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Cover Artwork

Porter Ranch Blowout No.7, photo by Hannah Benet

This photo is part of a series by Hannah Benet that aims to illuminate the effects of an invisible environmental disaster: The Porter Ranch gas blowout (Los Angeles, California USA). Between October 2015 and February 2016, an estimated 100,000 metric tons of methane and other poisonous gases spewed out of a blown-out well near many homes.

Initially, the gas company responsible reassured the community that the gas was harmless, but Porter Ranch residents soon started experiencing painful symptoms like headaches, nausea, rashes, and uncontrollable nosebleeds. Children were especially vulnerable to the blowout's side effects. By late November, Porter Ranch's air had been considered toxic for over a month, and Los Angeles county health officials finally ordered Southern California Gas Co. to help residents relocate.

The images in this series were taken in Porter Ranch during the blowout. The subjects in the photos, all of whom were directly impacted by the toxic air, are from Porter Ranch and its surrounding communities. Many of the kids had to relocate with their families in order to avoid further health complications – but some were not so lucky, and unfortunately lost their loved ones due to health complications brought on by the blowout.

Southern California Gas Co. finally plugged Porter Ranch in late February 2016, almost half a year after the initial leak. Some residents have returned to normalcy, but many are still in temporary housing because the residual leaks cause illness every time they re-enter their homes.

Hannah Benet was raised in the Los Angeles suburb of Porter Ranch. Her work can be viewed at her website: <http://www.hannahbenet.com>.

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