



Department of  
Toxic Substances  
Control

*Preventing  
environmental  
damage from  
hazardous waste,  
and restoring  
contaminated  
sites for all  
Californians.*



State of California



California  
Environmental  
Protection Agency

## Fact Sheet, July 2006

# Proposed Methane Protection Plan for School Site (Former Ambassador Hotel)

You are invited to review and comment on a plan to prevent the buildup and accumulation of methane and hydrogen sulfide gases in and under buildings at the Central Los Angeles Learning Center #1 Site (formerly the Ambassador Hotel property) located at 3400 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, California 90010. The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) is building three new schools on the site, designed to relieve overcrowding at Cahuenga Elementary School, Hoover Elementary School, Berendo Middle School, Los Angeles High School, and Belmont High School.

The Department of Toxic Substances Control, a department within the California Environmental Protection Agency, is responsible for overseeing the investigation and ensuring that mitigation and cleanup activities are conducted in accordance with state and federal laws and regulations.

### This fact sheet provides information on:

- Site History and Background
- Why Mitigation Is Necessary
- Understanding Methane and Hydrogen Sulfide
- Environmental Studies to Date
- Proposed Plan
- California Environmental Quality Act
- Next Steps

## COMMUNITY MEETING AND OPEN HOUSE

### Meeting

**Thursday, July 13, 2006 at 6:30 p.m.**  
Berendo Middle School  
1157 S. Berendo Street  
Los Angeles, CA

### Open House

**Saturday, July 15, 2006 – 10 a.m.-12 noon**  
Former Ambassador Hotel Site  
Entrance Gate at Catalina and 7th Street  
Los Angeles, CA

We encourage you to take an active role in this issue for your community by attending the meeting or open house event. You can attend the evening community meeting to see a formal presentation and to share your comments and questions. You can attend the open house any time during the two-hour period and get your questions answered one-on-one in an informal setting. *Spanish and Korean translation will be provided*

### PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

**June 30, 2006 to August 15, 2006**

The Draft Remedial Action Plan for this school site and other related project documents are available for review and public comment at the locations listed on page 4. Please submit written comments in the enclosed postage paid return envelope postmarked by August 15, 2006. Or, email before the deadline date no later than 5 p.m. to: Ms. Stephanie Lewis, DTSC Project Manager, [slewis1@dtsc.ca.gov](mailto:slewis1@dtsc.ca.gov)



## Site History and Background

The proposed site is the location of the former Ambassador Hotel. It is approximately 23-acres in size and is bordered by Wilshire Boulevard to the north; West 8th Street to the south; a portion of West 7th Street, and South Catalina Street to the east; and South Mariposa Avenue to the west. There are commercial office buildings, a parking structure, a vacant lot on the streets east of the site; and on the west apartment buildings, a commercial office building, and a parking lot.

The methane and hydrogen sulfide present at the site most likely originated from the breakdown of natural crude oil over millions of years. Portions of the site are known to exist in the methane zone and methane buffer zone as identified by the City of Los Angeles Department of Public Works. The gases presumably migrated to the surface through cracks in the soil beneath the site. Although occurring naturally in Southern California soils, exposure to high levels of these gases could cause adverse health effects.

## Why Mitigation is Necessary

Methane and hydrogen sulfide were initially detected in 2002 near the Ambassador corehole No. 1 Area, located in the vicinity of the parking lot along South Catalina Street, south of West 7th Street. The corehole is an oil exploration well drilled in 1977 to a depth of approximately 7,361 feet. It was subsequently abandoned under the supervision of the Department of Conservation Division of Oil, Gas & Geothermal Resources (DOGGR) and the Los Angeles Fire Department in the same year.

During recent investigations, conducted by LAUSD under DTSC oversight, high levels of methane and hydrogen sulfide were found in the soil at concentrations that could pose a potential risk if allowed to move to the surface and accumulate in confined spaces.

To address potential concerns related to adverse health effects or the potential for explosion in confined areas, the LAUSD prepared a remedial cleanup plan (RAP). DTSC will oversee the mitigation and will ensure that it is performed in a manner that does not harm people or the environment.

## Understanding Methane and Hydrogen Sulfide

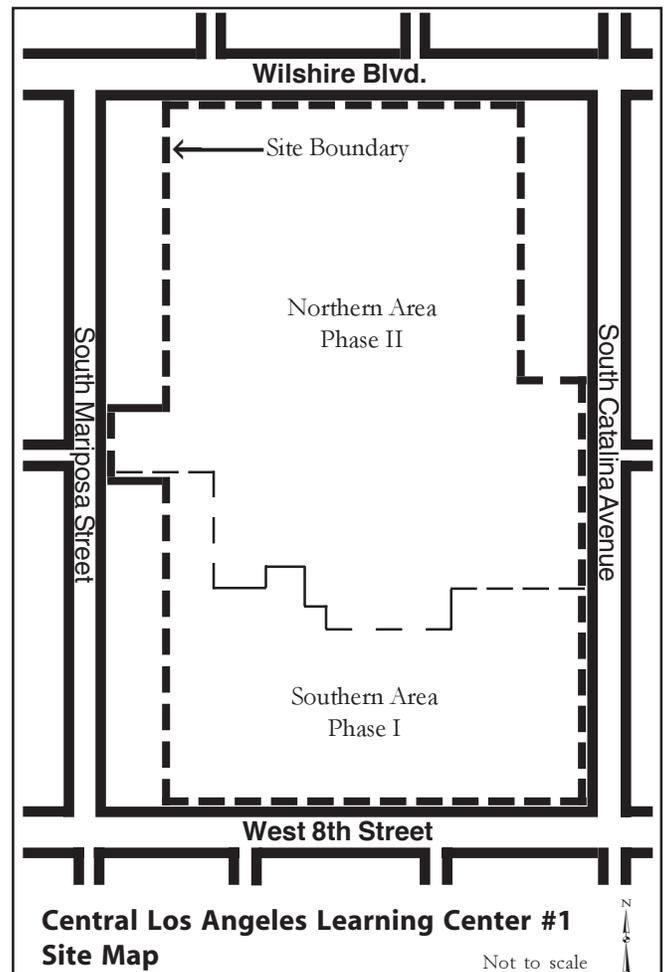
Methane gas is colorless, tasteless and odorless. Methane is produced by the decay of organic matter and it is the primary component in natural gas used

for cooking and heating. Methane does not cause cancer and is not a toxic chemical. However, it can be hazardous. If ignited, it can catch fire, explode and cause suffocation if it accumulates in buildings and other enclosed spaces. The highest methane concentration at this site was measured 25 feet deep, approximately 200 feet south-southeast of the former corehole.

Hydrogen sulfide is a flammable, colorless gas with the odor of rotten eggs. It can be toxic at low levels and can build up in enclosed spaces like buildings or utility vaults. This gas is a natural product of decay, and is most commonly a result of decomposition in sewer systems. Hydrogen sulfide was found in the same vicinity as the methane gas; and presents a potential health hazard at the site. The highest hydrogen sulfide concentration was measured 35 feet deep underground, approximately 250 feet west of the former corehole.

## Environmental Activities to Date

LAUSD prepared its initial cleanup plan, called the Removal Action Workplan (RAW) in October 2002. The removal plan included measures to address methane detected at levels that could pose a health risk.



DTSC approved the RAW recommendation to re-abandon (re-seal) the corehole and conduct quarterly monitoring to determine if gas concentrations were reduced to safe levels. The corehole was re-abandoned by LAUSD between February 17 and March 11, 2003, under the supervision of the DOGGR and DTSC.

The following cleanup measures were completed under the initial Removal Action Workplan:

1. Closure of four underground storage tanks (three located in the northern area and one located in the southern area on the site map);
2. Removal of soil containing petroleum hydrocarbons at concentrations posing a potential health risk;
3. Removal of lead-impacted soil from the Cooling Tower Area;
4. Sealing the corehole to mitigate methane leaks.
5. Quarterly soil vapor monitoring conducted at the site since 2002.

These measures did not completely remove the source and levels of methane and hydrogen sulfide remaining on the site. In 2004, a passive (non-motorized) venting study was carried out to determine if passive venting trenches could remove trapped gases and ultimately reduce levels of underground methane and hydrogen sulfide.

### **Proposed Plan**

In order to resolve gas issues, the LAUSD prepared a proposed Remedial Action Plan (RAP), outlining the details of the proposed mitigation. This plan explains the options proposed to reduce and control the methane and hydrogen sulfide beneath the site.

If approved, the plan will allow for the installation of an underground gas mitigation system to collect, vent, and monitor for the presence of the gases beneath the site. This plan is designed to protect students, faculty and staff on campus, public health, and the environment.

Methane and hydrogen sulfide detected beneath the site behave in a similar manner and present similar risks, so mitigation measures will generally be the same for both gases. The proposed approach presented in the remedial plan includes a combination of the following options:

- **Gas Dispersion Layer** — Installation of an 18-inch layer of sand in the exterior landscaped area, covered by a minimum of 18 inches of a soil to create a buffer zone to help prevent gases from accumulating.

- **Passive Venting System** — A system of pipes, placed in paved areas larger than 5,000 continuous square feet, to vent gases coming up from the soil.
- **Passive Venting Systems with Air Sweep** — A continuous gas monitoring system to trigger blowers (powerful fans) to inject air through the ventilation pipes if gas is detected at levels considered a risk. These will be installed in all new buildings, parking structure, and in the existing former Coconut Grove Building, as part of air conditioning systems and detection/alarm system.
- **Sub-slab Membrane** — A protective barrier placed underneath the foundations of the parking structure and all buildings to prevent passage of gases into the buildings.
- **Enhanced Ventilation System**, or dedicated ventilation fans, and detection/alarm system in the enclosed rooms within the parking structure and within the former Coconut Grove Building.
- **Membrane and a sand dispersion layer** beneath the swimming pool.
- **Perimeter trench and gas collection piping** tied to vent risers.
- **Installation of institutional controls** (such as landscaping and fencing) to limit access to any steeply-sloped areas of the site.

### **California Environmental Quality Act**

DTSC is required to review all environmental cleanup activities under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), which asks a series of questions about the possibility of significant effects on the environment.

A draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Report (SEIR) has been prepared to provide additional information to the 2004 EIR with regard to locations and concentrations of methane and hydrogen sulfide gases. LAUSD was the lead agency for the 2004 EIR; however, DTSC is the lead agency for the draft SEIR. The draft SEIR examines potential impacts associated with construction and operation of the subsurface gas mitigation system in compliance with CEQA provisions. The SEIR will be made available for public review and comment, and DTSC's response to public comments will be issued with the final SEIR. The final SEIR must be approved prior to DTSC's issuance of approval of the final Remedial Action Plan (RAP).

## Next Steps

LAUSD will submit Remedial Design Documents (RDDs) containing the detailed mitigation system construction drawings and specifications to DTSC for review and approval. Two RDDs will be completed: one for construction in the Phase I Area (consisting of the future parking structure and kindergarten through grade 3 facilities in the southern portion of the site); and a second for construction of the Phase II Area (consisting of the remaining campus facilities and the associated playing fields in the northern portion of the site). The Phase I Area construction is scheduled to begin in the fall of 2006, followed closely by construction of the Phase II Area.

Upon DTSC approval of the design documents, installation activities will begin. The installation of the mitigation system will be integrated with the overall school construction process to avoid delays.

A Removal Action Completion Report will be prepared and submitted to DTSC for final approval following installation of the gas mitigation system. After approval, DTSC will certify the school site is safe for occupancy.

After construction and prior to the school opening, DTSC will enter into a legal agreement with LAUSD to establish the roles and responsibilities of both parties to ensure the long-term safe Operation and Maintenance (O&M) of the new gas mitigation system. This will require LAUSD to inspect and monitor the system on a regular basis and following any earthquake activity, and to submit O&M reports to DTSC documenting the performance of the gas mitigation system.

**Prior to making a final decision** on the proposed remedial plan, DTSC will review and consider all comments received during the public comment period. DTSC will then prepare a "Response to Comments." Anyone who submits comments regarding the cleanup activities with their address will receive a copy of this document. Additionally, a copy of the Response to Comments will be placed in the information repositories listed below.

## Where to Find Site Documents

The Draft Remedial Action Plan and other site documents are available for your review at the following locations:

**Berendo Middle School** Administration Office  
1157 S. Berendo St., Los Angeles, CA 90006  
(213) 382-1343

**Virgil Middle School** Administration Office  
152 N. Vermont St., Los Angeles, CA 90004  
(213) 388-0347

**Felipe De Neve Branch Library**  
2820 W. 6th St., Los Angeles, CA 90057  
(213) 384-7676

Monday & Wednesday: 10 a.m. – 8 p.m.  
Tuesday & Thursday: Noon – 8 p.m.  
Friday & Saturday: 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.

**Pio Pico – Koreatown Library**  
694 S. Oxford Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90005  
(213) 368-7647

Monday & Wednesday: 10 a.m. – 8 p.m.  
Tuesday & Thursday: Noon – 8 p.m.  
Friday & Saturday: 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.

**Department of Toxic Substances Control**  
Regional Records Office  
1011 N. Grandview Ave., Glendale, CA 91201  
Contact: Jone Barrio, (818) 551-2886  
Hours: 8 a.m.- 5 p.m. Monday – Friday

**Los Angeles Unified School District**  
Office of Environmental Health and Safety  
1055 W. 7th St., 9th Floor, Los Angeles, CA 90071  
Contact: Tom Watson, (213) 893-7423

The documents are also available online at the LAUSD web site: [www.laschools.org/amb/](http://www.laschools.org/amb/)

## Who to Contact for Information

If you have any questions about the project or cleanup activities, please contact the following persons:

Ms. Treva Miller, DTSC Public Participation Specialist, (818) 551-2846 or [tmiller@dtsc.ca.gov](mailto:tmiller@dtsc.ca.gov)

Ms. Stephanie Lewis, DTSC Project Manager  
(818) 551-2847 or [slewis1@dtsc.ca.gov](mailto:slewis1@dtsc.ca.gov)

**Si desea información en español, comuníquese con el: Sr. Javier Hinojosa, Jefe, Unidad Escolar – Glendale del DTSC, al (818) 551-2172.**

## For Media Inquiries:

Ms. Jeanne Garcia, DTSC Public Information Officer  
(818) 551-2176 or [jgarcia1@dtsc.ca.gov](mailto:jgarcia1@dtsc.ca.gov)

## Notice to Hearing-Impaired Individuals

You can obtain additional information about the site by using the California State Relay Service at (888) 877-5378 (TDD), or by calling Treva Miller, DTSC Public Participation Specialist, at (818) 551-2846.

