearly lost his life due to contamination from the floodwaters, as documented by Chronicle reporter Daniela Sternitzky-Di Napoli. J.R. Atkins was

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hospitalized with a deadly flesh-eating bacteria after kayaking through floodwaters to check on his neighbors.

Seven first responders are suing Arkema Inc. after being sickened by toxic fumes at the company's facility in Crosby. Communities near Superfund sites, such as the San Jacinto waste pits, are left to wonder if they're putting their lives at risk by trying to clean up their homes.

The federal Environmental Protection Agency and its state counterpart, the Texas Environmental Quality Commission, owe it to the people who are going to be doing the dirty work of rebuilding after Harvey to sample what's in area yards, ditches, water wells and creeks. These environmental agencies have focused their water quality sampling on industrial facilities and hazardous waste sites. That is not enough. These agencies owe it to the many weary and careworn people who are moving back into ravaged homes to conduct more tests on the nature and extent of the contamination throughout the county and to release these results expeditiously. The agencies have a duty to make the public aware of the specific contaminants and any potential long-term hazards.

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OUTLOOK

Fleming: Houston deserves a truly democratic recovery from Harvey

Climate change: Let's talk openly and honestly

Lingering threats to health

Friday letters: Texas' future and surge protection

Friday letters: DACA, Tragedy Tax, flood worries

So far, they're failing at that task. The EPA has not released specifics about air pollution levels in east Houston after Harvey, according to the Texas Tribune. And in a kick while we're down, the federal agency has also announced plans to shutter its Houston-area regional lab.

Instead, the regulatory burden is being pushed onto Harris County and the city of Houston. Perhaps the EPA and TCEQ missed the headlines, but our local governments have just been hit with more than 50 inches of rain and the budgets of their health departments have been stretched thin.

The Gulf Coast can't be expected to rely on the New York Times to serve as makeshift pollution enforcers. Our environmental agencies must do their jobs.

After the Chernobyl disaster, Soviet citizens were left in the dark about the true dangers they faced. Fatality lists were kept secret, and government denied demands for transparency. The entire crisis became a symbol of the Soviet Union's failures.

As Houston rebuilds, federal and state officials must show that they can keep people safe in the wake of the worst disasters - not only from the immediate threat, but also the dangers that can linger for decades. Houston doesn't need more victims of Harvey.

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Planned closure of Houston EPA lab draws protests

By Bill Lambrecht, San Antonio Express-News | September 14, 2017

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WASHINGTON - Conservationists and labor union officials argued Wednesday that the potential closing of the Environmental Protection Agency's regional lab in Houston, which is expected to play a key role in Hurricane Harvey recovery, is among harmful impacts of the Trump administration's drive to slice staff and mission in the agency.

The EPA's Region 6 Environmental Services Laboratory, which serves a five-state region, is scheduled for closing when the lease on its rented, 41,000 square-foot space in southwest Houston expires in 2020, officials of the American Federation of Government Employees said they were told.

What happens after that, the EPA isn't saying.

The lab employs roughly 50 people, including chemists and biologists. Much of its work has been focused on testing samples from Superfund sites in the region.

In recent days, the lab has been an EPA staging area in the aftermath of Harvey, a scientist at the lab said, adding that employees were told they can expect to do water testing during the recovery.

The potential closing raises the prospect that water or soil samples in the future might need to be sent to another EPA lab or, perhaps, tested by independent contractors. The nearest EPA regional lab is in Ada, Okla., 400 miles from Houston.

At a news conference in Washington called to protest pending EPA cuts, critics said the decision to close the existing lab is ill-advised and would complicate the agency's work in the Gulf region.

"What's in the water coming into my house? The EPA is the agency that everybody is counting on," said the Sierra Club's Mary Anne Hitt, referring to the agency's role after disasters like Harvey.

TRANSLATOR

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John O'Grady, who heads the AFGE section representing EPA employees, called the potential closing "disconcerting." Speaking at the news conference, he added: "We have a laboratory in Houston that is state of the art and is situated directly in an industrial petrochemical complex. And that laboratory is slated for closure. Why? How much money are we going to save with that?"

Clovis Steib, an EPA employee and the union president in the Dallas region, said in an interview that EPA officials told him in April about the decision to close the lab.

"The sobering news given to me was that in 2019 they would start tying together loose ends and in 2020 the facility would close because they are not going to renew the lease. They would shutter it. And people there wonder, of course, what does that mean for me?"

The EPA recently offered buyouts to 12 people at the lab; three of them accepted the packages, Steib said.

Union officials visited offices of Texas members of Congress on Wednesday seeking to build support for keeping the Houston facility open.

In an email, David Gray, the EPA's acting deputy regional administrator for Region 6, acknowledged that that the lease in Houston won't be renewed but disputed the union's conclusions.

"We are looking at alternatives that will continue to provide the analytical services to support our mission critical work in the Dallas office," he said.

As a candidate, President Donald Trump vowed to reduce the EPA to "little tidbits" and early in his administration proposed reducing the agency's budget by 31 percent and cutting staff by one-fourth. Those cuts have since been scaled back by appropriators in Congress, but the reductions likely will be significant.

For years before Trump arrived, discussions took place in Washington about a change in the EPA's approach to managing its 37 laboratories – including ten regional labs – that are housed in 170 buildings in 30 cities.

The Government Accountability Office reported six years ago that the agency had ignored recommendations dating back to the 1990s about the value of consolidating or realigning labs.

Hoping to stave off closure, Houston lab employees intend to give Congress a better understanding of what they have accomplished in recent years.

For instance, they quickly analyzed over 3,000 samples as part of a PCBs removal action at the Old ESCO Manufacturing Superfund site in Greenville, according to reports to EPA headquarters.

The Houston lab analyzed sediment samples collected in surveys of ocean-dredge sites in the Gulf of Mexico, testing for PCBs, pesticide residues and metals, among other pollutants.

For criminal cases in the region, the lab does testing both in the investigative phase and in preparation for prosecution, the report noted.

A lab employee said that the uncertainty about whether workers will have jobs or be offered transfers weighs heavily.

"We just don't know what the future is. The stress level under these circumstances is incredible," said the employee, who requested anonymity because employees are prohibited from speaking to reporters.

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http://www.wacotrib.com/news/city_of_waco/highway-landfill-opponents-city-clash-on-pollution-record-of-existing/article_71108abb-fb01-55e3-97a5-741883db3ec8.html

Highway 84 Landfill opponents, city clash on pollution record of existing landfill

By J.B. SMITH jbsmith@wacotrib.com 14 hrs ago

Workers use heavy equipment to move trash at the Waco Regional Landfill.

Staff photo — Rod Aydelotte

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The campaign against a new landfill off Highway 84 has opened up a new front, as opponents allege that past city mismanagement of the existing landfill next door fouled Lake Waco.

In a press release this week, Citizens Against the Highway 84 Landfill cite environmental violations that state regulators found in 2001 and 2003 as evidence that runoff from the landfill polluted Waco's drinking water source.

City officials say that conclusion is unfounded, and in an official statement Tuesday city leaders accused the group of resorting to "scare tactics."

Bradford Holland, president of the anti-landfill group, sent out the press release earlier Tuesday in response to an opinion-page interview printed in Sunday's Tribune-Herald, in which Mayor Kyle Deaver said it was "unthinkable" that city staff would recommend a landfill site that would jeopardize Lake Waco.

"The one thing that bothers me most is that they would think our city management would put a landfill in a place where it would damage our water supply," Deaver said in the interview.

"Further, we've operated the site right next to the proposed site on Old Lorena Road all this time successfully. We take all the right measures to avoid that kind of problem."

Weighing few options, more trash: Q&A with Waco leaders on landfill prospects

Holland took issue with the statement, stating “it is clear that the mayor is unaware of the prior contamination of Lake Waco from the landfill at the current site.”

“Our group stands behind our evidence that the new landfill site significantly threatens the quality of the drinking water in Waco, despite the Mayor’s assertion that everything will be OK,” he wrote in the press release. “Given the completely unforeseeable events taking place around Houston with flooding and contamination, the Mayor’s line of thinking seems woefully ignorant of the potential for major problems.”

At issue are enforcement actions in the early 2000s by the state’s environmental agency, now known as the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

The city received a penalty of $22,000 in 2002 for a long list of regulatory violations found the prior year, ranging from improper signage and record-keeping to insufficient slope coverage, leachate management problems and the discharge of

contaminated water from a composting area "into the waters of the state."

In 2004, the city was slapped with an $18,750 penalty for another series of violations, including coverage deficiencies and another "failure to prevent the unauthorized discharge of contaminated water."

City officials don't deny that the landfill had operational problems in the early 2000s that led it to be listed as being in "poor" compliance with state regulations.

Even so, city solid waste director Anna Dunbar said there's no evidence in the TCEQ reports that the 2001 and 2003 incidents resulted in pollution of Lake Waco.

Dunbar knows something about the matter. As regional director of the state environmental agency from 2001 to 2011, she signed the notices of enforcement and authorized the penalties against the city of Waco in 2002 and 2004.

She said "waters of the state" is a broad term that could include a small marsh, a spring, a ditch or a private lake.

In the 2001 incident, an investigation report found water from the compost area ran into a ditch. But Dunbar said it's not clear whether that ditch discharged into Cloice Creek, the tributary that runs from the landfill to the South Bosque River, which feeds Lake Waco.

Silt in stock pond

In the second incident, TCEQ inspector Diane Massey noted that silt from the construction of a new landfill cell had washed into a stock pond of adjacent landowner Barry Gross. The pond is located on a tributary of Cloice Creek, but no mention is made of testing for contamination downstream of the pond.

"In the report, there's a discussion of a cleanup of silt, but nowhere in the report does it say anything about Lake Waco," Dunbar said. "No samples were taken at Lake Waco, and a site visit was not made to Lake Waco."

Dunbar said she trained investigators at that time to sample downstream if there was a suspicion of contamination, but that didn't happen in this case.

The pond and the Gross property have since been sold to the city of Waco and are part of the proposed new landfill site. An April 2017 TCEQ investigation found that the pond was clear and supported a fish population, and samples showed no contamination.

In a followup email response with the Tribune-Herald, Holland said that the evidence for the contamination of Lake Waco in the early 2000s is sufficient.

"It should not take water samples with toxic levels of 'substance X' to prove contamination of downstream water sources," he said. "That's simply not the standard in this case. The standard is that contaminated leachate has entered surrounding public/state water, and we have presented proof of that."

Leachate, the contaminated fluids that seep out of piles of trash, is collected at the Waco Regional Landfill by a system of pipes at the bottom of plastic-lined cells and is sent to the city sewer system to be cleaned.

Despite the citations for leachate management issues, Dunbar said there is no indication in the 2001 and 2003 reports that leachate left the landfill site.

City disputes claims of potential landfill threat to Lake Waco

In his press release, Holland singles out Deputy City Manager Wiley Stem, whose administrative responsibilities included the landfill during the violations recorded in the early 2000s.

“The mayor puts all trust in Wiley Stem, who was the one at the helm when these contamination incidents happened before,” Holland said. “Why the mayor listens to his city staff rather than scientific experts armed with facts is mind-boggling.”

Stem said he is proud of the progress the Waco Regional Landfill has made since 2004. The landfill's compliance has been listed as "good" throughout the current decade, and sampling has shown healthy water downstream.

"We've really put a high priority on running a quality landfill, as evidenced by the high aquatic life ratings on the South Bosque," he said.

Trash is moved into place at the Waco Regional Landfill.

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Staff photo — Rod Aydelotte

Belton: Dog Ridge Water Supply Corp issues boil order

(File)

By Staff | Posted: Thu 1:51 PM, Sep 14, 2017 | Updated: Thu 3:12 PM, Sep 14, 2017

BELTON, Texas (KWTX) The Dog Ridge Water Supply Company issued a boil order Thursday for some of its customers.

The order affects customers in the Whispering Hollow subdivision, off FM 1670 and the streets of Whisper Trail and Whisper Hollow Road.

Customers in those areas may experience a loss of water pressure as crews repair a flush valve.

Water intended for consumption, cooking or ice making should be boiled vigorously before use.

Ada, OK: This Brilliant Company Is Disrupting A $200 Billion Industry
EVERQUOTE

Governor tours Austin FEMA Command Center

Rebuilding after Harvey

By: Rudy Koski (mailto:rudy.koski@foxtv.com?body=http://www.fox7austin.com/news/local-news/governor-tours-austin-fema-command-center)
POSTED: SEP 14 2017 06:18PM CDT
VIDEO POSTED: SEP 14 2017 06:02PM CDT

A small army of 2000 emergency response managers with FEMA has set up shop in what was the corporate office for Golfsmith. What's being teed up by the 2000 workers is part of a unified effort to help the communities damaged by Hurricane Harvey.

Gov. Greg Abbott was briefed on the recovery work coordinated out of this central location in N Austin.

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"This is incredibly impressive, and I'm awestruck by how effective they are and how compassionate they are working to help Texans rebuild," said Abbott.

UP NEXT:

Abbott was joined by Texas A&M Chancellor John Sharp, who heads up the Governor's recovery commission.

The main goal, according to Sharp, is to strengthen lines of communication with local leaders and catch any potential miscues. "Where you really get in trouble, where local governments don't get this paperwork right, then all of a sudden 5 years from now you've got the federal government clawing back money from them, because some previous mayor or previous judge didn't fill out the paperwork right," said Sharp.

Debris removal is among the biggest jobs at hand.

130 debris removal sites have been set up by TCEQ.

It's estimated that 200-million cubic yards will be collected. That's an amount that could fill Kyle Field at Texas A&M 125 times, according to the governor. "It is going fast, but candidly not fast enough," said Abbott.

There was also an assessment on schools.

52 campuses are listed as catastrophic
234 with significant damage.
678 needing some type of repair.

"Over the course of the year, we will be analyzing every issue associated with Harvey, very similar to how we responded from the Ike and Rita to Hurricanes," said Mike Morath with TEA.

38 relief aid distribution centers are opened between Port Aransas and Orange County. 28 shelters, as of Thursday, have 5250 people in them. Innovation is the word that was used to describe the recovery process-especially with providing temporary housing. Providing a fleet of federally purchased trailers, like what was done after Hurricane Katrina, apparently isn't in the works.

"But manufactured housing, and recreational vehicles may be an option that a local government chooses to use, and we are not going to prohibit them from doing that, but we are going to work through our local governments and state agencies as to what's the best solution that takes care of getting folks back into the affected areas, they can get their kids back to school and go back to their jobs and get back to their normal life," said Tony Robinson with FEMA.

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The state General Land Office will also help with the housing problem.

The plan is to use Community Block Grants and it's estimated that more than $50 billion will be needed.

To read the press release from Speaker Joe Straus, click here.

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FOX 7 Discussion: Trump's relationship with Democrats

Texas A&M Notification Of Sewage Spill

From Texas A&M:

On Tuesday, September 5, 2017, a sewage line back up caused a spill to occur in a small, isolated area of the Texas A&M University campus in College Station. There is no indication of any resulting problem with local domestic water systems.

Immediately upon discovery, Texas A&M notified the City of College Station about the incident, and shortly thereafter notified the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) regional office in Waco.

This incident occurred after an abandoned sewage line that was being backfilled with flowable concrete on a campus construction site spilled into a system manhole and adjoining sewer lines. The blockage was cleared at 2:30 a.m. on Wednesday, September 6, 2017. An estimated 200,000 gallons of sanitary sewer effluent flowed into Bee Creek and an estimated 50,000 gallons flowed into White Creek. The affected area was flushed with water from fire hydrants and chlorine powder to disinfect overflow areas.

The TCEQ recommends the following:

• Until further notice, persons using water from private wells (not city/local water) located within 1/2 mile of the spill site (intersection of George Bush Drive and Houston Street) should use only water that has been distilled or boiled at a rolling boil for at least one minute for all personal uses including drinking, cooking, and personal hygiene. Those individuals with private water wells within 1/2 mile of the spill site should have their well water tested and disinfected, if necessary, prior to discontinuing distillation or boiling.

• The public should avoid contact with waste material, soil, or water in the area potentially affected by the spill. If the public comes into contact with waste material, soil, or water potentially affected by the spill, they should bathe and wash clothes thoroughly as soon as possible.

• Persons who purchase water from a public water supply may contact their water supply distributor to determine if the water is safe for personal use.

Short URL: http://wtaw.com/?p=118925

Air quality alert issued for New Orleans; sensitive groups urged to avoid outdoor activity

POSTED 5:56 PM, SEPTEMBER 14, 2017, BY WGNO WEB DESK

NEW ORLEANS — The New Orleans Health Department has issued an Air Quality Alert for New Orleans until midnight tonight, Thursday, Sept. 14.

Smoke comes out of factory chimneys / environment and industry and air pollution, d smog, fine dust, Co2

An upper-level ridge of high pressure, warm temperatures and sunny skies will enhance ozone formation allowing pollutants to accumulate.

The Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (LDEQ) has raised the Air Quality Index to orange, indicating that the air quality in the afternoon is unhealthy for sensitive groups including active children and adults, the elderly and people with respiratory diseases, such as asthma. These groups should avoid prolonged outdoor activities and exertion.

Residents are encouraged to take the following actions to help reduce the formation of ozone:

- Drive less and make sure your gas cap is tight.
- Refuel your vehicle, mow grass and use gas powered lawn equipment after 6 p.m.
- Postpone work that uses oil based paint, varnishes and solvents that produce flame.
- Use an electric starter instead of starter fluid to barbeque.
- Conserve energy in your home.

For more information, click here.

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Local electric car owners express frustration over lack of EV infrastructure in Louisiana

Published: Thursday, September 14th 2017, 5:06 pm CDT
Updated: Thursday, September 14th 2017, 5:53 pm CDT

By Nick Gremillion CONNECT

BATON ROUGE, LA (WAFB) - As of May, there were about 940 electric cars (or EVs) in Louisiana, according to Ann Shaneyfelt, the executive director of Louisiana Clean Fuels.

We talked to some local EV owners at an event the organization was hosting in downtown Baton Rouge Thursday to raise awareness about the benefits of electric cars. The EV owners we spoke with say they're pleased with their electric cars but are frustrated with the lack of charging stations in the city and across the state.

Jim Waid leases an all-electric 2016 Nissan Leaf and lives in Walker. He works at home, so he says during the week mainly uses his car to drive his son to and from school in Baton Rouge. On the weekends, he also uses the electric car to drive his family around.

Waid says the best part about owning an electric car is the economic value and its environmental impact. The $400 he used to spend on gas every month for his old vehicle pays for the lease payments on his Nissan Leaf. And charging the car at home only adds about $10-$20 a month to his electric bill.

His vehicle has a range of about 120 miles in on a full battery. But certain variables like driving speed and A/C use can lower that number. The range of the car is Waid's least favorite part. So, for longer trips, his family takes his wife's car which is gas powered.

Katrice Roman lives and works in Baton Rouge and owns an electric 2105 BMW i3. Her car is slightly different because it has an electric battery and gas-powered generator that extends the range of the vehicle. The battery alone has a range of about 50-80 miles and the generator adds an additional range of about 80-100 miles.

So, for long drives, like to New Orleans, she fills up the generator's two-gallon gas tank. The generator charges the battery as she is driving. And for even longer trips, BMW offers a mobility plan in which they'll let her use a gas-powered vehicle.

Roman likes the fact her vehicle has low emissions but is frustrated with the lack of parking with electric charge stations in Baton Rouge. She says while there are some charging stations downtown, most of the parking spots are taken up by non-electric vehicles. Waid said he has the same problem when he takes his family downtown on the weekends.

There are currently ten charging stations in downtown Baton Rouge. The EV parking spots contain two charging ports and are located on Lafayette Street by the old state capitol, in the Third Street parking garage, Louisiana Avenue, on Main Street by the Main Street Market, and on Lafayette Street by IBM.

Electric vehicles can be charged with a standard wall outlet, known as a Level 1 charger, and take up to 10-12 hours to fully charge the car battery. Owners can buy a faster charger that uses a 2-10 outlet. Those take about 2-4 hours to fully charge the car battery and can cost upwards of $400-$700.

More powerful Level 3 chargers can fully charge an EV car battery in less than an hour. However, there are currently no Level 3 charging stations in Louisiana. Secretary of Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality Dr. Chuck Brown told a group of owners at the event that he hopes to bring some to Louisiana through a settlement with Volkswagen and the U.S. Department of Justice.

As part of the settlement, Volkswagen is investing $2.5 million to building fast charging stations in the U.S., according to Dr. Brown. He says he has put Louisiana on the list to receive money to build the fast charge stations from Volkswagen.

During the event, Dr. Brown also spoke to electric car owners about the lack of electric car infrastructure in Louisiana. The LDEQ secretary said he will propose adding an electric vehicle to his department's fleet to his fellow board members. He also said he will encourage other state agencies to add at least one electric vehicle to their fleet and add charging stations to parking garages.

Electric car drivers can use a variety of apps and websites such as https://www.afdc.energy.gov/locator/stations/ to find nearby charging stations.

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Owasso Wastewater Treatment Plant kicks off $13M overhaul with engineering approval

By Art Haddaway News Editor 20 hrs ago

The city's wastewater is processed in the aeration basin at the Owasso Wastewater Treatment Plant. ART HADDAWAY/Owasso Reporter

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Earlier this month, the Owasso Public Works Authority (OPWA) approved engineering services for its Wastewater Treatment Plant and Main Plant Lift Station Expansion Project.

The newly passed proposal calls for making improvements to a number of critical systems at the facility due to aged equipment and to accommodate increased usage across the community.

"We do need to upgrade several key assets … to handle the growth that we have today and to handle the growth that we know is coming," said Owasso Public Works Director Roger Stephens.

OPWA provides collection and treatment services for over 12,700 residential, business and industrial customers. The existing system consists of over 167 miles of sanitary sewer line, 10 pump stations and a 4.2 million-gallon-per-day (MGD) treatment facility.

The new project, which comes on the heels of OPWA's 2014 update to its 12-year-old Wastewater Master Plan, will see that the department keeps pace with these ongoing wastewater demands of the city.

"It's just to ensure that we have the resources, we have the capacity, to treat the wastewater probably for the next 10 years," Stephens said. "This (expansion) will give us that ability to do so."

Along with keeping up with regional growth, the purpose of OPWA in carrying out these improvements is to continue conducting a safe operation and complying with environmental standards, Stephens said.

"The biggest and most important thing is the ability to treat and (release) a quality effluent downstream," he said. "It's very important that the discharge out of our treatment plant meets, if not exceeds, the ODEQ and EPA regulations."

The three-year project will be contracted with CP&Y Engineering out of Oklahoma City in the amount of $1,040,000, or 8 percent, of the estimated construction costs totaling $13,058,845.

The scope of the project includes an engineering report, detailed design and specifications, a geotechnical evaluation, a soils exploration, bid assistance, a cost opinion development, a ground survey, record drawings and more.

Wastewater Master Plan immediate needs

• Upgrade main plant pump station: Constructed in 1988, the dry well is beginning to rust and show signs of deterioration. The pumps have also become inefficient due to age.

• Upgrade headworks facility: The headworks equipment is at the end of its useful life and has become ineffective at removing grit, rags and other foreign material.

• Construct second aeration tank: The current aeration tank is approaching the rated capacity for biological oxygen demand (BOD).

• Upgrade existing aeration & equipment: Based on the lifecycle of this particular equipment, it is nearing the end of its useful life.

• Upgrade electrical equipment: In the activated sludge pump station, most of the electrical equipment was installed during the construction of the original plant in 1988.

Editor Art Haddaway

Art is a seasoned reporter of over 15 years with an extended background in writing and editing for a variety of publications and organizations.

LOUISIANA ENVIRONMENT AND FLOOD CONTROL

Hurricane Harvey flood insurance payouts could top $11 billion

1

Updated on September 13, 2017 at 3:36 PM
Posted on September 13, 2017 at 3:34 PM

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By The Associated Press

WASHINGTON -- The head of the National Flood Insurance Program said Wednesday (Sept. 13) that early estimates show Hurricane Harvey will result in about $11 billion in payouts to insured homeowners, mostly in southeast Texas. That would likely put Harvey as the second costliest storm in the history of the program, after more than $16 billion was paid out for Hurricane Katrina.

It is still too soon to estimate losses from Hurricane Irma, said Roy Wright, the Federal Emergency Management Agency's deputy associate administrator for insurance and mitigation. But he predicted that Irma damage in Florida and other states could rival the almost $9 billion paid out after Hurricane Sandy in 2012.

Even before the recent back-to-back hurricanes of Harvey and Irma, the federal flood insurance program was about $25 billion in debt to the U.S. Treasury. Wright said the program currently has enough cash to absorb the initial wave of payments to help homeowners get back on their feet but will need billions of dollars more within about a month.

"Congress has never turned [its] their back on a flood insurance holder, and I cannot imagine [it] looking away now," Wright said. "I am confident there will be no break in the flow of funds."

The Associated Press reported earlier this month that the total number of federal flood insurance policies nationally fell by about 10 percent over the past five years, to about 4.9 million. The drop came after Congress required a premium increase in 2012 and about a half million homeowners elected to drop their coverage.

As a result, scores of homes flooded by Harvey and Irma will not be covered by federal flood insurance. Those uninsured homeowners could seek grants and loans to rebuild. Wright said such federal emergency help should be seen as a life vest, but not the full protection offered by flood insurance.

Wright said that nationally there are about 10 million residential structures, twice the number of properties currently covered, in areas that could flood. That includes many homes that are outside "100-year" flood plains, where a flood is given a 1 percent chance of happening in any year, or that don't have federally-backed mortgages requiring flood insurance.

Uninsured homeowners around the country should learn from what is happening in Houston and other flood-ravaged parts of the country and seriously weigh whether they should buy a policy, he said. "Collectively, we need more people covered," Wright said. "We have to get beyond this conversation about what I have to do and what I'm mandated to do, and put folks in an educated position by which they are making a back-pocket economic decision."

Wright said that under current law, FEMA is not allowed to cancel policies covering waterfront or low-lying homes that have been flooded and rebuilt multiple times. In the wake of Harvey and Irma, he said, the flood insurance program will likely be refining its

policies to allow the owners of such multiple-loss homes to be bought out and moved to higher ground.

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Story by Michael Biesecker.

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LOUISIANA ENVIRONMENT AND FLOOD CONTROL

New Orleans mayoral candidates talk flood risk, climate change

4

Updated on September 14, 2017 at 9:14 PM
Posted on September 14, 2017 at 8:54 PM

New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu signs an executive order Friday, July 7, 2017, that puts into effect his administration's "Climate Action" plan on the "green roof" of the Sewerage and Water Board offices downtown. The plan calls for the city to reduce its environmental emissions 50 percent by 2030.(Greg LaRose, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune)

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By Sara Sneath
NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune

Mayoral candidates promised a complete overhaul of the Sewerage and Water Board at a forum on flooding and adapting to environmental change Thursday (Sept. 14) night. But dumping on perhaps the most hated department of the city was about as far as many candidates got.

The mayoral forum was moderated by the director of The Greater New Orleans Water Collaborative, Nathan Lott, and took place at the New Orleans Jazz Market, Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard. Eight of the 18 candidates running for mayor showed up to the forum: Michael Bagneris, Ed Bruski, LaToya Cantrell, Desiree Charbonnet, Brandon Dorrington, Troy Henry, Matthew Hill and Johnese Smith.

Most of the candidates at the forum earned knowing chuckles from the audience when describing the poor state of the Sewerage and Water Board. But at least half of the candidates were unable to answer questions about the specifics of re-hauling the city's drainage infrastructure, leveraging state and federal monies for coastal restoration and managing water at a regional level.

By far, the worst performers were Brandon Dorrington and Johnese Smith. Dorrington blew his first impression at the forum when he spent the majority of the time allotted for his first answer discussing how he was given the opportunity to speak before the three female mayoral candidates in attendance, though the candidate order was selected at random before the event began.

Smith spent her allotted answer time for every question digging though loose pieces of paper in front of her, getting lost in her own analogies and repeating that her platform was based on "kingdom building."

Entrepreneur Matthew Hill said his approach to drainage management would include ripping out all of the city's streets and repaving them with permeable plastic with polystyrene, the stuff that packing peanuts are made with, underneath. He did not elaborate on how the city would pay for such an endeavor. While Edward Bruski, a U.S. Air Force veteran and registered nurse, largely piggybacked on the answers of other candidates.

Considered to the city's three major mayoral candidates, former Civil District Judge Michael Bagneris, former Municipal Court Judge Desiree Charbonnet and City Councilwoman LaToya Cantrell, proved themselves to have a better understanding of the issues. Businessman Troy Henry also distinguished himself as a candidate with managerial experience.

Bagneris described the city's issue with infrastructure as a failure to use funding already available, including grant money from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. "That problem is not one of revenues it's one of fiscal management," he said. The former judge said that before the city can take a regional approach to water management it must first look internally at the issues leading to the Aug. 5 flooding. The city should also take a note from Jefferson Parish in using permeable pavement and retention ponds, he said.

Charbonnet said she would use the City Attorney's Office to identify possible Deepwater Horizon settlement monies to bolster the city's adaption to climate change. But, with a platform largely targeting crime in the city, she seemed to have a difficult time standing out on environmental issues. Councilwoman Cantrell, however, showed a keen understanding of the city's current strategies and how she would improve upon them.

In July, Mayor Mitch Landrieu announced an environmental initiative to curb the city's greenhouse gases 50 percent by the year 2030. Cantrell said she would keep the initiative and build upon it further. She would create an initiative under the Sewage and Water Board to incentivize residents to rip out impermeable concrete on their properties, she said.

The forum ended Thursday night with a final difficult-to-follow speech by Smith. The message was unclear but involved analogies about an ant hill, Willy Wonka's golden ticket and a spaceship.

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Sara Sneath covers Louisiana coastal issues for NOLA.com | The Times Picayune. Reach her at ssneath@nola.com. Follow her on Twitter @SaraSneath.

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By Mose Buchele | September 14, 2017 11:24 am

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From KUT:

While we're still a long way from understanding the full environmental impact of Hurricane Harvey, the damage has been done, and experts say Harvey has highlighted inconsistencies in Texas' ability to contain hazardous materials in the face of future storms.

The storm was responsible for 600,000 gallons of spilled gasoline statewide, much of it in Houston. More than 7 million pounds of toxic chemicals were released into the air. Rain from Harvey flooded Superfund sites, raising questions about the government response. And explosions and fires at the Arkema chemical plant west of Houston sent more than a dozen first responders to the hospital.

What policies could help prevent these things from happening again in the next big storm?

or federal government mandated flood-proofing for fuel storage tanks, it would be "a legal requirement that every company has to follow."

Cook-Schultz and others say flood-proofing might have been useful in the Arkema plant explosion, as well.

Those chemicals caught fire after refrigeration units were forced offline when backup generators at the plant flooded. So, Cook-Schultz asks, why not mandate that generators be built and positioned in such a way that they won't flood?

"That's applicable to almost any chemical plant, and it's also applicable to nuclear plants," she says, citing the meltdown of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant in Japan. "Their backup generators failed and were flooded. So, this is a really big deal. We should totally make sure that backup generators are flood-proofed."

Increased reporting and spill safeguards

The process of fracking and oil production generates contaminated wastewater that Texas companies generally store in pits or pump back underground. But Luke Metzger, the state director of Environment Texas, says they're not required to report when wastewater spills.

That means we don't know how much wastewater potentially washed across Texas streets, and potentially into waterways, during the storm.

"That's different than many other states around the U.S.," he says. "Who knows what quantities may have been released? We just don't have that data."

Other rules he thinks Texas should pick up from other states?

"We can require all new and existing wells to have remote shut-offs, as they require in Colorado," he says. "Wells can be retrofitted with containment berms that can help control spills."

"An analogy would be like the cold start of a car," toxicologist Elena Craft told KUT last month. "It would take a while for the engines to heat up to the appropriate temperature to actually burn off some of the pollution."

One thing she says the refining industry could do to improve air quality after such a disaster would be to "stagger" the restarting of chemical plants. It wouldn't reduce the emissions, but it could reduce their concentrations in the air.

Another regulation Craft thinks might have helped mitigate damage at the Arkema plant fire is one that used to be on the books. The updated management rule was put into place after a fertilizer plant in West killed 15 people in 2013, but EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt suspended it earlier this year.

"There were improvements that were made to that rule that he suspended that would have provided additional information to communities, that would have provided additional information to local emergency first responders," she says.

Seven first responders have sued Arkema, saying they were severely injured by fumes from the fires.

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Enel brews up Oklahoma wind power agreement with Anheuser-Busch

by Paul Monies • Published: September 14, 2017 5:00 AM CDT • Updated: September 14, 2017 5:00 AM CDT

Rafael Gonzalez, left, CEO of Enel Green Power North America, and Joao Castro Neves, president and CEO of Anheuser-Busch, toast the announcement Wednesday of a power purchase agreement for the brewer to get electricity from Enel's Thunder Ranch wind project in Oklahoma. [PHOTO PROVIDED]

Budweiser, this wind is for you.

Anheuser-Busch and Enel Green Power said Wednesday they have signed a power agreement for electricity from an under-construction wind farm in northern Oklahoma.

The deal will give Anheuser-Busch 152.5 megawatts of capacity from the 298-megawatt Thunder Ranch wind farm in Garfield, Kay and Noble counties. The $435 million Enel project, which is being constructed in two phases, is expected to be in operation by the end of the year.

The project is the brewer's first large-scale renewable energy deal in the United States and will help its parent company, AB InBev, meet a global pledge to secure all of its electricity from renewable resources by 2025. That goal would be equivalent to taking 500,000 cars off the road each year.

"As we strive to bring people together to build a better world, we at Anheuser-Busch are dedicated to reducing our carbon emissions," said Joao Castro Neves, the company's president and CEO. "Helping to grow the renewable energy market is not only good for the environment, it is a strategic business move as we strive for long-term sustainability."

Enel started construction of the Thunder Ranch wind farm in May. The company already has eight wind farms in operation in Oklahoma and is also building the 300-megawatt Red Dirt wind farm in Kingfisher and Logan counties. Enel will have about 1,700 megawatts of wind capacity in Oklahoma by the end of the year.

More than 400 workers are involved in the construction phase of Thunder Ranch, and the wind farm will have 18 permanent jobs. Enel has not disclosed other customers for the second phase of the project.

Rafael Gonzalez, CEO of Enel Green Power North America, said partnering with global brands like Budweiser and AB InBev shows other customers that Enel is at the forefront of offering customized energy solutions.

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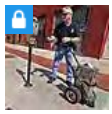

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"Enel and A-B are setting an industrywide example of how companies can invest in climate solutions at the same time as improving their business' bottom line," Gonzalez said in a conference call with reporters.

Enel earlier this year signed an agreement with T-Mobile to take 160 megawatts of power from Enel's Red Dirt project. The company also has a power-purchase agreement with Google at a Kansas wind farm.

Corporate power customers

Corporate customers are a fast-growing segment of the wind industry, which traditionally sold electricity to utilities or as merchant generators into a competitive energy market. Last year, corporate and other non-utility customers signed agreements for more than 1,950 megawatts of U.S. wind capacity, according to the American Wind Energy Association.

Low wind prices and the certainty of long-term energy delivery at a fixed cost has attracted corporate customers across the Fortune 500, as well as universities, cities and military installations. Tech companies led the way and continue to be the biggest buyers of renewable energy, but recent deals have included manufacturers and retailers.

"This is something consumers care about," Castro Neves said. "We are doing this because shareholders are asking, stakeholders are asking, because we as a management team believe this is the right thing to do."

Neither Enel nor Anheuser-Busch revealed the price of the wind procured under the power agreement.

Castro Neves called the Enel Thunder Ranch deal a "win-win-win" for Anheuser-Busch. In the past decade, the brewer has cut its water use by 50 percent and lowered its glass, aluminum and paper packaging costs. Since 2008, the company has cut its energy use by 30 percent.

"I think it's great to partner with a company that is investing heavily in the U.S.," Castro Neves said. "It's a win for us, it's a win for nature, it's a win for Enel."

Anheuser-Busch projects it will take 610 gigawatt-hours of electricity each year from the Thunder Ranch wind farm, or as much energy is used to brew 20 billion, 12-ounce beers.

"This announcement shows the trust that these companies show in Oklahoma as an energy leader," Rep. John Pfeiffer, R-Mulhall, said in a statement. "The returns to my district will be felt in the local schools and all the sectors of our local economies."

Enel said it spent more than $2.7 billion on its eight current Oklahoma wind farms, with more than $300 million in local property taxes paid to local communities over their useful lives.

The announcement comes amid uncertainty over the future of state policy on wind projects. Oklahoma lawmakers have ended two major tax incentives for wind.

Gov. Mary Fallin proposed a 0.5 cent per kilowatt-hour tax on wind energy in her budget proposal earlier this year, although the idea didn't get much traction in the regular session. Rep. Mark McBride, R-Moore, has said he plans to introduce legislation for a wind tax that would go toward a pay increase for teachers.

Gonzalez said Enel understands the budget pressures in Oklahoma and the company remains committed to the state and the communities where it has wind farms. But he said any talk of a new tax on wind creates uncertainty for investors.

"There is a good resource in terms of wind," Gonzalez said. "We continue to monitor how the situation is going to go in the coming sessions. There are changes in legislation that could impact business decisions we have to take in terms of investment."

Updates to Oklahoma's alcohol laws are expected to benefit breweries like Anheuser-Busch when they go into effect next year. The company already has about 700 employees in the state.

"From the A-B side, we're very happy with our business in Oklahoma," Castro Neves said. "Everything we've had to do with the state has been very open and we've had very good discussions."

Paul Monies

Paul Monies is an energy reporter for The Oklahoman. He has worked at newspapers in Texas and Missouri and most recently was a data journalist for... read more ›

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Little-known agency integral to hurricane prep, response

By Jessica Priest
Sept. 14, 2017 at 10:06 p.m.
Updated Sept. 15, 2017 at 6 a.m.

The Guadalupe River flows over state Highway 35 and River Road in Tivoli. Houses were flooded near the area.
Ana Ramirez/aramirez@vicad.com for The Victoria Advocate

The amount of water flowing down the Guadalupe River in Victoria after Hurricane Harvey is record setting.

There was 82,900 cubic feet of water flowing per second Aug. 30, the day the river peaked at 31.25 feet.

This is the third-highest water flow recorded.

The first was Oct. 20, 1998, when 466,000 cubic feet of water was flowing down the river per second. That day the river rose to its highest crest ever, 34.04 feet.

The second was July 3, 1936. Then 179,000 cubic feet per second was recorded as the river's discharge and 31.22 feet was its height.

The U.S. Geological Survey operates a nationwide network of more than 8,200 gauges on inland rivers and streams. They provide real-time data that the National Weather Service, FEMA, the Army Corps of Engineers and local officials use to determine when to issue flood and evacuation warnings.

"We're kind of like science ninjas. Nobody knows we're even out here," Michael Nyman said of the federal agency, which has about 8,000 employees assigned specifically to work on water.

Nyman was among four who visited Victoria on Aug. 30.

They dropped two devices, an acoustic 9 profiler and an M9, off the Guadalupe River bridge, which police had closed to traffic. The devices looked like little boats a child might tug with a string, but they were much more sophisticated. They calculated the river's discharge in about 12 minutes.

This was brand new technology in 1998 and is a time saver.

Back then, calculating a river's discharge could take several hours. Nyman remembered that well because he was in Victoria then.

He said the USGS didn't use the devices. Instead, they calculated the Guadalupe River's discharge after the water subsided by looking at the high water marks left on structures. This can create an error rate of plus or minus 20 percent.

Nyman also remembered seeing livestock tangled up in treetops.

"You'd usually smell them before you got to them," he said.

Fortunately, he hasn't made such a discovery after Hurricane Harvey.

The USGS also put up dozens of devices to measure the storm surge and the barometric pressure along the coast before the Category 4 hurricane's landfall on Aug. 25. The devices were put up between Packery Channel near Corpus Christi to Matagorda Bay. Some in the Tivoli area were lost to storm surge while another, located near the northeast eye wall of the hurricane, had its antenna rotated to transmit toward the ground instead of the sky.

Nyman said despite his and his colleagues' "science ninja" status, he's excited that people can access the data almost as soon as they need it to help others.

He encouraged people to go to txpub.usgs.gov/water-onthego/.

"When I started, nothing was real time," Nyman said. "When you left a site, you hoped it was going to work for the six weeks that you were gone. Now, it's all telemetered through a satellite system."

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