

Date: April 22, 2025

To: Thomas B. Modica, City Manager 

From: Alison King, Director Health and Human Services 

For: Mayor and Members of the City Council

Subject: **Methyl Bromide in West Long Beach Update**

On [November 19, 2024](#), Council District 7 introduced a motion requesting that staff work with the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD), California Air Resources Board (CARB), and other relevant agencies to investigate the public health, safety, and environmental impacts related to elevated levels of methyl bromide detected near Hudson Elementary School and nearby residential areas in west Long Beach, and to report findings and recommendations to City Council.

This memorandum provides an update on the issue. Staff from the City Manager's Office and the Department of Health and Human Services gathered information from SCAQMD and met with representatives from the Los Angeles County Agricultural Commissioner (LA CAC) to better understand current efforts to address elevated levels of methyl bromide detected in the area. They also participated in community meetings held by SCAQMD and CARB. Because the regulation and oversight of fumigants like methyl bromide fall under regional, state, and federal jurisdiction, staff recommend that the City continue working collaboratively with agency partners and the City's legislative delegation to advocate for stronger protections that support the health and wellbeing of the west Long Beach community.

Overview of Methyl Bromide

Methyl bromide is a colorless, odorless pesticide used to fumigate agricultural products for insect pests to protect public health and to meet international import and export standards. In Long Beach, it is primarily used on fruits coming through the ports. Methyl bromide is a Toxic Air Contaminant (TAC) and classified by the EPA as a Hazardous Air Pollutant (HAP) that depletes the ozone. Because of its ozone depleting effects, it was largely phased out of global use as part of the Montreal Agreement 2005, except for in very specific instances such as quarantine processes.

Commodity fumigation using fumigants like methyl bromide is conducted near the ports for pest control before and after shipping. The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) requires the use of methyl bromide as a quarantine treatment to prevent the spread of invasive pests through certain commodities. This activity is regulated by multiple agencies, including the California Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR), the LA CAC, CARB, SCAQMD, and the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Exposure to fumigants has the potential to cause non-cancer health effects when above Reference Exposure Levels (RELs). These effects may involve the respiratory, nervous, and developmental systems, with potential—though less commonly documented—impacts on the cardiovascular and gastrointestinal systems. Many of the health effects described are geared towards occupational exposures and less so for acute or chronic environmental and community exposure.

- Chronic Effects (Noncancer):
 - Data from an occupational study suggest that mild functional neurological impairment may result in humans chronically exposed to methyl bromide by inhalation exposure, but this is not conclusive due to concurrent exposure to other chemicals and inadequate quantitation of exposure levels and durations.
 - Neurological effects, including lethargy, forelimb twitching, tremors, and paralysis, have also been observed in animal studies.
 - Degenerative and proliferative lesions in the nasal cavity developed in rats chronically exposed to methyl bromide by inhalation ([EPA](#)).
 - Chronic inhalation exposure of male animals has resulted in effects on the testes at high concentrations ([EPA](#)).
 - EPA has classified methyl bromide as a Group D, not classifiable as to human carcinogenicity, based on inadequate human and animal data.

What Is Being Done to Decrease Levels of Methyl Bromide

SCAQMD first identified methyl bromide in the west Long Beach community during the Multiple Air Toxics Exposure Study (MATES) V study conducted in 2018-2019, but it was below Reference Exposure Levels (RELs), the level below which no adverse health effects are anticipated for a certain amount of exposure time. CARB initiated a new monitoring campaign in 2023 and has reported elevated levels of methyl bromide. Levels at CARB's monitor are reported to be about 50 percent above the chronic REL, or a "Hazard Index" (HI) of about 1.5 just from methyl bromide. An HI below 1 indicates no non-cancer health effects are expected, including in sensitive populations. The higher an HI is above 1, the higher the risk of experiencing health impacts. Of note, the average HI from all pollutants and emission sources across the entire South Coast region is about 5.5, and West Long Beach has an HI of about 5.8. Based on modeling by Department of Pesticide Regulation, about 50 homes in west Long Beach are believed to have methyl bromide exposures above the REL. More information about the study is available [here](#).

[Two facilities](#) are thought to contribute to these elevated levels in west Long Beach: Ag Fume (at Three Rivers Trucking in Long Beach) and SP Fume (at San Pedro Forklift in Los Angeles). According to CARB monitoring, they have observed increased levels of methyl bromide coming from those facilities largely during January-May 2024. This is likely due to increased imports of perishable commodities through the ports during growing seasons in South America that require the use of methyl bromide fumigation,

under USDA regulations.

Both SCAQMD and the LA CAC have taken regulatory actions in recent months. LA CAC worked with facilities to include new requirements in facility permits to reduce exposures for surrounding community. Permit requirements include:

- No fumigation during school hours (6:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m., weekdays)
- Increased stack heights (55' or taller) to reduce ground-level Methyl Bromide levels
- Stacks must utilize mechanical ventilation rated at no lower than 5000 acfm
- Additional leak prevention measures
- A reduction in the daily total use of methyl bromide from 1000 lbs to 200 lbs
- Facilities must schedule activities to avoid overlapping fumigation periods
 - SCAQMD has brought these facilities into their Toxics Hot Spots Program. As a first step the facilities have provided emissions data. Facilities in the Hot Spots Program must stay below SCAQMD health risk thresholds or they will be required to prepare health risk assessments, notify the public, and/or reduce their risks to the community

Furthermore, regional regulatory agencies have engaged in efforts to address elevated levels of methyl bromide in west Long Beach, including hosting a community meeting to provide information to local community members. On [January 30, 2025](#), CARB, DPR, LA CAC, and SCAQMD provided information about air quality monitoring data during a community meeting, and on March 20, 2025, SCAQMD outlined additional steps to address methyl bromide emissions. City staff from the Department of Health and Human Services and City Manager's Office attended the meetings, as well as staff from a number of elected offices including Council District 7 where this issue persists. The meetings detailed fumigation with various chemicals occurring in Long Beach and the greater Los Angeles basin, the monitoring and findings specifically in regards to methyl bromide emissions in West Long Beach, and described recent regulatory actions taken with the emitting facilities. SCAQMD is working on the following activities:

- Transition monitoring from CARB to SCAQMD
- Develop website that compiles information
- Work with fumigation facilities in Hot Spots program
- Explore potential rulemaking if necessary, as well as potential changes to an existing MOU between South Coast AQMD and LA CAC
- Continue outreach to community and state/local agencies as new information becomes available

Other Items

As part of the initial City Council motion, Council also requested information about the City's guidelines for pesticide usage in parks, including those not adjacent to schools, and contractor usage. Glyphosate was the industry standard for nonselective weed control for many years. In 2018, the Department of Parks, Recreation & Marine banned the use of glyphosate (roundup) in park spaces. Since then, the department looked at various methods of weed control in the absence of more economical glyphosate product. After trying many types of products and methods, Parks decided to use Glufonisate ammonium (Cheetah Pro) and Flumioxazin (Sureguard). Both products are different in mode of action and formulation. While the use of these products is more expensive when compared to glyphosate, mechanical methods of weed abatement are more labor intensive and would be much more costly to City.

These applications are regulated by the state Department of Pesticide Regulation and the Los Angeles Commissioner Weights and Measures. Applicators and handlers of pesticides are trained annually following the State regulations. Our team and contractors are trained in Integrated Pest Management principles to minimize the overall use of pesticide use and have the appropriate licenses to apply pesticides.

Furthermore, the City's contracts with landscape companies includes an integrate pest management section that states the following requirements: "Integrated pest management (IPM) principles govern the oversight and management of pest pressures. For this reason, biopesticides have been chosen as a primary control method whenever horticultural management criteria deem the anticipated result to be satisfactory. Combined with a sound IPM program, pest control through prevention, cultural practices, exclusion, natural enemies, and host resistance offers the safest, most effective means of producing high-level plant material. The City is concerned with the safety of wildlife and, therefore, Contractor shall be expressly prohibited from using anything that may result in direct or secondary poisoning and harming of organisms."

Recommendations and Next Steps

Because methyl bromide usage is regulated at the regional, state, and federal levels through the various agencies discussed above, the City's role in addressing the issue should continue to be information gathering and sharing, as well as advocacy with our government partners. On April 11th, Congresswoman Nannette Barragan, along with Congresswoman Maxine Waters and Congressman Robert Garcia, sent a joint letter urging federal, state, and local regulatory agencies to provide greater monitoring and oversight of toxic emissions from container fumigation facilities in Long Beach, San Pedro, and Compton (see attached).

The following are priorities that City staff recommend continuing to advocate for:

- The City can request periodic updates from SCAQMD and CARB in regards to

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emission levels. These agencies should alert City officials if a rise in emissions is seen, especially if they are above acute or chronic RELs.

- The City can request periodic updates from LA CAC on compliance with regulatory activities, facilities' inspection reports, and any further actions taken.
- The City can request from SCAQMD and LA CAC to determine a timeframe by which the other facilities utilizing methyl bromide will be brought to the same standards as those set for Ag Fume (at Three Rivers Trucking in Long Beach) and SP Fume (at San Pedro Forklift in Los Angeles).
- The City can continue to advocate for clean air standards in the area. SCAQMD should install additional air quality monitors and share data about how methyl bromide and other chemicals move through the air and impact west Long Beach.
- The City can request the state Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment to conduct an environmental health study regarding the impacts of methyl bromide in west Long Beach.
- The City can also work with our legislative delegation to request changes to federal regulations that require the use of methyl bromide to instead allow for other fumigation techniques that have less impact on surrounding air quality. The USDA is currently [considering alternatives](#) to the use of methyl bromide.

If you have any questions, please contact Alison King, Director of Health and Human Services, at Alison.King@longbeach.gov or (562) 570-4016.

ATTACHMENT

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DEPARTMENT HEADS

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

April 11, 2025

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RE: Methyl Bromide Emissions from Container Fumigation Facilities in Los Angeles County

Dear Secretary Rollins, Chair Randolph, Executive Officer Natri, and Chief Deputy Regis:

We have serious concerns about the prevalent use of methyl bromide, a toxic pesticide, by container fumigation facilities in Los Angeles County. Medical research has proven that prolonged exposure to methyl bromide can cause several adverse health effects, including impacts on the neurological and respiratory systems. We request greater monitoring, transparency, and oversight surrounding these fumigation facilities and their toxic emissions.

Several of these fumigation facilities are located close to homes, schools, parks, and other public spaces. Our communities deserve a greater understanding of the levels of toxic emissions from these facilities, the health risks from exposure to such emissions, and the oversight processes in place to ensure all protocols are maintained at these sites. This information will help determine whether additional measures are needed at these fumigation facilities to protect the health and safety of the public.

Recent reports of elevated methyl bromide emissions at two container fumigation facilities in Long Beach, California are deeply troubling. We understand that in response to learning of the elevated emissions, the Los Angeles County Department of the Agricultural Commissioner amended the conditional use permits for these two specific fumigation facilities, and we are hopeful that those changes will reduce the community's exposure to the toxic chemical. However, because a health risk assessment has not been conducted in the adjacent neighborhood of West Long Beach, we may lack an accurate and comprehensive understanding of how exposure to high levels of methyl bromide may impact the community's health.

In addition to the concerns regarding these fumigation facilities in Long Beach, there are four other fumigation facilities in San Pedro, California and Compton, California that use significantly higher volumes of methyl bromide and are located only short distances away from homes and public spaces, but where community air monitors are not present. We understand the

South Coast Air Quality Management District has requested a detailed emissions inventory from these sites; however, self-reporting of emissions from other local facilities has been inaccurate in the past. Due to the higher usage of the toxic pesticide, these sites in San Pedro and Compton may pose an even greater harm to residents; however, there is no air monitoring for methyl bromide near these sites and a health risk assessment has not been completed in the adjacent communities. Furthermore, there is also concern with the lack of publicly accessible information on the frequency and results of inspections of fumigation facilities in Los Angeles County.

Methyl bromide is regulated and monitored by several agencies across federal, state, regional, and local government, and each applicable agency has a critical role in mitigating the chemical's impact on the public. In response to the concerns mentioned in this letter, we urge the appropriate agencies to complete the following:

- Install community air monitors in public spaces near all fumigation facilities in Los Angeles County and provide the results on a public website.
- Complete health risk assessments in the communities where methyl bromide is used within Los Angeles County and provide the results on a public website.
- Compile reports on the schedule and results of inspections of fumigation facilities within Los Angeles and provide the results on a public website.

As the representatives of the communities impacted by methyl bromide use in Los Angeles County, we respectfully request your attention to this urgent matter, and look forward to partnering with you to support the health and safety of the communities we serve.

Sincerely,



Nanette Barragán
Member of Congress



Maxine Waters
Member of Congress



Robert Garcia
Member of Congress