

# COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS

*Empowering the community  
to take control of policy  
outcomes*

**ADDRESSING  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
HAZARDS IN THE  
LANDSCAPE OF  
COMPLEXITY AND  
CLIMATE CHANGE**

Oxnard, CA

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## **BACKGROUND**

Oxnard, California - positioned along the Central Coast between Los Angeles and Santa Barbara - is a City of roughly 200,000 people. The City has a mixed demographic, though is predominantly Hispanic or Latino with around three-quarters of the population identifying as either fully or partially of the classification. In the context of Ventura County, Oxnard is considered a high density City.

One significant concern that has dominated public discourse in recent decades has been the impact of externalities from private enterprise to residents and workers in the region. For the purposes of this discussion, externalities are defined as negative spill-over effects to the public caused by economic activity and production of/by private enterprise.

These concerns have been for numerous reasons, most notably:

- documented surges in pesticide-associated cancers in the farmworker population;
- documented cases of acute and chronic respiratory illnesses in close proximity to the GenOn Nuclear Power facility in South Oxnard;
- repeated surges of homeless encampments near decommissioned metal smelter Halaco, where cancer-causing metals and chemicals have been found near the Ormond Beach wetlands; and,
- increased public awareness of toxic VOC plumes near the Oxnard Airport, as well as under planned developments at the site of a decommissioned oilfield waste disposal site near 5<sup>th</sup> Street Beach.

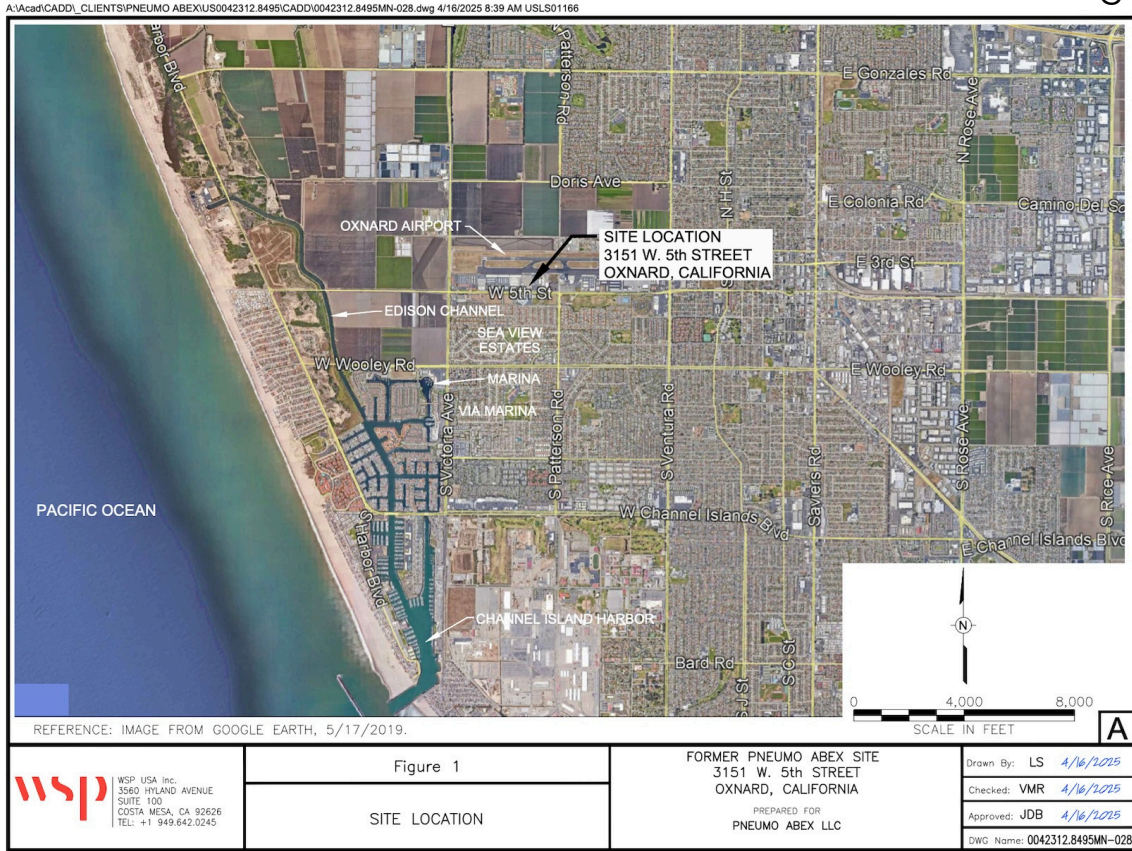
Complicating residents' and City officials' ability to even begin to address these externalities is the impact of climate change to the region. As a Coastal community, the City is especially vulnerable to the types of volatile climate change patterns that result in flooding and sea level rise, with some projections indicating areas of Oxnard expect a 93% chance of up to 3 feet of flooding by 2050, including in the aforementioned regions where toxic remediations depend upon relatively consistent groundwater levels for success. Mitigations in the area of the Oxnard airport are already being impacted by groundwater rise.

## **CASE STUDY: FORMER PNEUMO ABEX FACILITY**

The former Pneumo Abex facility, located on 5<sup>th</sup> Street in Oxnard, California, near the Oxnard Airport, is a known site of contamination with multiple Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) stemming from improperly stored petroleum hydrocarbons, including chlorinated hydrocarbons tetrachloroethylene (PCE) and trichloroethelyn (TCE). Many of these chemicals have been known to cause health problems, including cancer, in both the short and long terms. These chemicals have been detected in the general shape of a plume underneath the ground of the Site, and extending in the direction of the Sea View Estates. The extension of the plume is consistent with the direction groundwater naturally flows (Southwest), measures around 3,300 feet long, and does not appear to be migrating. The presence of these chemicals have subjected impacted buildings and regional groundwater wells to routine testing for soil vapors and vapor intrusion, including the Mexican Consulate, the Juan Lagunas Soria Elementary School, additional storage and daycare facilities, and in public areas around residences in the Sea View Estates. On several occasions, elevated levels of concern have prompted additional testing.

Pneumo Abex was in operation as an aerospace parts manufacturer from the 1960s until 1993. In 1995, a Site cleanup abatement order was issued, at which time numerous mitigations were implemented. This did not fully remediate the development and ongoing existence of the plume, though, and in 2020 the Los Angeles Regional Water Control Board began testing and planning for additional mitigation measures. The Sea View Estates homes were developed while Pneumo Abex was still in an active state of economic activity through manufacturing (1970s-1990s). The affected school opened in 2009.

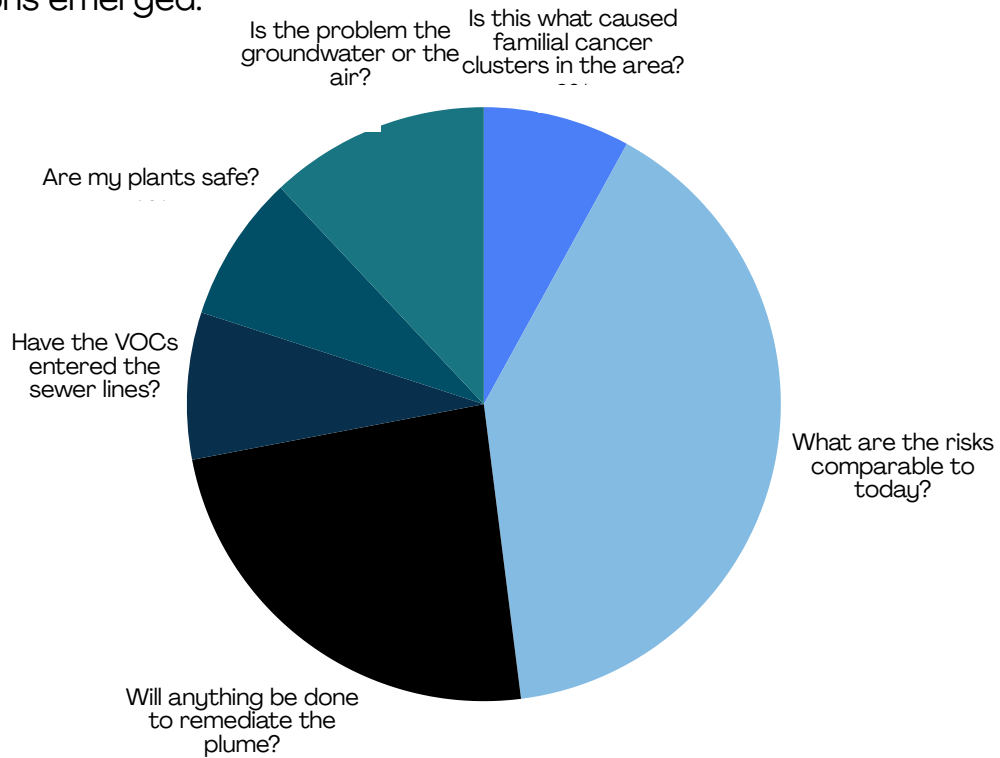
Since the Los Angeles Regional Water Control Board began requiring testing in 2020, chemicals of concern have remained at levels considered safe; however, there is no data available to the public for the years prior to this.



Source: Second Half 2025 Groundwater Monitoring Report

# KEY QUESTIONS

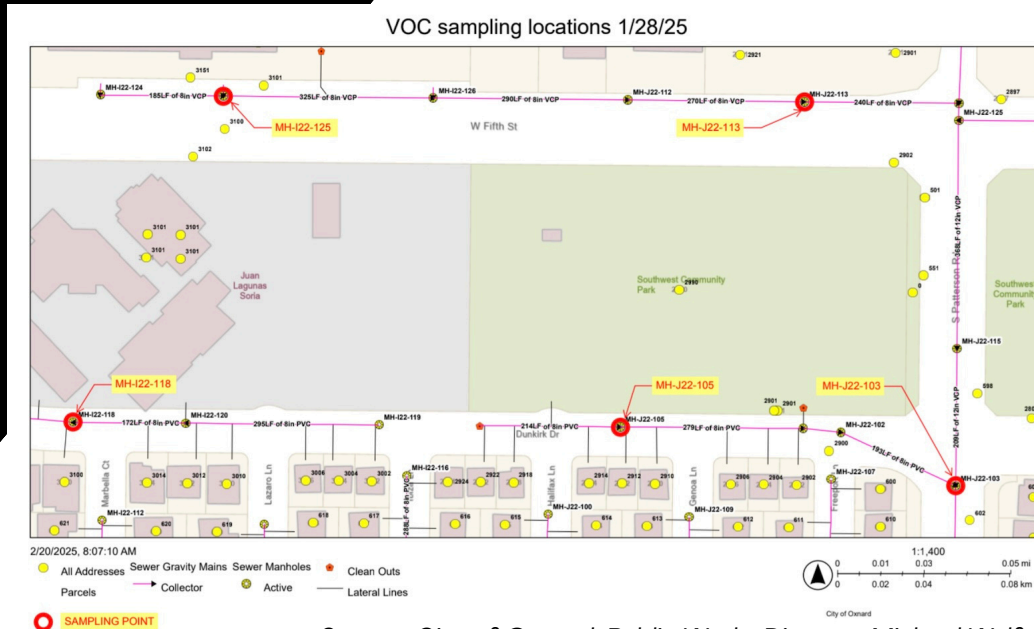
In assessing area resident attitudes and concerns on the issue, the following key questions emerged:



Many of the key questions posed by residents in the general region of the former Pneumo Abex facility have been technically answered by officials at the City of Oxnard, consultants of the “Responsible Party,” and by project managers and communicators at the Los Angeles Regional Water Control Board. However, due to the complexity of the presentation of available information, and the inability of science teams to offer concrete answers, concerns among residents remain. This level of complexity often lends itself to the development of misinformation campaigns and loss of public trust, though very little effort to avoid this through open and rudimentary communication has been deployed. Delays with obtaining permission and permitting from the City of Oxnard have also led to unanswered resident concerns.

## HAVE VOCs ENTERED THE SEWER LINES?

In January 2025, City of Oxnard Public Works Wastewater Team monitored five locations around the Site, and found no evidence of VOCs in the sewer lines.



Source: City of Oxnard, Public Works Director Michael Wolfe

The Responsible Party’s consultant is currently awaiting permission from the City of Oxnard to conduct additional testing along 5<sup>th</sup> Street to determine if soil gas is entering the sewer lines containing VOC concentrations.

## IS THIS WHAT CAUSED FAMILIAL CANCER CLUSTERS IN THE AREA?

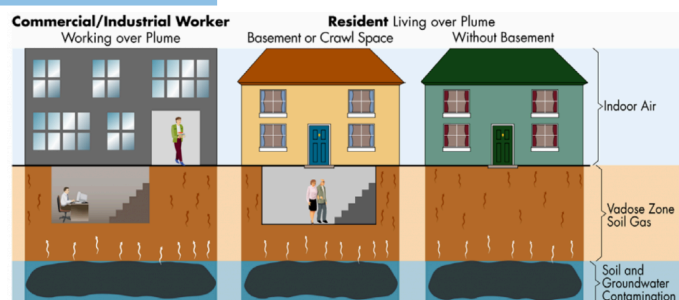
Many residents with decades of residency in Sea View Estates report multiple family members experiencing cancers that may or may not be caused by long term exposure to VOCs, including chlorinated hydrocarbons PCE and TCE. It is possible that between 1993 and 2020, levels of these toxic chemicals could have been high enough to cause health problems, though because routine testing and monitoring of groundwater and soil vapors did not begin until 2020, it is impossible to determine if that was a contributing factor. Since 2020, tested indoor air concentrations remained at levels considered safe.

## IS THE PROBLEM THE GROUND WATER OR THE AIR?

VOCs in the groundwater are not a cause of direct concern because they are approximately 14 feet below the ground. However, recent wet seasons have caused substantial increases to groundwater levels, which has prompted a pause on remediation planning to evaluate if necessary changes will be required for the remediation to be effective.

VOCs may diffuse from groundwater into the areas between soil particles to develop contaminated soil vapors, which may then leak through sewer lines or foundation cracks through a process called vapor intrusion. Soil vapors are below levels of concern at this time; however, “air” is the predominant problem of concern because of its accessibility to the public.

Vapor intrusion barriers may be installed during construction of new buildings to protect against contaminated soil vapors; however, Sea View Estates residences were developed prior to discovery of contamination.



Source: Interstate Technology Regulatory Council

## **ARE MY PLANTS SAFE?**

The Los Angeles Regional Water Control Board has no data to indicate soil contamination exists South of 5<sup>th</sup> Street, which extends into Sea View Estates. This suggests that plants, including home-grown fruits and vegetables, are safe, and safe for consumption. The Board also cites a lack of evidence that VOCs persist in plant roots, leaves, or wood, and the depth of groundwater remains at a level beyond the reach of average plant roots in the affected areas of the region.

Some studies have found a correlation between house plants and a reduction of VOCs in indoor air, suggesting that indoor plants are not only safe, but beneficial in the pursuit of improved air quality.

## **WHAT ARE THE RISKS COMPARABLE TO TODAY?**

A significant shortcoming by all involved parties has been in translating a risk assessment to the public in a way that is understandable and empowering to residents. This has likely occurred due to numerous causes, including:

- a limited scope of individual roles within the project;
- a tendency to avoid statements or communications that may be panic-inducing or imply certainty when data cannot be used in this way; and
- a lack of answers given gaps in data.

However, this tends to only worsen concerns in the general public, and even gives rise to misinformation due to the complexity of the information as it is presented and the limitations of the general public to digest and repeat that information.

## RELATIVE RISKS

While comparable risks are often difficult to calculate, some comparisons may be inferred based upon the most recent data accumulated in the semiannual groundwater and soil vapor testing, conducted in the fall/winter of 2025 and published in the *Second Half 2025 Groundwater Monitoring Report* and the *Offsite Soil Gas Monitoring Report July-August 2025*.

Based on the most recent data profiles at the Site, and in areas throughout the public right of way at Juan Lagunas Soria Elementary School and Sea View Estates, the risk levels are extremely low. Even if someone were to dig 14 feet under the ground to access and drink the groundwater (which is currently not considered potable water), or the table rose to surface level as a result of some catastrophic flood, drinking the water or inhaling the air would still be **of lower risk** than the following activities:

Driving *anywhere*



Flying



Poor diet



Smoking



Of course consistent and/or excessive consumption over a long period of time would raise risk levels. **TCE and PCE levels are of greatest concern to pregnant women and infants/children due to the observed impacts on development, birth weight, and immune system development.** In pregnant women, relative risks are comparable to passively inhaling occasional second hand cigarette smoke. Smoking or consuming alcohol during pregnancy, or poorly controlling prenatal diabetes, are of greater risk than exposure to the levels of TCE and PCE currently present in the region. In infants, relative risks are similar.

That being said, it is ideal for high risk populations to avoid exposure to VOCs, which can be done in spite of existing low levels by ensuring homes have high quality ventilation, lowering water temperatures, and addressing cracks in foundation and other structural abnormalities that may lead to vapor intrusion.

## **CLIMATE CHANGE'S ROLE IN HAZARD MITIGATIONS**

A considerable wet season from 2022-23 led to the water table rising significantly in the region including the Site and Sea View Estates. This has slowed, as of 2024, though a developing El Niño may result in another high volume wet season in 2026-27. This climate volatility has swiftly become a roadblock in implementing mitigations to dissolve and remediate the VOC plume that persists under the former Pneumo Abex facility, as well as countless other toxic sites around Oxnard and beyond.

While soil vapor extraction remediation technologies may be available to mitigate the issue, additional testing with respect to required well depth and viable methods must be considered amidst the new groundwater levels to proceed with an assurance of maximum efficacy.

This highlights the challenges presented by a changing climate, especially in places such as Oxnard which are particularly vulnerable to flood-related climate impacts. For this reason, swift remediation of externalities from private enterprise will be a necessary component of local climate resilience in years to come.

**The case study of the former Pneumo Abex facility and its impacts on the Sea View Estates in Oxnard, California highlights new challenges in addressing environmental hazards amidst a landscape of increasing complexity and climate challenges. Residents may improve outcomes at the individual level by calling on local officials to provide easier-to-understand information and guidance on relative risks for personal risk management and harm reduction. Additionally, climate change delays may be negated by leaning on City and County agencies to improve service delivery times of necessary permits and other permissions to engage in alternative mitigation planning or testing options. A certain level of flexibility and urgency will be required as climate volatility proves to complicate hazard mitigations.**

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## **DISCLOSURES**

HEATHER CHRISTENA SCHMIDT COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS, and no individuals within it, were paid by any individuals or organizations in the creation of this document.

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