

Local environmental reporting system launches

By Kellie Schmitt, Californian staff writer

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Representatives from government agencies and community advocates offered more information Tuesday on a new environmental and public health hazard reporting project: the Kern Environmental Enforcement Network.

The network allows residents to report perceived environmental hazards in English or Spanish through a web site, texting, voicemail or email. Officials from more than a dozen federal, state and local agencies will not only review those complaints, but also meet community members at a monthly session.

On Tuesday, community members and advocates gathered in Bakersfield, many with signs in Spanish reading: Protect the quality of water; Protect the quality of the air.

The resource will allow residents to easily voice concerns on topics such as environmental pollution, said Gustavo Aguirre, the organizing director for the Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment.

Already, Aguirre and others connected with the Arvin Bucket Brigade, a citizen air monitoring effort, plan to report the high levels of certain chemicals they self-tested near a Lamont area facility.

"We'll be working with agencies in the same room, looking for solutions," Aguirre said.

The nascent KEEN program has had some early success. In February, about 20 community members and government officials took a tour of Lamont and Weedpatch, pointing out areas of concern. That led to Kern Regional Transit building a shelter so residents don't have to wait for the bus so close to a muddy, busy road.

The KEEN effort is modeled after a successful effort in Imperial County, where resident reporting of environmental hazards resulted in \$90,000 in fines in the first year alone.

How to report

- Online at www.kernreport.org
- Text message (303) 800-8307
- Voicemail at (661) 379-0411
- Email reports@kernreport.org

Check www.kernreport.org for the location and time of monthly KEEN meetings.