



COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ

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NEWS RELEASE



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COUNTY ANNOUNCES ENVIRONMENTAL TESTING RESULTS

Board directed local sampling following Moss Landing fire

Responding to community concerns following the January 16, 2025, fire at the Vistra Energy lithium-ion battery facility in Moss Landing, Santa Cruz County has conducted extensive environmental testing to assess potential impacts on air, water, soil, and agricultural resources.

Under direction of the Board of Supervisors, County staff initiated comprehensive environmental testing through the Santa Cruz County Agricultural Commissioner and Santa Cruz County Environmental Health, following industry-standard protocols. Testing focused on soil, plant material, surface water, and sediment in South County, which was most likely to be impacted by the fire.

Results indicate that metal levels detected in Santa Cruz County are significantly lower than samples collected in Monterey County closer to the Moss Landing site and do not suggest elevated public health risks or food safety concerns. Testing of South County lakes, for example, showed cobalt levels were several orders of magnitude lower than samples collected in the vicinity of Elkhorn Slough.

Many metals tested, including cobalt, nickel, manganese and lithium, occur naturally and may not be linked to the fire, and their presence should not be presumed to represent a public health concern. Manganese, for example, is added to fertilizer to support healthy plants, and other metals are considered essential micronutrients when present at safe levels.

Samples taken from agricultural soils were taken at the surface and subsurface levels for comparison. No elevated levels of metals were found in surface samples, consistent with the recent Department of Toxic Substances Control finding that “there are not elevated metals associated with the fire in soil” near Moss Landing.

Initial plant material testing identified two outliers with elevated cobalt and nickel levels. However, follow-up testing showed a significant decline in these levels, possibly due to plant water uptake in the field. Absent background data, it is difficult to attribute the presence of metals to the Moss Landing fire.

Surface water and sediment samples were collected from multiple locations, including Drew Lake, Kelly Lake, Pinto Lake and Watsonville Slough, with additional samples collected at Antonelli Pond, Loch Lomond Reservoir and Forest Lake as spatial controls due to the lack of background data. Metals detected were below U.S. Environmental Protection Agency screening thresholds, with the exception of elevated manganese levels at Drew Lake, Watsonville Slough and Antonelli Pond. However, levels were not consistent with deposits from a battery fire and are likely due to natural or other anthropogenic sources.

Santa Cruz County continues to collaborate with Monterey County and state agencies to monitor environmental conditions. Residents concerned about health effects related to the Moss Landing fire are encouraged to complete a regional survey available at:

- **English:** www.mtyhd.org/MLFireSurvey
- **Spanish:** www.mtyhd.org/EncuestaDelIncendiosML
- **Help for completing this survey is available for those who cannot complete it online or need language assistance:** bit.ly/3XbU7U2

Previously released testing results are available at the following sites:

- **Monterey County Moss Landing Response Site:**
<https://www.readymontereycounty.org/emergency/2025-moss-landing-vistra-power-plant-fire>
- **Vistra Energy Moss Landing Response Site:**
<https://www.mosslandingresponse.com>