

Open letter on Lehigh quarry

Los Altos and Los Altos Hills city councils' ad hoc committees, Los Altos Town Crier, 2-22-11

Members of the Los Altos and Los Altos Hills city councils' ad hoc committees include Los Altos Mayor Ron Packard, Los Altos Councilman David Casas and Los Altos Hills Councilman Gary Waldeck.

In late 2010, members of the public approached both the Los Altos and Los Altos Hills city councils with claims of adverse health problems that stem from the Lehigh Southwest Cement Plant's operations.

The Lehigh quarry, a substantial enterprise (2,400-plus acres) located in the foothills just north of Cupertino, includes both quarry and cement manufacturing operations.

The complaining groups insist that the quarry is operating in violation of Environmental Protection Agency directives, and that the county has not taken appropriate enforcement action on Notices of Violations. Lehigh officials insist their company is a responsible corporate citizen, is in full compliance with all emission requirements and provides substantial benefits to the community.

Our two councils decided to form ad-hoc committees to collaborate in a transparent, objective effort to determine whether emissions comply with requirements and whether enforcement agencies have performed their jobs. If the ad-hoc committees determine that Lehigh is in compliance, their review will be concluded. If the committees determine otherwise, they will, at a minimum, insist that the responsible government agencies take immediate action to resolve any deficiencies.

The present plan of the committees is to proceed with four primary actions:

1. Gather information and make it readily accessible on a public Web site repository (www.SouthBayQuarryLibrary.org). The intent here is to collect and place all of it on one site to be kept current. In addition, formal requests for information will be presented to each of the enforcement agencies so that a complete picture is available.

No forum capability will be provided, because the library is designed to be objective. The Web site provides e-mail access to the librarian; it will accept e-mailed information for inclusion in the repository, if appropriate. If you have information or special skills, please let us know via the Web site's e-mail.

2. Engage the services of an independent expert to render an opinion based on all available evidence.

3. Take steps to install dedicated air-monitoring equipment in our jurisdictions to verify that any measured contaminants in our communities are consistent with the various legal requirements. One air-monitoring station is now located in Cupertino; however, its relevance for our communities is questionable. Qualified, independent analytical expertise is also being sought to assist in this effort.

4. Work with the regional water quality control board to change the sampling point of the water that passes through our environment as it flows to the Bay (downstream from the existing test location).

We will attempt to keep the public informed as the review progresses.