

SEPA continues its twin-track approach to ExxonMobil – ongoing monitoring whilst working to address root causes of ‘unacceptable’ flaring

24 January 2020

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) today (Friday 24 January 2020), confirmed the continuation of its ‘twin-track’ approach to the responsible restart of ExxonMobil Chemical Ltd’s Mossmorran facility in Fife.

With the agency having regular contact with the operator regarding its planned restart, SEPA confirmed it stands ready with a deployment of air quality, noise and regulatory monitoring.

Whilst more than twenty reports from the agency continue to confirm no breaches of air quality standards due to flaring at Mossmorran, SEPA is continuing its deployment of air quality monitoring in multiple locations surrounding the site. Locations in Lochgelly, Auchtertool and Donibristle, upwind and downwind of the complex, ensure that SEPA can monitor in local communities and take account of changes in wind direction. Full air quality reports are published at sepa.org.uk/mossmorran.

The agency has also deployed noise monitoring in Lochgelly and a residential location to the South East of the site, with additional responsive mobile monitoring to be deployed if required. Noise monitoring data associated with our regulatory investigation cannot be published at this time.

SEPA has previously confirmed air quality monitoring will stay in place whilst the recently announced investments are made at Mossmorran. SEPA is also working alongside partner agencies with air quality responsibilities to assess future requirements.

The agency also confirmed progress in driving change to address the root causes of ‘unacceptable’ flaring including requiring noise-reducing flare tips and fully enclosed ground flare technologies to be installed that will significantly reduce the impact on the rare future occasions when flaring is necessary.

Rob Morris, SEPA Senior Manager, Compliance & Beyond, said:

“We’re clear that compliance with Scotland’s environmental rules is simply non-negotiable. That’s why we’re continuing our twin-track approach to ExxonMobil. In addition to continuing our monitoring across the responsible restart of the facility, we’re firmly focused on addressing the root causes of ‘unacceptable’ flaring.

“People rightly expect that their lives won’t be impacted by nearby industrial processes. In addition to requiring ExxonMobil Chemicals Limited and Shell U.K. Limited to install noise reducing flare tips, we’re finalising proposals requiring new ground flare capacity that will be planned, designed, built and safely integrated in the shortest period possible.

“Public partners have been working closely together regarding the restart. With regulatory, air quality and noise monitoring officers working to ensure a responsible and reliable restart, we’ll provide regular updates and publish monitoring information as quickly as possible on social media and sepa.org.uk/mossmorran. Useful information is also available via ExxonMobil Chemical Limited’s Mossmorran’s social media. Anyone who is concerned about pollution can use SEPA’s online reporting tool at sepa.org.uk/report available around the clock.”

ENDS

Notes

Regulatory investigation in final stages

On Thursday 25 April 2019 the SEPA announced a formal regulatory investigation into the unacceptable flaring from the ExxonMobil Chemical Limited site in Fife that started on Sunday 21 April.

The investigation is now in the final stages. A small number of interviews remain to be conducted and a further update will be provided when complete.

Operating permit variations

SEPA has served a series of permit variations to lock in compliance at Mossmorran and reduce flaring impacts. The operating permit variations served on ExxonMobil Chemical Limited and Shell U.K. Limited have required both operators to achieve ‘Best Available Techniques’ in the shortest timeframe possible.

The variations will require investments in equipment that reduces the impacts of flaring on local communities when flaring is necessary. Flaring, an important safety feature of industrial facilities, will become the “exception rather than routine” and new infrastructure will address the issues that cause most disturbance to local people.

New infrastructure

SEPA expects investment in noise-reducing flare tips and fully enclosed ground flare technologies at Mossmorran and that these will significantly reduce the impact on the rare occasions when flaring is necessary.

Noise reducing flare tips are to be installed by the operators within the following timescales:

- ExxonMobil Chemical Limited in 2020
- Shell U.K. Limited in 2021

ExxonMobil Chemical Limited has committed to optimising timescales to install new ground flares – which will significantly address impacts from flaring. SEPA welcomes the £140 million investment announced by ExxonMobil Chemical Limited and the assurances that reliability and performance will improve.

Shell U.K. Limited must provide SEPA with a project plan by the end of January 2020 for their future use of ground flares. SEPA is currently reviewing the detailed plans for the installation of ground flares that were received from ExxonMobil Chemical Limited at the end of October 2019.