



Los Angeles County Department of Public Health

Its Actions in Response to Conditions Near the Chiquita Canyon Landfill Have Been Incomplete

Background

Since early 2022, the Chiquita Canyon Landfill (landfill) in northern Los Angeles County has been the site of a high-temperature, underground chemical reaction. The reaction has caused an increase in landfill gas emissions and odors, and in connection with these outcomes nearby community members have reported negative health symptoms such as nasal irritation, headaches, and nausea. The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (LADPH) functions to surveil health outcomes, strategize about mitigation, communicate with appropriate audiences, and coordinate with others when county residents experience health concerns. This audit reviewed LADPH's actions in response to the landfill reaction and its effects on the communities near the landfill.

Key Findings

- LADPH acted to respond to residents' health symptoms, but it has missed opportunities to better protect community health.
 - It does not have up-to-date information about the prevalence of symptoms in the community because its data are mostly from late 2024.
- Residents experienced limited communication and community engagement from LADPH.
 - At one point, LADPH did not issue a substantive written communication to the community for a year, during which time it could have provided periodic updates, such as information about air quality safety.
- We identified inconsistencies in how LADPH responded to the conditions near the landfill when compared to its responses to other health hazard events.
 - During another response, LADPH coordinated to provide mental health resources, which it did not do for this landfill event, and the department more quickly and formally reviewed the health conditions of affected individuals during other events.

Key Recommendations

- The Board of Supervisors (board) should direct LADPH to develop a community engagement plan with direct input from the community. The plan should specify the ways in which LADPH will ensure that it maintains two-way communication with community members and promptly addresses their expressed concerns.
- The board should direct LADPH to periodically collect information about health symptoms and other relevant information from residents and community members near the landfill.
- To ensure that it approaches all responses to health hazard events in a consistent manner, LADPH should adopt policies and procedures that establish the key information that staff and leadership must consider when determining what responsive actions are necessary, guide staff in making those determinations, and establish how staff and leadership should document their decisions.

LADPH's Engagement Activities Had Shortcomings

ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITY	LIMITATIONS TO ACTIVITY
Community Advisory Committee Meetings	LADPH is provided minimal time to engage with the community, speaking on average for fewer than 10 minutes per meeting and having limited opportunities to respond to residents' concerns. LADPH's deputy director of health protection indicated that the department does not know how many residents attend or watch these meetings because another county department facilitates the meetings.
Nurse Hotline	This is a passive activity that requires community members to call LADPH. About 65 individuals have called as of the conclusion of our audit's fieldwork.
Door-to-Door Survey Promotion	LADPH's staff made in-person contact with a small percentage of community members. In more than 90 percent of the locations they visited, the staff left written materials because they did not encounter anyone at the location.
One-Time Activities	These were one-time actions, such as a town hall event, that occurred during the first year of LADPH's response to the landfill reaction.