

Methane: Proposal for Investigation and Reconciliation with the Presence of Methane and Other Underground Gases in Los Angeles

The (re)discovery of hazards from methane and other natural gases in the Los Angeles basin has injected an element of chaos into the future of Los Angeles' urban life.

The impact of safety questions on environmentally controversial issues of land use and development --as at the Playa Vista wetlands development and "the Hill" project at Culver City, or on otherwise socially controversial projects such as the LA MTD-- are perhaps expected in view of the region's diminishing stocks of open space and general need for relief from the ascendancy of traffic in Southland culture. But the issue of subterranean gases has now infected the future of the city's educational system. The stalling of the world's most expensive high school project, the downtown Belmont Learning Center, formerly seen as a crucial step in bringing the city's burgeoning Hispanic and minority communities into the mainstream of the region's culture and economy, demonstrates how far an environmental safety issue can confound necessary decisions in the urban scene.

And yet, what environmental factor besides hydrocarbon could be said to so interwoven into the rise of Los Angeles, ever since the success of Mr. Doheny's "discovery" of oil in a hand-dug pit a block from today's Belmont School?

The lifeblood of the city remains hydrocarbons, oil, natural gas and their relatives, as suggested on the diagram (a good graphic needed here, showing interrelationship of hydrocarbons throughout)

Will Los Angeles founder on its denial of its own environment? This proposal suggests a community program aimed at managing this environmental problem in a creative and cooperative manner, with major participation of the various communities involved.



Relevant past experience and publications

[Ross store paper 7/00](#)

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ANNOTATED REFERENCES:

1. Meehan, RL; Hamilton, DH (April 23, 1971): "Ground Rupture in the Baldwin Hills," Science. 172, no. 3981, 333-344. This report describes the role of oil drilling and water re-injection in causing the Baldwin Hills Dam collapse.
2. Meehan, RL (1984): The Atom and the Fault, The MIT Press, Boston. This book discusses the evaluation of geologic fault hazards and the role of experts and the public in attempting to reach consensus on the problem. "Required reading for historians of science and technology, philosophers of science, regulatory commissions and the members of citizens' boards dealing with scientific and technological matters." --Paul Feyerabend University of California and Federal Institute of Technology Zurich, Switzerland .
3. Meehan, RL; Jelks, Lauren (May 1987): "The Battered Exclusion: Who Pays How Much For Landslides?" For the Defense. This paper explains how insurance losses resulting from ground failures and earthquakes may be passed on to local government.
4. Meehan, RL; Cotton, WR (November 3, 1987): "Geotechnical Analysis and Mitigation Alternatives of the Big Rock Mesa Landslide, Malibu, Los Angeles County, California," American Geophysical Union, 1987 Fall Meeting, 68, no. 44, 1285-1286. This paper explains how ground rupture hazards actually were passed on to Los Angeles County.
5. Meehan, RL; Hamilton, DA (Spring 1992): "Cause of the 1985 Ross Store Explosion and Other Gas Ventings, Fairfax District, Los Angeles," Engineering Geology Practice in Southern California. 20. This report describes how water-flooding operations can lead to methane hazards in and around oil fields.
5. Meehan, RL; Karp, L.B. (May 1994): " California Housing Damage Related to Expansive Soils," Journal of Performance of Constructed Facilities, ASCE. This paper has been used by professionals throughout California as a basis for determining what constitutes acceptable ground movement for residential housing.

6. Spangle, William E., ed. 1987. Pre-Earthquake Planning for Post-Earthquake Rebuilding (PEPPER). Los Angeles, California: Southern California Earthquake Preparedness Project.