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Air District fines Chemtrade \$1,150,000 for air quality violations

Faulty monitors caused an underreporting of sulfur dioxide emissions

SAN FRANCISCO – The Bay Area Air Quality Management District announced today that it has fined Chemtrade \$1,150,000 for air quality violations at Chemtrade’s sulfuric acid manufacturing plant in Richmond. The penalty resolves seven notices of violation issued to Chemtrade for violations that occurred at its facility in Richmond.

The violations primarily involved Chemtrade’s continuous emissions monitoring system, which measures the plant’s sulfur dioxide emissions to ensure the facility complies with permit limits. Chemtrade failed to properly calibrate, operate and maintain this monitoring system over an eight-year period. This caused the monitoring system to under-report sulfur dioxide emissions by an estimated 33 percent per year on average.

“The substantial financial penalties for these violations send a clear message to Chemtrade that they must accurately monitor their sulfur dioxide emissions in compliance with all air quality regulations to help protect those living in the surrounding communities,” said Dr. Philip Fine, executive officer of the Air District. “Protecting air quality and the health of Bay Area residents is our top priority.”

Sulfur dioxide can have adverse impacts on the respiratory system and contributes to acid rain. The Air District’s audit did not find evidence that Chemtrade’s sulfur dioxide emissions exceeded the facility’s permit limits. But it did find that Chemtrade’s monitoring system was unable to reliably monitor the extent of the plant’s emissions.

The Air District’s Hearing Board previously issued an abatement order that required Chemtrade to address the problems with its monitoring system in April 2022. The assessment of this \$1,150,000 fine adds a monetary penalty to that enforcement response. Agency staff will recommend that the Air District’s Board of Directors consider using a portion of these penalty funds in the Richmond community for projects to improve air quality.

In addition to the problems with monitoring system, the \$1,150,000 penalty also covers violations for failure to use required abatement equipment to prevent emissions while unloading railcars at the facility; failure to properly start up the sulfuric acid plant, resulting in a visible yellow-brown plume from its main exhaust stack; and failure to report required information regarding these violations. All the violations that led to this settlement have been corrected.

The Air District issues Notices of Violation when facilities violate a specific air quality regulation or rule. Violators are generally required to respond to the notice within 10 days and submit a description

of the actions they will take to correct the problem. These actions can include shutting down certain operations immediately or changing operations or equipment to come into compliance.

The [Bay Area Air Quality Management District](#) is the regional agency responsible for protecting air quality in the nine-county Bay Area. Connect with the Air District via [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#).

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