

Paris, July 8, 2013

Qatar: start-up of world's largest helium unit

press release

Contacts:

Corporate Communications

Corinne Estrade-Bordry
+33 (0)1 40 62 51 31
Garance Bertrand
+33 (0)1 40 62 59 62

Investor Relations

Virginia Jeanson
+33 (0)1 40 62 57 37
Annie Fournier
+33 (0)1 40 62 57 18

Helium in Ras Laffan, Qatar

After the discovery of the vast North Field deposit in the early 70s and the launch of Ras Laffan Liquefied Natural Gas Company Limited RL at Ras Laffan Industrial City in the 90s, Qatar initiated the development of a plant to recover helium from the natural gas liquefaction units. Even when present at levels of only 0.05%, helium recovery is economic due to the size of the North Field deposit. **Qatargas and RasGas** are key players in the worldwide liquefied natural gas and helium markets.

Air Liquide recently started up the world's largest **helium purification and liquefaction unit**, a turnkey project at **Ras Laffan Industrial City, Qatar**. The new unit's production capacity is approximately 38 million cubic meters of helium per year. The high technologies Air Liquide uses to purify and liquefy helium at a very low temperature (-269°C) are **proprietary**. The liquefaction equipment is **the world's largest**, measuring 20 metres long and more than 8 metres high. **This helium liquefier is operated by RasGas.**

The combined production capacity of this new unit and the existing unit on this site will be approximately **58 million cubic meters per year**, making Qatar the world's second largest producer of helium with 25% of current global production.

Under a long-term agreement with RasGas and Qatargas, Air Liquide will purchase **50% of the helium volumes produced** by this new unit and the existing one. Access to this major helium source will position the Group as **one of the main players in the worldwide helium market.**

This start-up marks the next step toward helium market stability. World demand for helium has remained robust in the last ten years, while **helium is scarce worldwide**. Helium plays a critical role in a wide array of products. Key uses include MRI scanners, semiconductors, fiber optic cable, space exploration, scientific research, air-bag production and professional hyperbaric diving.

Hamad Rashid Al Mohammadi, RasGas Chief Executive Officer and Vice Chairman of Qatar Petroleum (QP) said, **"The Helium 2 plant, which broke ground in May 2010, is the second helium project to be built in Qatar, and we are very pleased to report that in over 5 million man hours worked to complete this project, we have maintained a lost time incident rate (LTIR) of zero. Achieving such a remarkable milestone is a clear testimony to RasGas' commitment to creating and maintaining a safe work environment in a complex construction project that involved thousands of contractors and employees."**

François Darchis, Senior Vice-President, Air Liquide Group, and a member of the Executive Committee, commented: **"I would like to thank RasGas for its trust, as well as the many dedicated people who have inspired and contributed to the technological prowess required to bring this helium production project in Qatar to where it is today. Air Liquide is proud to have played a role in this success, which significantly strengthens our worldwide helium supply position as well as our leadership in the Middle East."**

Air Liquide in the Middle East

Air Liquide employs 600 people in the Middle East. The region offers increasing development opportunities as a result of energy-related projects and a demand for new technologies.

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***Air Liquide is the world leader in gases for industry, health and the environment**, and is present in **80 countries** with **close to 50,000 employees**. Oxygen, nitrogen, hydrogen and rare gases have been at the core of Air Liquide's activities since its creation in 1902. Using these molecules, Air Liquide continuously reinvents its business, anticipating the needs of current and future markets. The Group innovates for the good of society while delivering profitable growth and consistent performance.*

***Innovative technologies** that curb polluting emissions, lower industry's energy use, recover and reuse natural resources or develop the energies of tomorrow, such as hydrogen, biofuels or photovoltaic energy... Oxygen for hospitals, home healthcare, fighting nosocomial infections... Air Liquide combines many products and technologies to develop valuable applications and services not only for its customers but also for society.*

***A partner for the long term**, Air Liquide relies on employee commitment, customer trust and shareholder support to pursue its vision of sustainable, competitive growth. The **diversity** of Air Liquide's teams, businesses, markets and geographic presence provides a solid and sustainable base for its development and strengthens its ability to push back its own limits, conquer new territories and build its future.*

***Air Liquide explores the best that air can offer to preserve life, staying true to its Corporate Social Responsibility and sustainable development approach**. In 2012, the Group's revenues amounted to **€ 15.3 billion** of which 82% were generated outside France. Air Liquide is listed on the Paris Euronext stock exchange (compartment A) and is a member of the CAC 40 and Dow Jones Euro Stoxx 50 indexes.*