

Feds find more problems at Kettleman landfill

By Eiji Yamashita

Hanford Sentinel, Saturday, July 17, 2010

Here comes another violation for the Kettleman Hills landfill, which nearby residents blame for a rash of birth defects.

Federal environmental officials last week cleared Chemical Waste Management's cleanup of cancer-causing PCBs, or polychlorinated biphenyls, at the site, allowing the company to continue accepting hazardous waste. But the company isn't off the hook yet.

On Thursday, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency followed up with a notice of further violation against the waste disposal giant on top of its previous notice of violation in April, saying more PCBs were found earlier this week in the soil underneath the storage area, where they shouldn't have been found.

Company officials say the action results from findings that the company self-reported to the EPA and shows their willingness to go above and beyond to ensure compliance and guard its safety record.

For the time being, the company can continue disposing of hazardous waste at the site, but it has 60 days to clean up the newly found contamination. If it doesn't clean up the contaminated waste, it will lose its privilege to accept PCB waste generated from EPA's cleanup efforts.

The new notice is the latest in a string of PCB violations found at the site for the last several years. Thursday's enforcement action comes as the company seeks the renewal of its PCB permit.

"After CWM removed the portion of the concrete pad where the contamination was found, additional PCBs were found below the pad," the EPA said in a statement. "Based on sample results taken by CMW at the site, EPA has determined that this newly discovered release of PCBs is a violation of [the Toxic Substances Control Act]."

The act is a federal law regulating the storage and disposal of PCBs. Based on the April violation with PCB regulations, the EPA conducted a follow-up inspection and concluded that the company had addressed the PCB violations identified in April. But the agency says it found more PCB contamination during the June inspection on a concrete pad next to the PCB storage building.

The samples detected PCBs at 24 micrograms per 100 square centimeters, 2.4 times the federal level of 10 micrograms, according to the letter sent to Chem Waste Thursday.

The company removed the contaminated section of the concrete pad. But federal inspectors found more PCBs in soil underneath. Preliminary samples of the soil submitted by the company tested for PCBs at levels 2.1, 64, 74 and 440 parts per million, some far exceeding the federal level of 50, the letter says.

Company officials expressed dismay over the notice Friday.

"We were disappointed to get the notice yesterday and view it as unnecessary because we're already working with the U.S. EPA on the issues we self-reported," said Waste Management spokeswoman Jennifer Andrews through e-mail communication Friday. "It really is a perfunctory processing matter. It's the EPA's way of keeping track of the issues that they monitor. We'd begun the dialogue on a remediation plan already."

Andrews said the company has taken extra steps to investigate the April notice of violation further by sampling soil in and around the PCB storage unit in Kettleman. Remediation effort includes sandblasting and recoating with epoxy all the areas inside the storage building to make sure they are 100 percent clean.

The company downplays the issue, denying any health risks from the violations.

"It is important to remember that this issue never caused any public health risk," Andrews said. "The area in question is a designated PCB storage facility where highly-trained environmental specialists treat and handle PCBs."

Chem Waste's Kettleman Hills facility is at the heart of controversy surrounding at least 11 birth defect cases reported in Kettleman City since 2007. The company has said its operation is well regulated and safe, while health officials have said there is no evidence linking the landfill to the deformities.

The state is still investigating the causes of the birth defects.

For activists, Thursday's EPA action was another reason to lobby against a new PCB permit for Chem Waste.

"We thank the EPA for taking this action, but with more Chem Waste violations being discovered, it is time for the EPA to finally deny Chem Waste's request for a new permit," said Maricela Mares Alatorre, a Kettleman City resident and member of the community group El Pueblo Para El Aire y Agua Limpio. "EPA must protect our community that is already suffering from so many birth defects and infant deaths."

Biz Beat: Water needs, issues highlight local business luncheon

By Seth Nidever

Hanford Sentinel, Friday, July 16, 2010

If anybody didn't understand the importance of water to the local economy before Wednesday's business luncheon at the Comfort Inn, they probably did when they left.

That's because Randy McFarland, spokesman for the Kings River Water Association, spelled out in no uncertain terms the significance of water to an area that would be either alkali flats baking in the sun or submerged beneath the waters of Tulare Lake if it weren't for the complex water delivery system that has turned Kings County into an agricultural powerhouse.

"I don't need to tell all of you what that means to your economy," he said, delivering the keynote address at the quarterly business gathering sponsored by Kings County Economic Development Corporation.

Look at Mendota, McFarland told the audience, if you want to see what life might be like without adequate water supplies.

Mendota, a town almost completely dependent on agriculture on the west side of Fresno County, suffered unemployment as high as 40 percent last year amid water delivery shortages from the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta.

Speaking to a group that included representatives from Del Monte, JG Boswell Co., Pacific Gas and Electric, the [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#) and Kings Water Recycling Authority, McFarland noted that much of Kings County used to be under water until Tulare Lake was dried up by dams on the Kings, Tule and Kaweah rivers.

He noted that the Kings River flows into the northeastern part of the county and reaches all the way to the southern border with irrigation water. He noted Kings County's groundwater overdraft, due to far more water has been pumped out than has been replenished by surface water deliveries. For that reason, he said, the state is moving toward tighter restrictions on groundwater use - and local entities better wake up and take action before the state takes over.

"We mine more (water) than we replenish," he said.

McFarland discussed the environmental problems in the delta that have hampered water deliveries to western and southern Kings County.

He stumped for the \$11.2 billion water bond, which may get yanked off the November ballot because supporters don't think it has much chance of passing in a tough economy.

The bond could fund new dams that would ease storage and delivery problems, and it could fund a way of bringing Northern California water to thirsty farms and cities south of the Bay Area without going through the fragile delta.

Endangered fish species have restricted the pumps that suck water out of the delta for delivery south.

"We have to solve the delta's problems if we're ever going to move beyond this," McFarland said.

McFarland finished the way he began - hammering away the significance of the strange substance many take for granted.

"We have to have water," he said.

Route to the future

Planned express bus will speed commutes, cut pollution

Stockton Record, Thursday, July 15, 2010

The San Joaquin Regional Transit District is adding a metro express line on Hammer Lane similar to one that runs on Pacific Avenue.

That means as early as 2012, there will be an east-west express bus route to complement the existing north-south route. Think of it as a light rail system but at less cost and with more flexibility.

The express buses run on tight schedules, with prepaid passengers boarding only at key locations along the route. These buses, all hybrids, move more swiftly because there's not a lot of waiting around at stops for passengers fumbling for money.

And there's not a lot of idling at stop lights, because technology on the buses means the district can work with the city to give the buses priority at traffic signals.

The east-west route is being funded by a \$5.2 million federal grant.

The existing north-south express route averages more than 2,500 passenger trips a day. That means a lot fewer cars on city streets and a lot less pollution in city air.

The trick is to make the buses so efficient, easy to use and cost-effective that people who normally would drive to work will leave their cars in the garage and hop on the bus.

Some believe that day is coming.

"Just give us 10 years, and this is going to be the place to be," said Rep. Jerry McNerney, D-Pleasanton, who was on hand for the transit grant announcement.

[Contra Costa Times Guest Commentary, Sunday, July 18, 2010:](#)

It takes a healthy village to raise a child

By Dr. David Pepper

As a physician in Contra Costa County, I see firsthand the health effects of transportation policy. Recently I treated Sam, a 4-year-old with asthma.

Sam's family is fearful that he will have another asthma attack — triggered by air pollution. In the Bay Area, air pollution has been linked to 2,600 premature deaths annually and thousands of hospitalizations, with the largest source of emissions coming from motor vehicles.

In Contra Costa County, nearly one in four children (23.7 percent) between the ages of 5-17 have been diagnosed with asthma.

This doesn't have to be. Increasingly, studies reveal that a significant factor in the health of our children is the design of the community — what health professionals call "the built environment."

The proverb "it takes a village to raise a child" takes on a new meaning. It's not just family, teachers and neighbors but also roads, parks and neighborhoods that are critical factors in giving kids a chance to grow up healthy.

For decades we have fostered a transportation policy that fuels fragmented and sprawling cul-de-sacs rather than connected and coherent communities.

Our focus on auto-oriented growth leads to increases in inactivity, obesity, loneliness, fossil fuel dependency and deadly air pollution.

Let's be honest: our previous national transportation policy has engineered health out of our villages. Now it's time to bring it back.

What does a healthy village look like? It's one where we can get to shops, parks, our friends and transit options easily — without the need to drive.

Sustainable, mixed-use communities designed around mass transit, walking and cycling have been shown to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, air pollution and a range of adverse health outcomes.

In addition to the benefits to lung health, individuals who live in mixed-use and walkable communities have a 35 percent lower risk of obesity.

Americans understand the need to create healthy villages. A national poll released by the Transportation For America coalition showed that voters nationwide overwhelmingly support broader access to public transportation and safe walking and biking options.

More than four-in-five voters (82 percent) responded that "the United States would benefit from an expanded and improved public transportation system," including better rail and buses. And nearly three-of-five voters chose improving public transportation and making it easier to walk and bike over building more roads and expanding existing roads as the best strategies for tackling congestion (59 percent to 38 percent).

These national figures are inspiring because, right now, our best chance for promoting health in transportation policy lies in Washington, D.C.

Sen. Christopher Dodd, D-Conn., recently introduced legislation to support public transportation agencies across the country. What's more, the Senate's Environment and Public Works Committee, led by our own Sen. Barbara Boxer, is drafting new policy to support our roads, bridges, buses, trains, ports, bikeways and crosswalks.

The timing couldn't be better: Without federal support, our transit agencies will continue to struggle with budget shortfalls, and as a result our community will face increasing health impacts from transportation policy.

My prescription: Boxer should co-sponsor Dodd's Public Transportation Preservation Act, and press ahead with an agenda that increases funding for public transportation to reduce air pollution, improve public health and create healthy villages for all.

Why? Because Sam and his family need a new healthier direction — and so does Contra Costa County.

Dr. David Pepper is a physician in Contra Costa County.