

# We need an ISO

NOVEMBER 12, 2017 *By Pat Toth-Smith* <http://beniciaheraldonline.com/letters-iso-and-water-woes/>

As a Benicia resident I found out about the May 5 Valero refinery near-catastrophic emergency shutdown and major flaring incident in real time, when I drove through the large black cloud of smoke looming over Interstate 680 which was headed directly toward the Suisun Marsh and the city of Fairfield. The fire trucks and police were at the refinery, and as I drove by I received information about the incident and the shelter in place order from my radio. Luckily for me, my car seals up tight when the windows and vents are closed so I had no adverse effects, but unfortunately, some people close to the incident required medical care. Neither our town of Benicia nor the residents ever received any information about what happened, what was in the black cloud and what could help prevent another major incident like this in the future.

It wasn't until 5 months later that a KQED reporter shared a very limited investigative report from Solano County about the incident. This is surprising, being Solano County has one of the highest rates of childhood asthma and ER visits for asthma in the state of California, and the public would have benefited from knowing what had been in that black cloud. It seems there is a problem with the reporting mechanism that left the city government of Benicia and its residents in Solano County in the dark about what happened. Also, it seems that there are no air monitors in the town of Benicia that accurately measures toxic incidents in real time that are able to give a report of what was released.

These two areas could be greatly improved on if we had an Industrial Safety Ordinance (ISO).

Benicia is the only jurisdiction in the Bay Area that contains a refinery but doesn't have an ISO.

Contra Costa County adopted an ISO and revised it after the 2012 Chevron Fire to help facilitate cooperation between industry, the city, the county, local fire departments, Cal/OSHA, Cal/EPA, other agencies that have oversight of businesses, and the public in the prevention and reduction of incidents at their refineries.

Their ISO has been praised as the best safety ordinance in the country and we have the opportunity to hear about it at an expert safety panel discussion (including representatives that created the Contra Costa ISO) on Nov. 14 at 7pm, in the Benicia Library at 150 East L St., which is free to the public.

This issue is extremely important, as the residents of Richmond found out after the 2012 Chevron catastrophic fire that resulted in 15,000 people seeking medical treatment at area hospitals. Community support is needed to encourage our city government to protect us citizens and our children in creating and adopting a Benicia ISO and attending this panel meeting is the essential first step, so I urge you all to come.

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