

Agendize discussion of ISO

NOVEMBER 9, 2017 *By Roger Straw* <http://beniciaheraldonline.com/letters-lwv-forum-and-iso/>

At its May 23, 2017 meeting, the Benicia City Council agreed on a 4-1 vote to “agendize in the future” a discussion on adoption of an Industrial Safety Ordinance (ISO). The vote came close on the heels of the near-catastrophic sudden shutdown of power at Valero Refinery.

“Time has shown that Benicia needs to have an Industrial Safety Ordinance,” wrote Mayor Patterson. “This was considered in the early 2000s but no action was taken. Recent events are compelling for adoption of an ISO modeled on the Contra Costa ISO. Unlike the other 4 refineries in the Bay Area (all in Contra Costa County), Valero is an ‘integrated refinery’ where power loss in one area of the refinery impacts the whole facility. In other refineries in the Bay Area, power outages can be isolated to parts of a refinery.”

When the Council agrees to agendize a discussion in the future, city staff are called upon to follow up with research and to supply a report to the Council preparing the way for the discussion.

Our city staff is excellent. Staff is undergoing a huge transition after losing key staff members, orienting new staff and managing with a few interims. So it is understandable that staff may be reluctant to take on the responsibility of providing support on a Council request such as the one of May 23.

But the health and safety of Industrial Park workers and the good people who live and work in Benicia must not take a back seat to other significant concerns. We learned a fearful lesson last May. It’s time to review, learn lessons, and take action to protect ourselves.

Six months with no agenda item is long enough. I call on our elected officials and staff to move quickly to convene a follow-up discussion on adoption of an ISO to protect Benicia workers and residents.

For more information, please attend a Town Hall on Tuesday, Nov. 14, 7 p.m. at the Benicia Library. A distinguished panel will offer insights and background on the interface between State regulations and a local ISO.

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member of Benicians for a Safe and Healthy Community*