



## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH**

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### **ADPH updates mercaptan status for Eight Mile residents**

#### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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The Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) and the Mobile County Health Department have worked with several state and federal agencies to determine whether a 2012 mercaptan spill has led to adverse health effects for residents in the Eight Mile community.

The event that occurred in Eight Mile was caused by a lightning strike that led to a rupture of a mercaptan tank. A slow and gradual gas release was found to be tert butyl mercaptan, an odorant used in gas that can be smelled at very low levels. The odor, used to detect gas leaks, has been compared to the smell of rotten eggs.

Chief Medical Officer Dr. Mary McIntyre, ADPH, said, "Based on the current scientific evidence and available information, we believe that the community is affected by the odors. These odors may impact residents' sense of well-being and quality of life. Mercaptan causes irritation to mucous membranes and has been associated with some of the symptoms reported by the residents of Eight Mile."

Another factor that may contribute to the odor is related to the location of a marsh in the community. It is known that the breakdown of organic materials (plants and animals) in marshes results in the release of sulfur and other gases.

"Unfortunately, health assessments alone do not address the question of association or causation," Dr. McIntyre said. "Even though unpleasant odors can impact quality of life, not all odors are toxic. We continue to work with the Eight Mile community."

Collaborating agencies providing assistance include the Alabama Department of Environmental Management, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, and the Environmental Protection Agency, Region 4.