

LARNIE FOX: WE WOULD SIMPLY LIKE TO KNOW WHAT IS IN THE AIR

June 25, 2018

Simple.

As a citizen of Benicia who lives close to a refinery I, like many other Benicians, would simply like to know what is in the air that we breathe.



Larnie Fox, Benicia

At the Benicia City Council meeting last Tuesday, 6/19/18, the Council missed an excellent opportunity to get us that information. Valero clearly does not want us to know what is in the air we breathe. Unfortunately Tom Campbell joined Mark Hughes and Alan Schwartzman in opposing the proposed Industrial Safety Ordinance. Tom did say that he would vote for such an ordinance in November “if Valero doesn’t act”. I have no doubt that Valero will “act”, but I doubt that it will act in such a way that gets us real-time, publicly accessible air-quality monitors in our neighborhoods. People in our community have been working to get such monitors for close to twenty years. Valero has consistently hampered efforts in that direction. These are the simple facts. It raises the simple question: why does Valero not want us to know what is in our air?

My wife and I are not part of the [ISO Working Group](#), but we and scores of Benicians supporting an Industrial Safety Ordinance sat through the marathon Council meeting last Tuesday until the wee hours of the morning.

- We heard a very detailed, commonsense, comprehensive proposal for an ISO that included both fence-line and community air monitors and a “seat at the table” that would give our representatives a voice and access to information about events at the refinery.
- We heard requests from City Council members for Valero to provide more information about the May 5, 2017 flaring incident, which prompted shelter-in-place warnings in our schools and evacuations and sent residents to the hospital, and explain why such information had not already been provided.
- We heard Valero stonewalling those requests to the obvious frustration of all five Council members.
- We heard them talking about installing only fence-line (not community) monitors, and even being unwilling to say where those would be located. (We found out they would be on the side of their facility that would measure air moving away from Benicia.)
- We saw an embarrassing moment when Robert Livesay, a frequent contributor to the Benicia Herald, claimed to be “an organized group” in order to speak out of turn and for an extended time – for an incoherent diatribe against community engagement on this issue – taking advantage of the courtesy the Council extends to actual organized groups

like Benicians for a Safe and Healthy Community and Valero Energy Partners. This was unfortunate as our local democracy flourishes only because of the civility and courtesy we show each other, even if we disagree on issues.

- We also saw many well-informed members of our community ask our elected representatives for an ISO that would get us the information we need to be able to save lives should an accident worse than the May 5, 2017 event occur at Valero in the future.

This is not a simple issue. The ISO is multifaceted and complex. However, the simple fact remains that we deserve air-quality monitors in our neighborhoods and access to the information from those monitors in real time. The Council has again delayed this legitimate request. Let's thank Mayor Patterson and Vice Mayor Steve Young for their leadership, and remember to hold the other three accountable in November.

Larnie Fox, Benicia