State Releases Environmental Exposure Assessment Plan for Kettleman City

Plan outlines how Cal/EPA will move forward in testing for potential environmental contaminants

KETTLEMAN CITY, Calif. – Today, the California Environmental Protection Agency released its draft exposure assessment outline for Kettleman City and will discuss the plan and solicit public comment from residents at a community meeting tonight.

“We are committed to working with Kettleman City and the affected families to ensure that the environment in their community is safe and meets the strictest levels of environmental law,” said Linda Adams, California Secretary for Environmental Protection. “This assessment plan will look at environmental factors, including a thorough examination of air, soil and water, in an attempt to determine whether the birth defects are related to a common environmental factor. We recognize the seriousness of the situation and hope the information we gather will give us significant insight into whether residents are exposed to potentially harmful chemicals and what those potential sources might be.”

The draft exposure assessment outline details how Cal/EPA and its boards, departments and office will proceed with testing of soil, air and water around Kettleman City. In developing the document, Cal/EPA scientists identified chemicals potentially found in Kettleman City that may cause birth defects, as well as possible sources of those chemicals. They are also developing plans for sampling and analyzing those chemicals.

Scientists from Cal/EPA’s Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, Air Resources Board, Department of Pesticide Regulation, State Water Resources Control Board and the Department of Toxic Substances Control have developed a list of 28 chemicals that should be tested for in Kettleman City. The list contains industrial chemicals and pesticides, as well as arsenic, which is naturally occurring in the area.

Cal/EPA will examine the potential sources of the chemicals from present and past activities including the Kettleman Hills hazardous waste disposal facility; agricultural operations; naturally occurring contaminants, industrial and legacy petroleum sources; illegal dumping; and arsenic in the drinking water.

This effort is in response to Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger’s request that the California Department of Public Health and Cal/EPA take aggressive action to investigate birth defects reported in Kettleman City. The departments are coordinating their investigative efforts.

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The release of this outline at today’s meeting opens a two-week public comment period ending on April 8. After incorporating community comments, Cal/EPA will finalize the exposure assessment workplan and in April will begin collecting soil, air and water samples around the community. A final report to the community should be completed by November.

For the complete assessment outline, please visit http://www.calepa.ca.gov/EnvJustice/News/.

The California Environmental Protection Agency is charged with developing, implementing and enforcing the state’s environmental protection laws that ensure clean air, clean water, clean soil, safe pesticides and waste recycling and reduction. Our departments are at the forefront of environmental science, using cutting-edge research to shape the state’s environmental laws.