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COUNTY OFFICIALS DETERMINE WATER WELL AS SOURCE OF H₂S ODOR

(SANTA BARBARA, Calif.) – Yesterday, the Santa Barbara County Air Pollution Control District, Santa Barbara County Public Health Department, Santa Barbara County Fire Department, and Santa Barbara County Office of Emergency Management were involved with the investigation of a release of hydrogen sulfide (H₂S) causing a “rotten egg” smell in the Ellwood area of Goleta on Sunday, October 9.

During the investigation, inspectors from the Public Health Department, Environmental Health Services Division (EHS), identified the likely source as naturally occurring H₂S that was released during drilling of a private agricultural water well. At approximately 2:30 pm, Monday, Oct. 10, EHS suspended the well drilling permit. According to EHS, the driller was able to plug the well and stop the flow of water late Monday night. The stop work order is in place until a plan to mitigate the release is approved. According to EHS, the driller was able to plug the well and flow of water late Monday night. The work order stoppage is in place until a plan to mitigate the release is approved.

As late as 3:30 a.m. today, remaining H₂S levels were recorded by fence-line monitoring installed around the Venoco Ellwood facility; these monitors detect H₂S in the area regardless of the source. There was no release of H₂S from Venoco, nor did H₂S detectors within the Venoco facility detect any H₂S. The investigation has concluded that the Venoco Ellwood Onshore Facility is not the source of the odors.

Hydrogen sulfide is a gas that produces a sulfurous odor at a low level and health effects at higher levels. Those levels range from generating a noticeable odor to generating some temporary health effects, such as nausea, headaches, minor respiratory symptoms, and watery eyes following extended exposure.

Information regarding symptoms of H₂S exposure at various concentrations can be found at the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) website at www.osha.gov/SLTC/hydrogensulfide/hazards.html. Information regarding recorded H₂S levels and wind conditions are available on the Air Pollution Control District website at www.ourair.org.

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If you or your family members are experiencing health effects from breathing H₂S, you should seek medical attention.

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