



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Nov. 16, 2016

Media contact

[Seth Preston](#)

Office: 360-428-1617 ext. 235

Mobile: 360-724-8766

Shell Puget Sound Refinery penalized for chemical release

Incident in early 2015 spurred widespread complaints

ANACORTES – Shell's [Puget Sound Refinery](#) faces a \$133,000 penalty because of an odor violation in February 2015 that prompted hundreds of complaints around the March Point facility.

In addition to operational violations related to the chemical release, the [Northwest Clean Air Agency](#) also found that the refinery failed to meet general duties to follow good air pollution control practices for minimizing emissions, as required by federal law.

"This penalty reflects the seriousness of the incident, which unnecessarily impacted hundreds of residents near the refinery," said Mark Buford, Northwest Clean Air Agency's deputy director. "Our agency's role is to enforce local, state and federal air quality regulations. We're taking this action because we want to make sure something like this doesn't happen again."

In April 2016, after a yearlong investigation, Northwest Clean Air Agency issued a Notice of Violation alleging that Shell did not follow shutdown and decontamination procedures while cleaning the refinery's east flare system.

On Feb. 20, 2015, because of Shell's failure to follow required procedures, a surge of wet, chemical-laden gases moved through the refinery's flare line. When operating as intended, the flare flame combusts chemicals into less odorous and toxic forms. The surge of gases prevented the flare from doing its job, resulting in the release of uncombusted chemicals to the atmosphere.

The chemicals released included hydrogen sulfide, dimethyl sulfide, mercaptans, and benzene.

Winds carried the released chemicals south from the refinery through the Swinomish Reservation and La Conner. Hundreds of people reported symptoms that included irritation of eyes, throat and lungs, headaches, nausea, fatigue, and loss of appetite.

Northwest Clean Air Agency received 67 complaints, mostly from individuals on the Swinomish Reservation and in La Conner. The Swinomish Tribe reported 176 written accounts of more than 550 affected people who live and work on the Swinomish Reservation. The Swinomish Tribe said 12 people sought medical treatment and five reported going to an emergency room or hospital.

The \$133,000 penalty total includes two violations of federal "general duty" clauses for proper facility operations, along with five operational violations. Each violation carries a maximum \$19,000 penalty.

Shell has 30 days to appeal the penalty to the [Washington Pollution Control Hearings Board](#).

The Northwest Clean Air Agency is responsible for enforcing federal, state and local air quality regulations in Island, Skagit, and Whatcom counties. In addition to permitting and regulating industrial sources of air pollution, the agency provides services and information related to asbestos, indoor air quality, outdoor burning, woodstoves and fireplaces. More information about the agency is available at www.nwcleanairwa.gov.