

Environmental Report: Sept. 19, 2016

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Quemetco:

A public meeting was held by the California Dept. of Toxic Substances Control at the Hacienda Heights Community Center on Aug. 31. Initial results of lead testing are now available.

By Aug. 31 over 5,400 soil samples taken from 115 residences located within a one-quarter mile of the plant and public right of ways have been analyzed. Of the 234 locations sampled, 11 locations exceeded 1,000 parts per million, the level at which more action may be needed. Nine were on the Quemetco property and two were in a nearby right-of-way, reported Jose Diaz, DTSC manager of soil sampling. DTSC hopes to conclude residential soil sampling by the end of Sept. then begin taking samples from commercial properties north and west of the facility, roughly in the direction the wind blows. This is important since it has been found in studies of the similar Exide plant in Vernon, that contamination on commercial roofs was found to have accumulated to high levels. (<http://www.whittierdailynews.com/environment-and-nature/20160901/lead-testing-in-hacienda-heights-slipped-by-legal-issues-low-participation>)

Lead exposure can lead to brain damage and young children are particularly at risk from damage. However, adults can store the lead in their bone tissue and with an increase in age possibly associated with a loss in bone density, lead accumulated at an earlier date can be released. Arsenic is a known carcinogen and the risk is being evaluated by the SCAQMD as part of the permitting process Quemetco must undergo for the proposed expansion by 25% of their throughput.

Below 80 ppm is considered by DTSC as safe. However, if residents receive results that are in excess of 400 ppm lead in the soil, it is advised that contact with soil should be eliminated. Children should not play on bare soil. Bare soil should be covered with bark, grass, wood chips, or cement. A doormat should be used and cleaned frequently.

One issue that has not been resolved is the lack of participation by local residents or owners to give permission for testing of individual residential properties, blood testing for lead, and permission from companies to test commercial sites. On Sept. 14th an article in the San Gabriel Valley Tribune reported that few residents have taken advantage of free blood testing for lead provided by Quemetco. The hope is to increase sample sizes—only 15 people had their blood tested recently during soil testing and only a total of 60 (54 adults and 6 children) as of Sept. 13th. Some commented that they do not trust a company hired by Quemetco.
<http://www.sgytribune.com/health/20160914/doctor-pleads-for-residents-near-quemetco-to-get-blood-tests-but-most-remain-wary>

The Clean Air Coalition of Avocado Heights arranged for independent testing for lead and other metals by the University of Southern California Dept. of Preventive medicine. In this study, 54 samples were collected on sites within 1 mile from the plant. 189 samples were collected by community residents and brought to a community meeting on 7/23/2016. Community residents had been instructed on the proper method of soil collection. Residents provided up to 3 samples per property. All samples were analyzed for metals.

Of the 221 reliable samples collected, 14% detected antimony, 24% detected arsenic, 24% detected arsenic, 9% detected cadmium, 62% detected copper, 95% detected lead and 97% detected zinc. The highest detectable lead level exceeded 2400 ppm., the highest arsenic level was 48ppm. The sampling found 40% of samples exceeded the California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) residential standard of 80ppm for lead. Three percent exceeded the 400 ppm and 1% of the samples (n=3) exceeded 1000 ppm. All detections of arsenic exceeded the QEHHA residential soil safety level. Cadmium was detected in 19% of soil samples; all detections exceeded the OEHHA residential soil safety level. Other metal levels did not exceed residential soil standards. Chronic exposure to cadmium (low level over an extended period of time) can result in kidney, bone and lung disease.

DTSC has determined that Quemetco, Inc. has failed to monitor for possible ground-water contamination by failure to maintain a functioning leak detection system in its containment building that contains hazardous waste related to the facility's handling of lead.

The state Department of Toxic Substances Control has issued four additional violations in an addendum to a previous order from August, saying Quemetco has not set up a system for determining whether toxic contaminants are leaching into the San Gabriel Basin, the main source of drinking water for 1.8 million San Gabriel Valley residents. They also have found a 3 inch hole in the containment building that could release fugitive air pollution.

A second study in connection with a second permit is sought by Quemetco from South Coast Air Quality Management District to increase throughput by 25%. They recently concluded a cancer risk assessment for Arsenic—a pollutant also produced by Quemetco. Arsenic may be a greater problem than the lead contamination that so far been found to be in low concentrations. As noted above, all detections of lead in the USC study exceeded the QEHHA residential soil safety level.

CleanTech Hazardous waste site:

On Aug. 6 the California Dept. of Toxic Substances Control issued a Notice of Preparation (NOP) for a Supplemental Environmental Report for CleanTech Environmental Inc. located at

5820 Martin Rd. Irwindale, CA. A public comment period on what should be addressed extended from Aug. 6, 2016-September 6, 2016. This NOP is in regard to a permit issued by DTSC for a hazardous waste facility to be located the CleanTech company in Irwindale.

HHIA became aware of this project back in July, 2015 only after DTSC had approved the permit for a project that would allow processing of hazardous waste in the City of Irwindale at the CleanTech facility located at 5820 Martin Road, Irwindale, CA 91706. We opposed the approval of this project in a letter of July 15, 2015 to the City of Irwindale but were informed that the City could not stop the project. HHIA was greatly concerned because this facility is located directly above aquifers that supply Hacienda Heights with drinking water.

At that time, we submitted our belief to the City of Irwindale and to Governor Brown that the Environmental Impact Report prepared for this project was deficient in meeting the requirements of CEQA. We indicated our concerns that DTSC was derelict in its duty to diligently evaluate the potential impacts of this project. We were troubled that, as required by CEQA, the public, environmental groups, social justice advocates and other potential stakeholders were unaware of the proposed project until the permit was approved. There seemed to be inadequate public notification.

We recently received the Notice of Preparation of a Supplemental Environmental Report from the Department of Toxic Substances Control that was instigated by a Petition for Appeal submitted by Los Individuos Movilizados para Prohibir Intoxicacion del Agua (L.I.M.P.I.A) submitted on Mar. 04 2015. L.I.M.P.I.A. filed a petition for review within the appropriate 30 days after a permit decision.

HHIA agreed with their opinion that the EIR on which the permit was issued was deficient. We further believe that, as discussed below, storage and processing of hazardous waste at this site should not be permitted at all. We are concerned that the risk of a spill reaching water resources that serve as the supply for our community of Hacienda Heights as well as other communities in the San Gabriel Valley cannot be allowed.

HHIA also believes the DTSC decision to prepare a supplemental report that apparently will involve only the “Cumulative Impact” section is inadequate. We believe that deficiencies in the EIR do not document potential impacts that also could result in cumulative effects that could spread well beyond the facility site affecting water resources for our community. These possible consequences must be evaluated in the Supplemental Environmental Impact Report.

HHIA submitted the following comments on the NOP for the CleanTech Facility permit to expand operations as a hazardous waste processing site to DTSC.

Seismic Risk:

Damage caused by a potential earthquake with an associated accidental spill was not addressed nor were the potential cumulative impacts of such an event.

The “City of Irwindale Hazard Mitigation Plan” (2012) indicates that the “City of Irwindale is located within a seismically active region”. Earthquakes on the Duarte, the Sierra Madre-San Gabriel, the San Andreas, Raymond Hill, Clamshell-Sawpit and Whittier-Elsinore faults could affect this area. The City’s “Hazard Mitigation Plan” specifies that Irwindale could be subjected to violent shaking from movement along any of these faults. Impacts due to movements on these faults were not evaluated.

Earthquake damage to this facility could result in a hazardous waste spill. The site is located above porous, permeable gravels and sands deposited by streams flowing out of the San Gabriel Mountains. The unconsolidated sediments, typical beneath the plant, maximize potential for ground shaking during seismic events. An earthquake could damage the facility to release hazardous waste onto the surface that could infiltrate and percolate into aquifers beneath and beyond the plant into the Main San Gabriel Groundwater Basin. These aquifers are the source of water for our local water companies.

The possible failure of spill containment elements of the plant is not adequately evaluated in the EIR. Contamination reaching groundwater could exacerbate already existing contamination problems addressed in Superfund Sites present in the San Gabriel Groundwater Basin. If the containment controls are breached as the result of a seismic event and a spill is not controlled, damage could occur to groundwater resources for the region.

Potential contamination of aquifers beyond the site were not evaluated and potential impacts of a spill reaching the San Gabriel River were not discussed.

Water Resources and Quality:

The San Gabriel Groundwater Basin is already the location of six EPA Superfund sites. Contaminants were used as degreasers or solvents in the manufacturing of goods in the past or were components of rocket fuel. Over half the basin is contaminated, resulting in drinking water wells being shut down.

Many years ago, residents in Hacienda Heights were advised not to use their tap water for a period for drinking, cooking, or even bathing in hot water due to this contamination of wells in the Main San Gabriel Groundwater Basin. Wells were shut down and new wells drilled. Currently, several filtration plants operate, costing millions of dollars, to remediate contaminated groundwater.

HHIA believes Any potential for impact to water resources must be addressed both in the EIR and as a possible cumulative impact. Such an analysis is not presented in the FEIR although the document does indicate that a release of hazardous waste could occur. It does not evaluate this impact and does not address this possibility with a mitigation plan.

Consideration of Alternatives:

CEQA requires consideration of a “No Project Alternative” as well as a range of reasonable alternatives (Section 15126.6{d}). Evaluation of alternatives was inadequate.

Only two alternatives were evaluated—a no project alternative and one site in Long Beach—and even then not adequately for a decision maker to make an informed evaluation. Moving the location to Long Beach is described as having the same impacts but in a different area, discounting the fact that a Long Beach location would not probably not include a hazardous waste site located in an SEA, and a potential spill might not impact important water resources.

We have asked that the FEIR be revised and the permit for a hazardous waste site above local aquifers be denied due to the potential for contamination of drinking water resources for the San Gabriel Valley region.

Puente Hills Landfill Park:

The DEIR for the Park is being reviewed by the Dept. of Parks and Recreation. We are awaiting the Final Environmental Impact Report for review and comment.