

Here in the Bay Area we had a nasty fire at the Chevron refinery a few weeks ago. One of the questions is what, exactly, might have been in the smoke from the fire and what kinds of health effects we might expect from that smoke. Unfortunately, state and local officials haven't been able to give a good answer to that question because, it turns out, [the air quality monitoring network in the area around the refinery is inadequate](#). This apparently isn't news to environmental officials and activists in the area, who have been complaining about this for years, but it took a major fire to get publicity about the point. It also isn't news to me — as I've written [here](#), there are lots of reasons to expect that public agencies and legislatures will systematically underinvest in the monitoring of environmental conditions, and that we need to think carefully about how we structure our regulatory and management structures to reduce that problem.