

# ISO will create better informed community

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A lot has been said and written over the past several weeks on bringing an industrial safety ordinance (ISO) to the city of Benicia. Or, perhaps we should think of it as a community safety ordinance, which is what a Benicia ISO would also represent. As a resident of Benicia, I continue to believe that enacting such an ordinance, modeled after the Contra Costa County and city of Richmond ordinances, will provide more information to the City of Benicia and therefore to the community. Information is necessary and valuable because it “informs” us, in this case, about environmental risks and exposure to toxins, safety and risk management plans to reduce and prevent accidents, and industrial operations that impact the community. Information from the audits and reports produced by the impacted industries would be submitted to the City of Benicia (and therefore to the community). All this ISO compliance activity, including community access and input, should help foster more interaction and cooperation between industries and the City as they strive to ensure a protected community. Who knows? The Benicia ISO could even provide the process through which community-wide monitoring finally becomes a reality – perhaps bringing out of mothballs and placing into operation the previously purchased monitoring equipment languishing in sheds since 2008 or so.

There are those who oppose an ISO for Benicia. Their arguments seem to come down to the following: it would be duplicative, cost us money, maybe raise taxes, or it is just unnecessary regulation. To the first point, it is true that a Benicia ISO will include existing CA EPA/CA OSHA requirements; but that’s good, meaning nothing extra there for affected industries to worry about. But, in addition, Benicia’s ISO should also include reporting requirements comparable to what the city of Richmond and Contra Costa County officials receive through their respective ISOs. That’s important, because the city of Benicia (and therefore the community) doesn’t receive much of anything now, at least directly, regarding CA EPA/CA OSHA compliance. Secondly, as to raising taxes or costing us consumers more money from our pocket, costs for implementation and compliance related to the Benicia ISO should be collected in the form of fees on the impacted industries, similar to the city of Richmond and Contra Costa County ISOs. Yes, the industries could choose to pass those costs on to consumers, but even so, the Benicia community in exchange receives information that we don’t currently have about risks and exposures, or only receive on a limited and insufficient basis.

Finally, those opposed wonder whether an ISO is just unnecessary. However, Benicia is the only jurisdiction in the East Bay with a refinery that does not have a local safety ordinance. Benicia is the only city in Solano County that is home to a refinery, and currently our county has no plans to develop an ISO. An ISO is working well in the city of Richmond, and the ISO in Contra Costa County is considered the best safety

ordinance in the country. Benicia deserves a seat at the table with Valero and other industries subject to CAL EPA/CA OSHA compliance requirements. A Benicia ISO will provide that seat and give the Benicia community a voice in the preventing and/or minimizing the effects of incidents like the near-catastrophic May 5 Valero emergency shutdown and major flaring incident. And, next time, when such an incident or even worse one occurs, with an ISO in place the community will have real-time information available to answer questions that could not be answered on May 5th or in the days, weeks, and months that followed.

I urge all Benicians to support the continuing efforts to bring a draft ISO to City Council for consideration and ultimate enactment of a Benicia ISO.

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Benicia*