

Belmont Commission

Anthony Brown was retained as the lead technical advisor to the Belmont Commission. The Commission was established to investigate the purchase of a former oil field property by the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), assess the environmental issues at the Belmont Learning Center, and evaluate whether the proposed school project should proceed.

The LAUSD is challenged by increasing numbers of children, limited and ageing educational facilities, and the availability and cost of land for new school buildings. To build a new high school the LAUSD purchased a large parcel of land that had yet to be developed, but had previously been an active oil field.

After purchase, the LAUSD implemented an environmental investigation at the property. This investigation revealed elevated levels of methane gas in shallow soils across the property and the presence of a fault under the northwest portion. A risk assessment determined the levels of methane exceeded acceptable health thresholds, and mitigation would be needed to proceed with development. The work scope included, but was not limited to, the following:

- Review of site operational history, focusing on oil field activities, oil field geology, and pathways for methane migration;
- Review of testimony and reports provided by various experts on oil field operations, petro-physics, toxicology, and methane abatement;
- Synthesis and summary of technical information;
- Design and oversight of field investigations to confirm, quantify, characterize, and delineate the extent of methane contamination;
- Development of a site geological conceptual model to evaluate methane fate and transport;
- Recommendations for site mitigation activities, including sub-slab membranes and passive soil vapor extraction systems; and
- Recommendations for building locations, based on the fault location and areas of elevated methane seepage.

The property was ultimately developed safely as an educational facility.