

DOCKETED

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Administrative Report

Council Action Date: September 01, 2015

To: MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

From: ROBERT METZGER, FIRE CHIEF

Subject: UNCONTROLLED ENVIRONMENTAL RELEASE OF NATURAL GAS FROM THE AES PLANT ON AUGUST 28, 2015.

RECOMMENDATION

1. Receive and file a report on an uncontrolled release of natural gas from the AES plant in Redondo Beach on August 28, 2015; and
2. That City Council request a full accounting of the event from management of AES Redondo Beach including the reasons for the gas release as well as a description of measures by AES to provide timely and accurate information to the City and to prevent similar gas releases in the future.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the evening of Friday, August 28, 2015, the AES electrical generating plant in Redondo Beach experienced an unexpected and uncontrolled release of natural gas into the atmosphere. The Fire Department believes the release lasted approximately 39 minutes. On the evening of August 28th, the Fire Department responded to three locations to check for natural gas odors. Additionally, the City of Hermosa Beach received calls from the public concerned about natural gas odors.

As a result of a call from a concerned citizen, the Redondo Beach Fire Department was alerted that the source of the gas leak may be the AES plant. The Fire Department is not aware of any notification made to the City by AES of this hazardous release. Upon the Fire Department's arrival at the AES site, plant personnel confirmed that the plant was experiencing an unexpected venting of natural gas. Plant personnel were able to secure the natural gas leak and render the situation safe.

BACKGROUND

On the evening of August 28th at approximately 19:45 hours, the City of Redondo Beach Dispatch Center began to receive calls for natural gas odors at different locations in the City. The Fire Department responded to three different addresses, although the actual number of calls to 9-1-1 is unknown at this time. Calls on record were to 700 N. PCH at 19:45 hours, 1300 Amethyst at 19:48 hours, and 1100 N. Harbor Drive at 19:57 hours. The last call to which the Fire Department responded was the AES plant, with the caller stating that there was a strong smell of natural gas and there appeared to be alarms of some kind sounding. On-duty Fire Division Chief Mark Winter responded to the AES address along with Truck 61 and Squad 63.

During his response to the plant, Chief Winter directed Dispatch to make contact with AES to ascertain what type of issue they were having. Dispatch reported back to Chief Winter that multiple attempts were made to reach someone at the AES facility, and that all attempts rolled into voice mail only. No direct contact was ever made by Dispatch to anyone at AES.

Upon arrival at the AES front gate, responding Fire Department units found the gate closed and unattended. There were no security personnel available to provide immediate access to the plant. Chief Winter noted an audible loud noise of what he believed was escaping gas under pressure. Chief Winter activated the call button at the front gate but received no immediate response from any AES personnel. He instructed the truck company to prepare to force entry onto the AES premises, when a security officer finally responded over the gate speaker that he was coming to the gate to assist them. Once the security officer arrived and opened the gate, Chief Winter requested that a representative from the AES plant with working knowledge of what was happening meet with him at the front of the property. In the interim, Chief Winter deployed Fire Department assets in preparation for managing an unstable incident.

Within a few minutes, Mr. Amer Saeed from AES arrived to brief Chief Winter on the incident. He then led Chief Winter and a small complement of Fire personnel to the location of a venting pressure relief valve. Mr. Saeed then left, reportedly to manually shut down the gas line feeding the pressure relief valve.

At this point the gas leak was stopped, with assurances from plant personnel that the pressures in the line were stable and below any pressure that would cause an issue. Chief Winter instructed the Redondo Beach Dispatch Center to contact the EPA and advise them of the gas leak. The following information was conveyed to the EPA:

1. The gas leak began at approx. 19:36 hours, according to AES personnel.
2. The gas leak was brought under control at an estimated 20:15 hours.
3. The operating pressure of the gas supply lines was approximately 65 PSI.
4. The total estimated discharge time of the natural gas was 39 minutes.

The EPA Report number is 1126982.

No one from EPA came to the scene. Dispatch advised that they (EPA) did not request any more info or follow up.

A representative from the Gas Company was also summoned to the scene (no name recorded), who advised that there was no need to continue to monitor the area for Natural Gas. He stated that once the leak had been stopped, there was no longer a threat to the area.

During this incident Chief Winter reported that he was contacted by a Hermosa Beach Engine company and told that they were also checking on complaints in their city for natural gas smells that they believed were related to the AES discharge. The extent of the impact to Hermosa Beach is presently unknown to us.

During the day on Saturday, August 29, 2015, City Manager Joe Hoefgen and AES representative Eric Pendergraft communicated via text and voice mail. Subsequently, on Monday, August 31, 2015, Mr. Pendergraft forwarded a synopsis of the gas release event to the City Manager. Attached to this staff report is a record of the correspondence between AES and the City.

The recommendation is that the City Council request of AES a full accounting of the events of August 27, 2015, including the reasons for the gas release as well as a description of additional measures by AES to provide timely and accurate notification to the City and to prevent similar gas releases in the future.

Submitted by:
Robert Metzger, Fire Chief

Approved for forwarding by:
Joe Hoefgen, City Manager

ATTACHMENT

- Text / Voice Mail / Email Communication from AES
- Draft Letter to AES