

Compton air being tested for toxins

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COMPTON — After a cancer-causing compound was discovered at toxic levels in Paramount last fall, the South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD), has decided to run tests for the same substance in Compton.

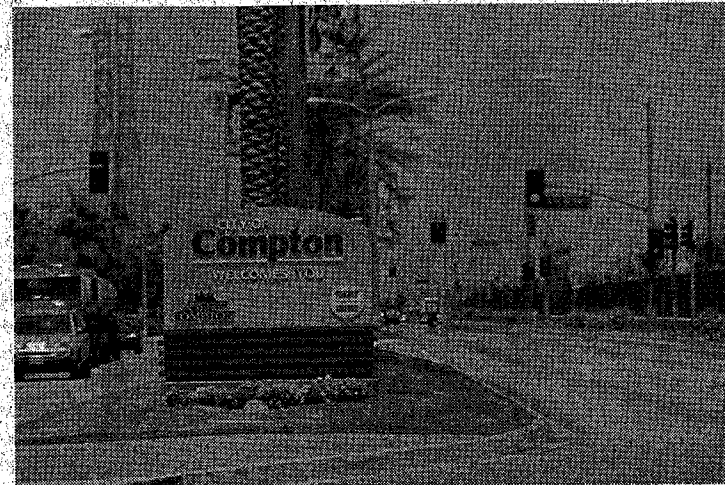
The city was chosen since it is home to a concentration of metal-processing facilities, which are known to emit the substance, hexavalent chromium. The plants are in close proximity to each other and to schools, homes, hospitals and senior centers.

"We have learned from our intensive air monitoring efforts in Paramount that some facilities previously unknown to emit high levels of hexavalent chromium are in fact significant sources," said Wayne Nastri, executive officer of the South Coast Air Quality Management District in a statement.

"We will use the lessons from Paramount to determine whether there are any high emitters in Compton, and if so require them to rapidly reduce their emissions."

In Paramount, the testing found that hexavalent chromium was primarily coming from Anaplex, a metal processing company, and Aero-craft, a heat-treating firm, for aircraft manufacture and maintenance. Both companies serve the aviation industry.

Hexavalent chromium can



A monument sign welcomes motorists to the city of Compton. The air in the city will be tested by officials from the South Coast Air Quality Management District, who are looking for toxic emissions from metal-processing facilities similar to what happened in Paramount last fall.

Courtesy photo

cause lung cancer when inhaled over long periods of time, typically years to decades.

The compound is used as pigments in dyes, paints, inks and plastics. It is also added to paints, primers and other surface coatings as an anticorrosive agent. Hexavalent chromium gained infamy in the 2000 film "Erin Brokovich" as a pollutant in the water of Hinkley, Calif.

"We don't know yet how alarmed to be, but I'm always concerned because of what happened in Paramount," said Cecil Rhambo, Compton's city manager.

"Those businesses had been there longer than it was a city, since the 1920s," he said. "It's the same here in Compton; the

city grew up around the industrial area, and the environmental regulations may not have been around when they began operations, at least not the way they are now."

Rhambo said that unlike in Paramount, where residents had complained to the AQMD for a while before the testing began, he has not heard of anything from Compton residents.

"In Paramount, they complained about an odor, which was actually from another, unrelated process," he said. "But it prompted the investigation that uncovered the hexavalent chromium."

The testing in Compton is set to begin in a couple of weeks. Sam Atwood, a spokesman for the AQMD, said the

district could detect within days or weeks if there are emissions at the levels equivalent to those from Anaplex and Aero-craft; however, if the chemical is present, but at lower levels, the process could take weeks to months.

"There are some specific plants we are looking at, but we don't want to name them at this point," Atwood said. The effort will initially focus on chromium plating and anodizing plants.

The inspection is still in the preliminary stages, as AQMD is still finding sites to deploy the air monitors.

The process consists of placing at least two portable monitors at each facility, one on an upwind side and the other downwind. The district will collect a sample every three days, over a 24-hour period. If the chemical is present, it will appear on the filter, as it takes a particulate rather than gaseous form.

If results show that any facilities pose a significant risk to the community, AQMD will seek administrative orders from the independent AQMD Hearing Board, as it did in Paramount.

There, the board issued abatement orders that required each facility to shut down all equipment and operations that could produce the compound if emissions exceeded a certain limit. Aero-craft has had to do so four times since the beginning of the year, and Anaplex once.

Each partial shutdown lasted a week.