

# SEPA launches formal regulatory investigation into ExxonMobil Chemical Limited Easter 2019 unplanned flaring as complaints exceed 600

25 April 2019

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency has today (25 April 2019) announced a formal regulatory investigation into the ongoing flaring from ExxonMobil Chemical Limited at the Mossmorran petrochemical plant in Fife.

The above assets are available for print, online and broadcast media to use to illustrate this story. Please [click through to our media gallery](#) to download them – no registration is required. All related items will be shown on the same page.

- SEPA launches formal regulatory investigation into ExxonMobil Chemical Ltd Easter 2019 unplanned flaring.
- Investigation announced as flaring enters its fifth day at the Mossmorran Fife Ethylene Plant.
- Move by SEPA follows 'Final Warning Letters' issued to ExxonMobil Chemical Ltd in April 2018 regarding flaring which was found to be "preventable and unacceptable".
- It also follows SEPA and Health and Safety Executive investigations in 2018/2019, a tightening of permit conditions and an instruction to conduct a 'Best Available Technologies' (BAT) assessment, due shortly.
- Over 600 complaints have been received to date by SEPA's 24 hour Pollution Hotline, one of the highest number for any single event.
- Whilst flaring is an important safety mechanism and is permitted through permit conditions, the latest event featured a full regulatory, air quality and noise monitoring response from SEPA.

The investigation was announced by SEPA Chief Executive, Terry A'Hearn, as flaring enters its fifth day at the Mossmorran Fife Ethylene Plant. The move by SEPA follows 'Final Warning Letters' issued to ExxonMobil Chemical Ltd in April 2018 regarding flaring which was found to be "preventable and unacceptable". It also follows SEPA and Health and Safety Executive investigations in 2018/2019, a tightening of permit conditions and an instruction to conduct a 'Best Available Technologies' (BAT) assessment, due shortly.

On Easter Sunday, 21 April 2019, SEPA responded to complaints of unplanned flaring at ExxonMobil Chemical Ltd, Mossmorran. Whilst flaring is an important safety mechanism and is permitted through permit conditions, SEPA deployed a full regulatory, air quality and noise monitoring response which

will inform SEPA's understanding of the nature of the event.

With the operational response continuing across the duration of the incident, including regulatory and noise monitoring, air quality monitoring carried out on Monday 22 April showed no cause for concern.

With ExxonMobil Chemical Limited advising that flaring is likely to continue over the coming days, SEPA has reinforced to the site operators the importance of restarting the plant as quickly as possible with the minimal amount of elevated flaring.

Over 600 complaints have been received to date by SEPA's 24 hour Pollution Hotline, one of the highest number for any single event.

*Terry A'Hearn, SEPA's CEO, said:*

*"Every day, SEPA works to protect and enhance Scotland's environment and compliance with Scotland's environmental rules is simply non-negotiable. In addition to working hard to ensure ExxonMobil brings a halt to the flaring as quickly as possible, we have also launched this investigation into the incident.*

*"The unprecedented number of complaints we have received is a clear message and it's one that we have heard powerfully and clearly. I want to thank everyone who has taken the time to help us understand the impacts of this flaring, and I encourage people to continue to report to us.*

*"The Mossmorran complex is a major industrial facility, where this type of flaring is a legitimate safety mechanism, but it's been happening too often, and the current level and extent of the flaring from ExxonMobil Chemical Limited is unacceptable."*

SEPA will provide as much information, as quickly as possible, within the constraints of a live regulatory investigation. Updates will be provided across our online hub [www.sepa.org.uk/mossmorran](http://www.sepa.org.uk/mossmorran), where communities can sign up for email updates.

To report environmental incidents online please visit [www.sepa.org.uk/report](http://www.sepa.org.uk/report) or call our 24 Hour Pollution Hotline on 0800 80 70 60. Information received in these reports is important in helping SEPA understand the impacts of this unplanned flaring, and we encourage people to continue to report to us.

Due to the volume of calls received over the last few days there has been some pressure on the Pollution Hotline, and so people are encouraged to use our online reporting form via [www.sepa.org.uk/report](http://www.sepa.org.uk/report)

**ENDS**

#### **Notes to editors**

- SEPA served Final Warning Letters on both operators in April 2018 for flaring in June 2017. This followed an intensive investigation by SEPA, which included formal statements from local residents.

- During the investigation SEPA found that whilst flaring is an important safety feature in the event of a process fault, a series of maintenance failures led to elevated levels of unplanned flaring in breach of environmental controls between 12 and 18 June 2017.
- Residents were subject to considerable disturbance in their homes from noise, vibration and black smoke over the seven-day period in Summer 2017, during which a total of 74 complaints were received by the agency.
- Permit variations were served on both operators in June 2018 requiring ExxonMobil Chemical Ltd and Shell UK Ltd to ensure they take all appropriate preventative measures against noise and vibration emissions through the application of 'Best Available Techniques (BAT)' and ensure that no significant pollution is caused.
- Both ExxonMobil Chemical Limited and Shell UK Limited are required to complete an evaluation of the 'Best Available Techniques (BAT)' due shortly, to prevent and, where that is not practicable, reduce emissions of noise, vibration and smoke associated with flaring.
- Shell UK Limited is not involved in the current flaring event.
- A full copy of our Mossmorran complex investigation update published in February 2019 is available on our Mossmorran Hub [www.sepa.org.uk/regulations/air/air-quality/mossmorran-and-braefoot-bay-complexes/#investigationupdate](http://www.sepa.org.uk/regulations/air/air-quality/mossmorran-and-braefoot-bay-complexes/#investigationupdate)
- The update includes links to copies of the Final Warning Letters, Permit variations and interim reports on the evaluation of Best Available Techniques.
- SEPA's [Enforcement Policy](#) sets out the intent and principles underpinning our approach to enforcement action. The intent behind the enforcement action is to:
  - secure compliance and change the behaviour,
  - stop or reduce the risk of harm arising from the non-compliance to an acceptable level.