



DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

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DEQ takes measures to address elevated SO₂ levels at Chalmette monitor

BATON ROUGE – On Jan. 11-12, the Department of Environmental Quality used its Mobile Air Monitoring Laboratory to conduct additional air sampling in St. Bernard Parish. This effort was undertaken because the Chalmette Vista air monitor site has shown levels of SO₂ above the new National Ambient Air Quality Standard of 75 parts per billion and as a result of recent odor complaints.

“It’s important for the facilities involved to be ahead of what could be a lengthy legal process to reach compliance with the new standard,” DEQ Secretary Peggy Hatch said. “Although no facilities have been in violation of their permitted limits, the fact is that the one-hour standard is not being met. We will work with the local industry and federal partners to find the cause of these emissions and to reduce SO₂ emissions in St. Bernard Parish.”

The MAML and the Chalmette Vista air monitor site showed elevated levels of SO₂ that were above the one-hour standard. The MAML showed a one hour maximum reading of 362 parts per billion on Jan. 12 when the wind was coming from the southeast. The MAML was located at the St. Bernard Port on St. Bernard Highway during this time. The Chalmette Vista air monitor had a maximum one-hour reading of 162.4 ppb with the wind coming from the south on Jan. 11. According to the national Air Quality Index, these levels are considered unhealthy particularly for sensitive groups.

In 2010, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency changed the SO₂ standard from a 24-hour average to a one-hour standard. St. Bernard Parish meets the 24-hour standard, but the parish fails to meet the new one-hour standard. DEQ has recommended to EPA that the parish be classified as non-attainment for the one-hour standard. Under the process outlined in the federal regulations, DEQ and the EPA will work together to develop a plan that will get the parish in attainment in the designated timeframe, which is five years after the effective date of the designation.

Prior to the mid-January sampling effort, DEQ and EPA had scheduled a planned inspection to occur in late January at the facilities in order to address the new standard. DEQ will conduct additional unannounced MAML monitoring efforts in several spots in St. Bernard Parish. DEQ staff is conducting an inventory of other possible SO₂ emitters in the region.

Due to the number of elevated readings and the levels, the department is working with known SO₂ emitters to address emissions before the legal timeline takes effect. The three facilities with the largest known SO₂ emissions in the St. Bernard Parish region are Rain CII, Chalmette Refinery and Valero. As part of the attainment process, DEQ has met with representatives of all three facilities and discussed strategies the facilities are considering in order to comply with the one-hour standard. Additionally, the department has ordered the companies to provide operational and emissions data for dates in December and January when levels were above the one-hour standard. This two-pronged approach seeks to address short-term and long-term solutions.