



Martinez Refining Company (MRC) Spent Catalyst Release Frequently Asked Questions

Updated Jan. 11, 2023

What was in the “white dust” released from the refinery on Nov. 24-25, 2022?

The “white dust” was spent [catalyst](#) accidentally released by the refinery, the Martinez Refining Company (MRC) said in its [72-hour report](#) to the County. Contra Costa Health (CCH) took surface samples of the material released into nearby neighborhoods. Lab results from those samples showed elevated levels of metals including aluminum, barium, chromium, nickel, vanadium and zinc. For example, our surface samples of the material released indicated that vanadium was approximately 100 times greater than the background dust sample collected up-wind from the event.

Does being exposed to these materials pose a risk to my health?

There can be short-term health impacts from breathing in these materials, especially for people with respiratory sensitivities. Anyone exposed to the material released from the Martinez refinery who is still experiencing respiratory symptoms such as coughing, sore throat or difficulty breathing should contact their healthcare provider.

What are the potential long-term health impacts?

It’s difficult to ascertain at this time. The long-term health impacts will depend on each person’s exposure to the spent-catalyst product. Contra Costa Health is working to learn more about the potential long-term health impacts through additional environmental testing and incident investigation.

Can I be re-exposed to these materials through contaminated soil in my yard?

Foods grown in soil that contains certain metals may pose health concerns – anyone who is growing food is encouraged to understand the make-up of their soil. More information can be found [here](#). Until further environmental testing is complete, the health department recommends not eating foods grown in soil that may have been exposed to the spent catalyst.

The white dust is still on my car and/or outdoor surfaces at my home or business. How can I safely remove it from those surfaces?

Rains that occurred the week after the release should have washed away most remaining material left on outdoor surfaces in the area near the refinery. Vehicles that still have catalyst dust on them should be taken to a commercial carwash for cleaning. Other surfaces, such as patio tables and chairs, can be wiped down while wearing gloves and a high-quality mask such as an N95. Carefully wet down suspected areas before cleaning to avoid spreading the material into the air.



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Is it safe for the wastewater from the carwash to go down the drain?

Yes. The equipment at these carwashing facilities will capture any solids or metals like the ones released by the refinery.

What caused the accidental release of spent catalyst?

This is still under investigation. MRC will be required to send a monthly report and update Contra Costa Health every 30 days until the refinery's internal investigation is completed. These 30-day reports will be posted on our webpage, cchealth.org/hazmat. The first 30-day report will be due to CCH on Dec. 29, 2022.

How much spent catalyst was released into the community?

This is under investigation. We are expecting to have details about how much catalyst was released by the end of December 2022.

There was intermittent flaring at MRC the week of Nov. 21. Was the release of spent catalyst related to the flaring?

The flaring was a separate incident that began prior to the release of the spent catalyst. It is possible that part of the cause of the release was related to precautions that were taken related to the flaring. Our investigation as to the cause of the release is not yet complete.

MRC should have notified CCH about the accidental offsite release of spent catalyst, but it did not do so. The health department learned about the release from social media posts by community members commenting on the "white dust" seen on surfaces near the refinery.

Will MRC face any legal consequences?

As part of our investigation, CCH will determine if any regulatory standards were violated during this incident that may warrant enforcement actions, including referral to the District Attorney. The Bay Area Air Management Quality District is also conducting an investigation of this event and they may take regulatory action as well.