



NEWS

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Air District Orders Tesoro Refinery to Clean Up Equipment and Operations

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District (Air District) has issued an order requiring the Tesoro Refinery to take steps to address repeated releases of sooty particulate pollution from a piece of equipment known as a coker. The order, officially called a “conditional order for abatement,” was issued by the Air District’s Hearing Board—an independent, quasi-judicial, five-member panel.

The order comes in response to four separate incidents over an 18-month period in which Tesoro’s primary system for handling coker exhaust gas malfunctioned. In each case, coker exhaust gas laden with particulate pollution generated a black plume from the refinery’s smoke stacks. Particulate pollution is a harmful air contaminant that can be inhaled deeply into the lungs and cause tissue damage.

“Clearly, Tesoro does not have an adequate method of handling coker emissions during upset conditions,” said Jack P. Broadbent, the Air District’s Executive Officer. “This order will require them to come up with a better method, and to implement interim measures until those improvements come online.”

The order requires Tesoro to develop and implement an improved backup system to handle coker emissions during upsets. The refinery must also take interim steps to reduce the likelihood of further upsets and to minimize impacts should an upset occur, including revising operating procedures and retraining staff. Tesoro will be subject to penalties of up to \$25,000 per day if it fails to comply with any of these requirements.

In addition to the abatement order, the Air District is also assessing monetary penalties on Tesoro for past violations involving the coker.

“In the most recent incident in January Tesoro emitted a particulate plume for over two weeks in violation of air pollution standards and caused a public nuisance,” said Air District Counsel Brian C. Bunger, Esq. “Tesoro must pay a penalty commensurate with the severity of these violations.”

The Air District’s pending enforcement actions with respect to coker emissions come on the heels of recent settlements of other past violations by Tesoro. Last month, Tesoro paid \$800,000 in civil penalties to settle over 75 past violations.

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