Q: What was released from Blanchard’s Galveston Bay Refinery?
A: On Tuesday, January 13, 2015, a unit within Blanchard’s Galveston Bay Refinery released catalyst dust. Catalyst dust is a granular, gray material comprised of amorphous silica (40-75%), aluminum oxide (25-60%) and trace amounts (<0.1%) of heavy metals.

Q: How is a person exposed to catalyst dust?
A: An individuals’ exposure to catalyst dust depends on their circumstances. During the release the catalyst was dispersed in the air. Persons in the direct vicinity to the dust may have inhaled these particles. Some dust released may have deposited on outdoor surfaces. A person may be exposed to catalyst dust by ingesting small amounts of the dust that has settled on surfaces. This may happen when a person puts their hands on a surface with dust on it and brings their hand to their mouth (hand-to-mouth contact) while eating, smoking, etc.

Q: Should I be concerned about the health of my family?
A: Exposure to elevated concentrations of dust in the air may affect sensitive individuals. However, it is unlikely that a single short-term exposure to catalyst dust in air would be associated with an increased risk of long-term health effects. Dust residue on surfaces will diminish in the presence of rain, moisture, or cleaning. Care should be taken to avoid direct contact with skin and eyes as this may cause irritation in some individuals. If skin contact is made, the area should be washed with a mild detergent or hand soap and rinsed with water.

Q: Is it safe for my children and pets to play outside?
A: As the catalyst dust has settled and the release has ceased, the catalyst dust does not pose an ongoing inhalation hazard; however, settled dust may be deposited on surfaces that children or animals may contact including floors, tables, and outdoor playground equipment. Care should be taken to avoid direct skin contact from outdoor surfaces if settled dust is visible.

Q: Are the fruits and vegetables in my garden safe to consume?
A: The catalyst dust may settle out on fruits and vegetables. This may give fruits and vegetables a disagreeable metallic taste, even if rinsed with water. If there is visible evidence of settled catalyst dust on fruits or vegetable grown outside, it is recommended that these food items be discarded.

Q: Are there exposure standards or guidelines for catalyst dust designed to protect my health?
A: While no exposure standards or guidelines exist specifically for catalyst dust, exposure guidelines have been derived by various regulatory agencies – such as the USEPA – for individual compounds that may be present. Testing to determine the levels of these individual compounds on surfaces is ongoing.