U.S. EPA settles with Valero for hazardous waste violations at Bay Area refinery

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SAN FRANCISCO – Today, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced a settlement with Valero Refining Company - California over improper management of hazardous waste and toxic chemicals at its crude oil refinery in Benicia. Violations included illegally disposing benzene into an unlined stormwater retention pond and not alerting the public about all of its toxic chemical releases.

Valero will pay a $157,800 penalty and modify its piping operations; submitting a work plan by the end of 2016 and completing the project by June 2017. This action will prevent an estimated 5,000 lbs of benzene, a known human carcinogen, from being released into the environment over the next 10 years. The company will also correct and resubmit its toxic chemical release reports.

“Valero’s operations can affect both the communities near the refinery and the wildlife habitat of Suisun Bay,” said Alexis Strauss, EPA’s Acting Regional Administrator for the Pacific Southwest. "It is critical for Valero to comply with federal laws that protect public health and our natural resources."

Valero Refining Company - California is a subsidiary of Valero Energy Corporation, a global manufacturer and marketer of transportation fuels, petrochemical products and power, based in San Antonio, Texas. EPA conducted an inspection at Valero’s Benicia refinery in May 2014 to assess compliance with the federal Resource Conservation and Recovery Act and the Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act.

Additional violations uncovered by the inspection included the company’s failure to determine if solid waste generated at the refinery was hazardous; failure to maintain and operate the facility as needed to minimize the possibility of any unplanned release; and failure to maintain complete and accurate records at the facility.

This investigation was part of EPA’s continuing efforts to ensure communities located near complex industrial facilities are informed of the toxic releases from those facilities. This action also reflects EPA’s focus on the largest hazardous waste generators, including petroleum refineries.
The federal Resource Conservation and Recovery Act program oversees the safe management and disposal of hazardous waste. Under authority delegated by EPA, the California Department of Toxic Substances Control enforces this hazardous waste management program in the state. EPA routinely conducts RCRA inspections in its state oversight role, to ensure the state effectively implements its program.

The Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act was created to help communities plan for chemical emergencies. It also requires industry to report on the storage, use and releases of hazardous substances in a community. To accomplish this, EPA created the Toxics Release Inventory. This publicly available database contains information on toxic chemical releases and other waste management activities reported annually by certain industries and federal facilities.

For more information on RCRA, please visit: https://www.epa.gov/rcra

For more information about the Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act, please visit: http://www2.epa.gov/epcra

For more information on the Toxic Releases Inventory Program, please visit: https://www.epa.gov/toxics-release-inventory-tri-program

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