



**ADRIAN
GARCIA**
COMMISSIONER



GROUNDBREAKING INITIATIVE PROVIDES BIG BOOST TO AIR QUALITY MONITORING IN HARRIS COUNTY

Industry Grant and Collaboration Help Address Emergency Response Issues Identified By Harris County Gap Analysis Following 2019 Chemical Plant Incidents

Harris County, Texas (January 28, 2021) – A new collaborative initiative between Harris County, an independent research group and private industry will help enhance daily collection and availability of air monitoring data and improve air quality knowledge during significant industrial incidents.

The new initiative includes the deployment of new equipment and development of new protocols and was made possible through a first of its kind \$1 million grant provided to Harris County by the American Chemistry Council (ACC) Foundation. The grant provides assistance to Harris County to purchase air monitoring equipment that will enhance the County's local Community Air Monitoring Program (CAMP). CAMP provides air data to the community through a recently created air monitoring network.

“Over the past two years, Harris County has undertaken historic steps to modernize the county's ability to protect the environment and enable a proactive response to threats to public health and safety,” said Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo. “After decades of systemic underfunding and neglect of key County departments, we've made the biggest investments needed in more than 30 years. There is still a long way to go, but we should never lose sight of the fact that every family in Harris County should never have to worry about the quality of the air they breathe or the safety of their environment.”

Harris County is using the grant to deploy the following new air monitoring equipment:

- **1 Stationary Gas Chromatograph (GC) unit** located in Friendship Park, Seabrook
- **4 Semi-Stationary Sensit® SPOD units** located in:
 - Hartman Park in Manchester
 - Barrett Station near Crosby
 - River Terrace Park in North Channel

- Fairmont Park in La Porte
- **8 portable DustTrak units** to be used by Harris County Pollution Control Services staff
- **55 handheld Multi-Gas Detectors** to be provided to the following emergency response teams:
 - Harris County Fire Marshal Hazardous Materials Team
 - City of Houston Fire Department Hazardous Materials Team
 - City of Baytown Fire Department Hazardous Materials Team

The stationary monitors will communicate data directly through the recently created HCPCS CAMP network. Information from portable and handheld monitors will be uploaded to the website to provide local officials with timely and useful data to make informed decisions on community response to potential health impacts.

Over the past year, Harris County Precinct 2 Commissioner Adrian Garcia's office, Harris County Pollution Control Services (HCPCS) and Houston Advanced Research Center (HARC) have worked with ACC, East Harris County Manufacturing Association (EHCMA) and Texas Chemical Council (TCC) to outline activities, equipment and protocols that best serve the community.

"It has been exciting to have been working together with ACC, TCC, EHCMA, and HARC. I commend and thank them for their partnership with my office. Our joint work has been with the goal to provide Precinct 2 citizens and industry neighbors access to current air quality data for everyday use by the public. On top of that, this critically important information will be especially valuable during industrial events," said Harris County Precinct 2 Commissioner Adrian Garcia.

"This historic relationship we are building takes a significant step toward making Harris County a model of how to be good neighbors for entities all across the nation. Collaboration between industry, environmental groups, and community-focused organizations along with government is what helps promote a healthy, safe, and economically strong area. Together we can work to assure our residents feel engaged and educated about our industry neighbors and industry can ensure their neighbors breathe clean air," said Commissioner Garcia.

"Harris County Pollution Control's Community Air Monitoring Program is a huge step toward establishing a networked air monitoring system that will allow Harris County to provide residents with real-time data and information about the air quality in their communities," said Dr. Latrice Babin, Director of Harris County Pollution Control Services. "The data gathered will inform residents and decision-makers on routine monitoring as well as emergency events. The ACC Foundation grant is a timely and generous contribution to the CAMP program that will prove beneficial to fence line communities deeply impacted by industrial events."

"Harris County Pollution Control looks forward to working collaboratively with HARC to better understand baseline data and various other community partner stakeholders that will continue to boost the County's air monitoring program," Dr. Babin added.

In another collaborative effort, Harris County and the City of Houston are finalizing an agreement for Harris County to place an SPOD monitor in the City of Houston's Hartman Park. "We first want to thank Harris County Precinct 2 and Harris County Pollution Control for taking

this important step of placing an advanced air monitoring system in our Hartman Park,” said Kenneth Allen, Director of Houston Parks and Recreation Department. “The safety of our citizens is the number one priority for both the City and County. Our strong partnership means we work hand-in-hand in the fight to keep our citizens informed about their air quality. It’s a mission that must be done collaboratively to protect the people, neighborhoods, and communities of Houston.”

Through the grant, Harris County is also obtaining independent scientific support from HARC, including analysis and modelling of air quality data collected throughout Precinct 2. To help with their analysis, HARC also received 30 years of private industry air monitoring data which will assist with background studies on air quality to better understand day-to-day baseline readings.

Under the new agreement with HARC, a Science Advisory Committee of noted air quality, risk communications, and health experts will help review threshold values for certain pollutants, which will support the ongoing analysis conducted by the County’s revamped Pollution Control department.

“This is a very exciting project for HARC. We look forward to working with the project’s independent Science Advisory Committee and ACC, EHCMA, TCC, first responders, Harris County, other governmental entities, and all the partner community stakeholders and advocacy groups to help enhance Harris County’s and our region’s emergency preparedness and response capabilities. Protecting public health and safety is a paramount goal we all share,” said Dr. Mustapha Beydoun, HARC Vice President and COO.

HARC, Harris County and industry will test the new network and improve stakeholder coordination during a series of table-top drills slated for later this year.

“We thank Judge Hidalgo and Commissioner Garcia for opening the door to industry for collaboration. We applaud Commissioner Garcia for his active leadership and we appreciate the opportunity to be a part of this groundbreaking initiative, which will help protect workers and communities throughout the Houston region,” said Chris Jahn, President and CEO of the American Chemistry Council. “One of the project’s important strengths is that in addition to providing local officials with an array of new air monitoring equipment, it also allows officials to draw on the scientific expertise of HARC. It’s a tremendous team effort that will greatly improve the county’s ability to collect, analyze and share information about air quality, especially during an emergency.”

[» Download the Harris County Public Private Air Monitoring Initiative Fact Sheet](#)