



Aliso Canyon Heath Research Study Orientation Sessions Summary

Executive Summary

On Saturday, March 16, 2019 and on Tuesday, March 19, 2019, two Orientation Sessions – open house / resource fair style events – were held at California State University, Northridge (CSUN) to provide information concerning next steps and to solicit feedback from the Northwest San Fernando Valley community about the Aliso Canyon Disaster Health Research Study. The goal was to share information regarding the SoCalGas Settlement and the Health Research Study, while also allowing space for the community to voice their concerns and submit input about the Health Research Study in a respectful and productive manner.

The SoCalGas Settlement provides \$25 million to conduct a multi-year health study on the short-term and long-term impacts of the Aliso Canyon Disaster, which will be carried out in coordination with the Community Advisory Group (CAG) and the Scientific Oversight Committee (SOC). With the Settlement approved on February 25, 2019, the Orientation Sessions were held as soon as possible to start informing and engaging the community on planning for the Health Research Study and its components. Specifically, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (Public Health) sought feedback on research areas of interest and the functions and operations of the CAG and the SOC.

The key takeaway is a better understanding of how the community members want to participate. Due to worries about symptoms and illnesses arising from exposure to the gas, people are interested in participating in research studies and in the CAG. Attendees clearly want the CAG – and, to a lesser extent, the SOC – member selection process to be led by the community.

Moving forward, the process for the CAG and the SOC needs to be confirmed and presented with precise language regarding selection and operation. The community clearly wants this process underway as soon as possible. Alongside this, communication channels need to be expanded to improve awareness.



Next Steps

- If future Orientation Sessions are held, they should be targeted to interest areas.
- The selection and operation process for the CAG and the SOC needs to be confirmed and then presented to the community with clear language surrounding the community's involvement.
- Establish better communication channels, including a hotline, an improved website and an email: "alisostudy@publichealth".
- Create business cards for team members, each with an individual's name, the Health Research Study's email, a common phone number (e.g., the hotline) and the Health Research Study's website.
- Identify opportunities to address concerns regarding current symptoms and illnesses, including improving communication with local doctors.
- Update stakeholder databases.



Event Information

Location – East Conference Center of California State University, Northridge’s campus, located at 18111 Nordhoff St., Northridge, CA 91330. CSUN was chosen for ADA-compliance, availability of parking and central location for Valley residents.

Dates and Times –Saturday, March 16, 2019, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., and Tuesday, March 19, 2019, from 4 to 8 p.m.

Type – Open house style with seven stations. Questions were directed to Public Health staff in one-on-one discussions at each informational station. Stations included poster displays of the Settlement, maps of the affected areas and informational graphics detailing the purpose of the Health Research Study and the operations of the Scientific Oversight Committee.

Participation Opportunities – Attendees were invited to fill out prompt cards regarding their wants and concerns and pin them on a board, add their questions to a real-time poll displayed on-screen via Sli.do and/or complete a hard-copy survey. The prompts are listed below.

Prompt Cards:

- I want more detail/information on...
- I am concerned about/that...
- I want to know...
- The Study should focus on...
- The Scientific question I want answered is...
- My question is...

Attendees were also asked to provide their contact information if they were interested in receiving more information about joining the Community Advisory Group. An online version of each station’s poster display was made available on the Public Health website for those who could not attend in person.

Stations – Seven stations:

- Station 1: Sign-in Table
- Station 2: Disaster, Response & Settlement
- Station 3: Health Research Study



Aliso Canyon Disaster Health Research Study

- Station 4: Breakout Space
- Station 5: Scientific Oversight Committee
- Station 6: Community Engagement
- Station 7: Public Health

Materials – In addition to the poster displays, handouts were available for attendees, including:

- Engagement Preferences Survey
- Aliso Canyon Health Research Study Summary
- Timeline and Settlement Handout
- Community Engagement Handout

Noticing – Due to the short timeframe, effective noticing was difficult. Due to venue challenges, the deadlines for most publications had passed, and the existing stakeholder database was insufficient. Effort was made to directly contact major stakeholders (including elected officials, Neighborhood Councils and community groups) and ask them to participate and share Orientation Sessions information within their networks. Public noticing focused on posting notices to social media and Public Health’s website. Attendees suggested using Facebook, Nextdoor, or Neighborhood Council for future events. The noticing was undertaken 10 days before the first Orientation Session.

Attendance – On Saturday, March 16, 2019, there were approximately 45 people in attendance, and on Tuesday, March 19, 2019, approximately 25 people attended. Over the course of the two days, 45 people signed in, providing their name and contact information. From this pool of 45 people, attendees were from 12 different neighborhoods, including Porter Ranch, Chatsworth, Northridge, North Hills and San Fernando. The online version was viewed by 39 people.

For such a high-profile issue, attendance numbers were lower than expected. However, attendees included Neighborhood Council Board members, field deputies for elected officials, leaders of actively engaged community groups, plus several locals keen to learn about the Health Research Study for themselves. Such attendees typically act as a conduit to larger communities and groups.



Questions, Comments and Concerns

Below is a brief summary of the topical areas associated with questions, comments and concerns received during the meeting:

Project Background

- Requests for a review of Dr. Nordella's research.
- Questions about symptoms and symptom trackers.
- Questions regarding treatments for possible effects.
- Concern regarding the timeframe (i.e., how useful the Health Research Study is three years after the blowout).
- Concern regarding SoCalGas' involvement in the Health Research Study.
- Questions about the lack of local universities included in the Scientific Oversight Committee.

The Health Research Study

- Concerns about conducting a Health Research Study without knowledge of the chemical components of the (proprietary) gas.
- Concern regarding the physical effects of the blowout, including cancer clusters and worsening of existing medical conditions.
- Questions on how to participate in the Health Research Study.
- Concerns about researchers who may be biased.
- Questions about the operations of the SOC.
- Desire for increased transparency, including SOC operations.
- Desire for a degree of community control or management of the Health Research Study.
- Concerns about the social and mental health effects of the disaster.

Engagement

- Concerns about trust and transparency from Public Health.
- Concerns regarding participation opportunities during work hours and availability.
- Desire for a centralized mode of communication.
- Desire for community input on SOC members.
- Desire for the community and not Public Health to select the CAG, including a potential community vote on CAG members.
- Questions on how to join the CAG.



Feedback

Event

People were of mixed opinions. Some would have preferred a town hall style format, but others appreciated the chance to speak one-on-one with technical experts and review the information at their own pace. A common complaint was the difficulty in locating the room using the map provided with the event information online and that directional signage could be better for future events. Attendees suggested adding more street names to the signs, providing larger and better positioned directional signage, and using an easier to find location. This has been noted, and future events will incorporate this feedback.

Appendix B shows a word cloud of all the feedback submitted via prompt cards, breakout sessions, one-on-ones, the SOC operations graphic, Sli.do comments and the hard-copy surveys.

The most frequently mentioned topics in the collected feedback include “Study”, “community”, “people” and “gas”. The largest area of concern for those who submitted feedback is possible or actual health effects residents in the Northwest San Fernando Valley are currently experiencing or could experience in the future. Attendees are seeking answers to symptoms and are worried about their families’ exposure and possible negative health effects.

Recommendation – Public Health should improve communications regarding health impacts, including how residents can access health resources and the information available on the website. The health impacts will be something the SOC can address, but in the interim, Public Health can take the following steps: identify accessible case studies, conduct an audit of informational materials and review informational quick wins.

There is also confusion on what the Health Research Study can answer, including individual treatment and timeframe; the holistic nature needs to be more widely understood. There were many mentions of exposure – during Halloween and soccer practices, for example – which explains the stated concerns about negative health effects they are experiencing.

Community Advisory Group (CAG)

- Consensus was that the public should have a level of control over the Community Advisory Group (CAG).
- Attendees provided different feedback on how the nomination process should proceed, including not allowing the majority of the CAG to be selected by the Neighborhood



Councils, while others suggested all members of the CAG should be elected by the community at-large.

- Most agreed that Public Health should not be selecting members.

Recommendation – The model should be finalized and made public as soon as possible. The current proposed model of seven Neighborhood Council representatives and between eight and thirteen at-large members (selected by the Neighborhood Council representatives) is a reasonable compromise.

Scientific Oversight Committee (SOC)

- Meetings of the SOC should be publicly accessible.
- SOC members should be diverse.
- Those who have any associations with SoCalGas cannot be on the SOC.
- Representatives of local universities should be included on the SOC.
- The community should be able to provide input on nominations to the SOC.

Recommendation – The model should be finalized and made public as soon as possible. The degree of community input on the SOC composition must be determined. It is recommended that at least one position be available for the CAG to choose, potentially from a list of qualified nominees. The SOC should have some degree of public engagement, including ways for the community to provide feedback and ask questions. It is recommended that this be conducted through an online format (e.g. WebEx Events – digital town halls). A standing item on every SOC agenda should be a discussion of received feedback and questions. The SOC schedule should also include annual collaborative workshops with the CAG.

Health Research Study

- Public Health should create a public symptom timeline, map and data registry.
- Public Health should provide timelines so the community can understand what is happening and when.
- The community wants to share information and anecdotal evidence they have already collected. They are committed to providing this input to researchers.
- Researchers should communicate with the community in a variety of ways, including social media, email, text, school notice, and postings in doctors' offices.
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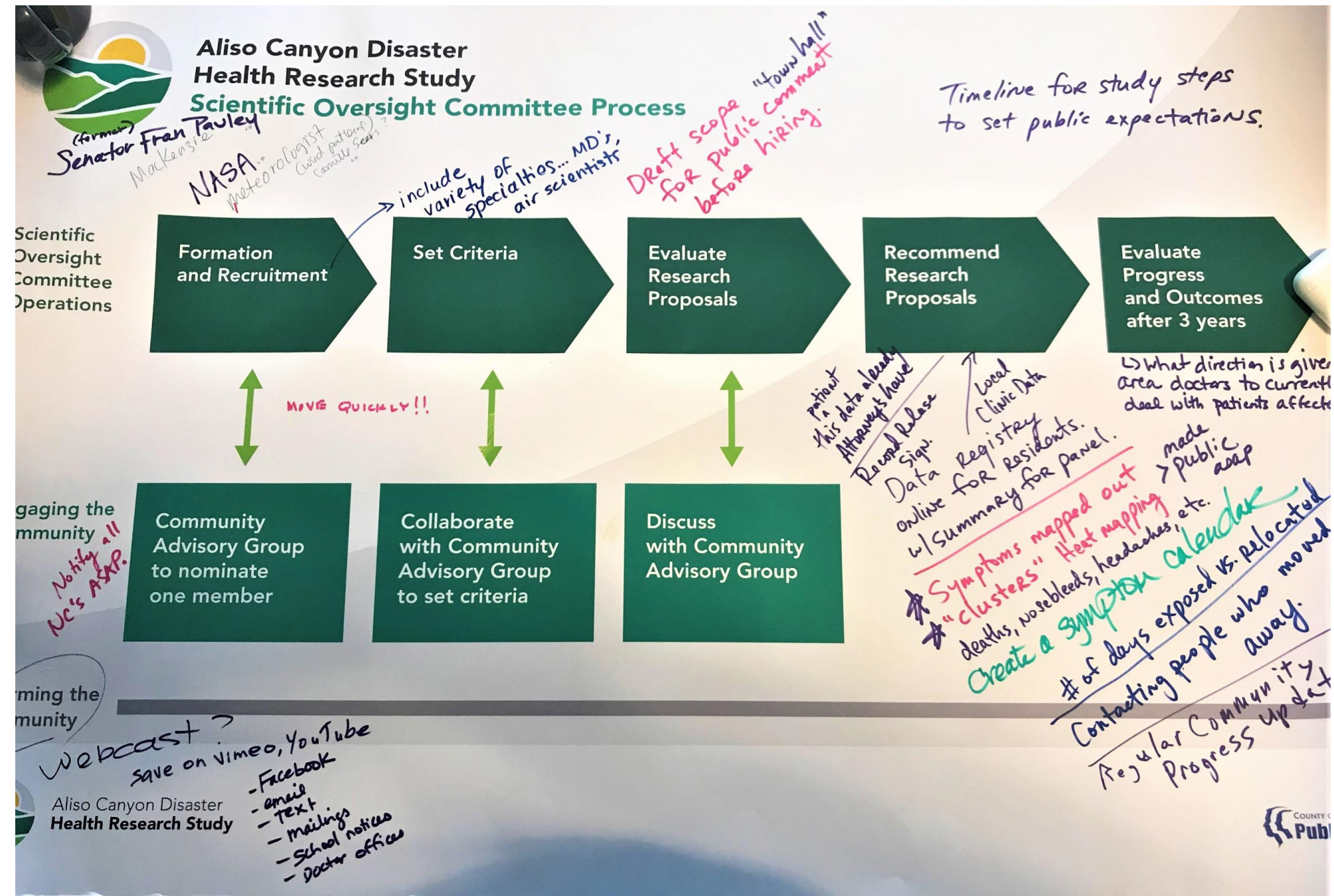


Aliso Canyon Disaster
Health Research Study

- Public Health should release research scopes for public comment prior to the commencement of solicitation.
- **Mental health impacts:** In the feedback collected, attendees expressed desire for this to be a topic of interest in the Health Research Study.
- **Chemical components of gas:** While SoCalGas may not share the exact chemical composition of the gas that was leaked, the community wants transparency on unknown chemicals potentially affecting their health.
- **Unusually high rates of symptoms/illness in affected area:** In the feedback collected, there were comments expressing concern over a believed higher than average number of cases of cancer in the community.

Recommendation – Explore using a comment wall tool such as Social Pinpoint to allow for the community to tell their stories and address the desire for symptom mapping, which will publicly display the community’s data for use by the SOC and researchers. Feedback through comment wall tools should be analyzed for recurrences that can be used in developing Health Research Study criteria and themes. Public Health should also explore opportunities to improve communication with local health practitioners.

Appendix A – SOC poster with comments



Appendix B – Word Cloud

