COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
Public Health

JONATHAN E. FIELDING, M.D., M.P.H.
Director and Health Officer

JONATHAN E. FREEDMAN
Chief Deputy Director

313 North Figueroa Street, Room 806
Los Angeles, California 90012
TEL (213) 240-8117 • FAX (213) 975-1273

www.publichealth.lacounty.gov

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July 30, 2012

TO: Each Supervisor

FROM: Jonathan E. Fielding, M.D., M.P.H.
Director and Health Officer

SUBJECT: **PROMOTING PUBLIC HEALTH, PUBLIC SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN WILLOWBROOK**

On June 6, 2012, your Board directed the Director of Public Health to report back within 30 days regarding the parameters of a health assessment to determine, if possible, whether contamination found around the former Athens Tank Farm may have resulted in elevated incidence of disease within the surrounding area.

The Department of Public Health (DPH) has determined that a scientifically credible and reliable health assessment of past exposures to contaminants in the subject area is not possible. Such an assessment would require, among other things, decades of past environmental exposure data, a registry of former residents of the Ujima Village area, their levels of exposure, and their follow up health data from the time of exposure through the present. The lack of past environmental exposure data and the lack of comprehensive health data for the subject area make it scientifically impossible to establish whether any exposure to contamination may have contributed to disease. Even if exposure and health data were available, the population of this area is too small to perform meaningful and scientifically reliable statistical analyses.

Cancer statistics are available from the USC/Norris Cancer Registry. We have requested a review of these data from the Cancer Registry, and a report regarding cancers in this census tract is anticipated by mid-August 2012. We will submit that report to the Board once it is available. This report will document the incidence rates of certain cancers in the census tract; however, the report will be unable to establish any connections between illnesses and potential environmental exposures from the past.

Addressing health concerns like those in the area of Ujima Village is a common challenge for many communities throughout the nation where prior industrial uses have released chemical substances into soils and groundwater. These chemicals can persist in the environment for decades, and potentially expose community residents via ambient air or through direct contact

with contaminated soils. In California, the Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC), and the Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) are responsible for assessing site conditions and potential health risks. This process begins with a *"remedial investigation"* to identify the concentrations of hazardous chemicals in soils and groundwater. Subsequently, a *"risk assessment"* is performed to determine if site conditions represent a significant health risk to current and future residents.

The completion of a *risk assessment* is the standard approach employed by the State for this purpose. It is also the approach employed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Based on the findings of the *remedial investigation* and *risk assessment*, a remedial action plan, or *"clean-up plan"* is issued to ensure the site will not present a current or future health risk to community residents. This is the approach currently underway in the communities surrounding Ujima Village. Risk assessments based on sampling conducted thus far have not revealed a current risk to human health.

DPH encourages stakeholders to continue focusing on the environmental investigations and risk assessment underway by the State agencies, to assess current and future safety of the area.

If you have any questions or would like additional information, please let me know.

JEF:cr
PH:1206:005

c: Chief Executive Officer
County Counsel
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors