

Texas Attorney General: BP Illegally Released Air Toxins

Sarah Portlock, Associated Press Writer

HOUSTON (AP) — BP illegally emitted nearly 500,000 pounds of toxic air pollutants at its Texas City refinery during a 41-day period this spring, the state attorney general contends in a lawsuit.

According to the lawsuit filed Monday in state district court in Austin, BP's poor operation and maintenance for those days in April and May were the primary cause of the toxic emissions of cancer-causing benzene, carbon monoxide and nitrogen oxides. BP could be fined up to \$25,000 per day for each violation. The Texas City refinery is the nation's third-largest, about 30 miles south of Houston.

Last week, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality released a report finding that BP's multiple violations are "egregious" and the company has a poor compliance history. The state regulatory agency turned those findings over to the attorney general.

In an e-mailed statement Monday, BP spokesman Scott Dean said the company "will continue to cooperate with the attorney general's office and the TCEQ to resolve their concerns." Dean wrote that he wouldn't comment further about the litigation. Last week, Dean denied the allegations in the commission's report.

According to those findings, the emissions stem from an equipment malfunction on April 6 in the refinery's ultracracker unit, which helps convert petroleum products similar to diesel fuel into high-octane gasoline. The TCEQ has reported five other problems in the same unit within the last year.

The most recent problem was discovered when a worker noticed erratic gas flows in a compressor's high-pressure case and shut down the equipment, according to the TCEQ report. BP reported the incident to the TCEQ, but an agency investigation determined that the company did not properly maintain the equipment, which could have prevented the fire.

According to the lawsuit, BP continued using the equipment without the damaged compressor, causing the release of the toxic chemicals.

"Rather than shut down the (units) while it waited to repair the ... Compressor, and thereby avoid releasing contaminants into the air, BP decided to continue operating those units so as not to reduce productivity," the suit states. "BP made very little attempt to minimize the emission of air contaminants caused by its actions, once again prioritizing profits over environmental compliance."

This is the second recent lawsuit filed by Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott

Texas Attorney General: BP Illegally Released Air Toxins

Published on Industrial Maintenance & Plant Operation (<http://www.impomag.com>)

against BP. In June 2009, Abbott charged BP's poor operational practices led to 72 violations of harmful releases following a 2005 plant explosion that killed 15 workers and injured 170.

Between 2000 and 2007, the TCEQ recorded 15 violations at the refinery related to at least 39 so-called "emissions events" of unauthorized air emissions, according to the lawsuit.

A TCEQ official said last week there were no short-term health risks associated with the release, and the long-term impact of constant exposure to these toxic chemicals is unknown.

Last week, a Houston law firm filed a lawsuit against BP PLC seeking \$10 billion in damages for people who breathed in toxic chemicals during the release.

Source URL (retrieved on 09/19/2014 - 3:01pm):

http://www.impomag.com/news/2010/08/texas-attorney-general-bp-illegally-released-air-toxins?qt-recent_content=1