

## **Feds find problems with PCBs at dump**

Tracie Cone, Associated Press

In the S.F. Chronicle, Friday, April 10, 2010

Fresno -- A federal investigation found that a major hazardous waste facility at the center of a birth defects controversy improperly disposed of a chemical known to cause cancer and reproductive problems.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency sent a notice of violation Thursday to the Chemical Waste Management landfill involving federal laws on the disposal of PCBs, or polychlorinated biphenyls, a now-banned transformer fluid.

The agency also acknowledged that investigators had neglected to follow up on a host of 2005 violations at the landfill, including the improper treatment and storage of hazardous waste.

The company has been fined in past years for not properly monitoring seepage under the landfill holding PCBs.

Neighbors have blamed the facility - the largest hazardous waste facility in the West - for at least 11 birth defects since 2007.

Company officials have said there's no evidence linking the dump to the birth defects. They did not immediately return calls Thursday seeking comment.

Activists fighting a plan to expand the site welcomed the findings announced by EPA regional administrator Jared Blumenfeld.

"The picture is becoming clearer that claims things are just fine are false," said Bradley Angel, executive director of the environmental justice group Greenaction.

Blumenfeld's announcement was part of promise he made to residents of the impoverished Central Valley farming community of Kettleman City that he would investigate the situation.

Blumenfeld, who took over the western division's top post in January, told residents in February he would investigate whether the EPA had dropped the ball on past complaints.

The investigation by the EPA's Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance completed in 2007 found that equipment for testing PCBs wasn't calibrated properly; PCB leachate was improperly diluted before storage; and the company illegally placed several toxic chemicals in evaporation ponds - including the solvents acetone and toluene - that potentially could be emitted into the environment.

Blumenfeld said the EPA will continue to investigate to determine the scope of the company's waste disposal problems, which he said were confined to property inside the landfill.

State investigators are taking samples of air, soil and water around Kettleman City, 3 1/2 miles to the east of the landfill, in an effort to determine the source of the cleft palates and other problems seen in newborns.

The expansion permit was approved earlier this year by the Kings County Board of Supervisors despite opposition from hundreds of residents of this farm town of 1,500 people. The expansion permit is on hold while state health and state and federal environmental investigations continue.

## **Worth Noting in business: Cheap gas, renewable energy program and more** Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, April 13, 2010

**Geico** plans to subsidize gasoline purchases for 115 people in Bakersfield Thursday.

The insurer said it will make gas available at \$1.15 a gallon at the Fastrip at 1200 Coffee Road, at the intersection with Brimhall Road.

The offer is good only for the first 115 people in line, and is limited to one offer per household.

**A Pacific Gas and Electric Co.** representative is scheduled to discuss renewable energy projects the company is involved with at a meeting later this month of the League of Women Voters of Kern County.

The program is to focus on solar, wind and other energy projects. It is set to begin at 7 p.m. April 21 at the Petroleum Club, 5060 California Ave. Dinner starts at 5:45 p.m.

Reservations can be made by calling 634-3773.

**Kern Council of Governments** is holding a series of workshops to collect input from the public on how transportation tax dollars should be used.

The workshops seek feedback on [whether the region needs more buses, more bike lanes and which areas have the worst traffic congestion, among other things.](#)

Six workshops are scheduled between April 15 and May 4. For times and locations, call 862-2191 or go to [www.kerncog.org](http://www.kerncog.org).

[Bakersfield Californian commentary, Tuesday, April 13, 2010:](#)

### **We've whipped many infectious diseases, but now face another foe: chronic disease**

In the late 1920s, Alexander Fleming, a young Scottish research scientist, inadvertently discovered that one type of mold inhibited the growth of certain types of bacteria. This discovery changed the world and brought an almost immediate cure to a wide range of infections. Fleming named this newly discovered active ingredient Penicillin.

The continued advancement of science and technology has provided each of us protection against a number of deadly diseases, including smallpox, polio, and tuberculosis. Whereas these frightening diseases afflicted us for generations, we now live in a time where we no longer face the same health worries that our parents and grandparents were confronted with. What an amazing time to be alive!

However, we are now faced with an even greater, complex threat that will make our children's generation the first to have lower life expectancies than their parents. This menace that is now affecting all of us is chronic disease.

Chronic diseases, such as heart disease, diabetes and asthma are the leading causes of death and disability in the United States. Chronic diseases account for 70 percent of all deaths in the U.S., which is 1.7 million each year. Heart disease, for example, is the number one cause of death in our country. More than 910,000 Americans die each year, equaling about 2,600 deaths a day. As bleak as the nationwide statistics are, when you narrow the focus to Kern County, it only gets worse. Annually, the state releases information about health status indicators within each county. Of the eight health indicators related to causes of death, Kern County ranks in the bottom 25 percent of all counties in six out of the eight indicators. To highlight the gravity of our situation, as ranked in comparison with the other 57 California counties, we were the worst -- 58 out of 58, when it comes to heart disease as a cause of death. In 2007, the year of the most recent available data, 1,136 Kern County residents died due to heart disease.

Why is this? There are many factors that have brought us to this point. Obesity, high cholesterol and blood pressure, tobacco use, diabetes, lack of physical activity, [air quality](#), financial circumstances; can all be found at the heart of the problem.

Our community and its residents are the best "weapons" we have to combat this problem. Within the last several years our community has faced challenges posed by West Nile virus and H1N1, and Kern County has responded to this threat with great enthusiasm and energy. We now have an historic opportunity to re-direct this momentum towards chronic diseases.

Although they cannot be cured with a shot, we know how to prevent these illnesses from ever developing. We also know that we have the capacity to come together as a community to make a difference. Unfortunately the work ahead is not as easy as a shot and will take time. We did not arrive here overnight. But through hard work, true focus and communitywide support and dedication, a change can be made to positively impact the well being of our community.

The Kern County Public Health Services Department, now comprised of Animal Control, Emergency Medical Services, Environmental Health and Public Health, is focusing all of our available resources towards the prevention and identification of chronic diseases in Kern County. A large cadre of dedicated, talented people will be working with you toward the same goal -- a healthier Kern County. Over the coming months, Public Health will be on the forefront of this issue, overseeing and participating in activities dedicated to improving the health of our residents, from hosting certified farmers markets, enacting an employee wellness program, facilitating an obesity summit and enforcing regulations involving trans-fat bans and menu labeling.

On March 23, the Board of Supervisors proclaimed April as Public Health Services Month. Starting this month, I ask that you join me on this path to a "Healthier Kern" by participating in the many exciting and healthy activities taking place throughout our community, including the first ever 2010 Wellness and Healthy Activities Festival, to be held Sunday, April 25, at Central Park's Mill Creek in Bakersfield.

With so many dedicated, talented people working towards the same goal, a "Healthier Kern" is not a dream. It is an attainable reality.

*Matt Constantine of Bakersfield is director of the Kern County department of public health.*