

Vulcan refuses access for Duarte's annual Fish Canyon hike

Daniel Tedford, Los Angeles Newspaper Group, 4-18-10

AZUSA -- With officials in Duarte maintaining vocal opposition to a new mining proposal, Vulcan Materials Co. will not allow access through their mining site Saturday for Duarte's annual Wilderness Day hike to Fish Canyon falls.

It will be the first time in the 21-year history of Duarte's Wilderness Day that hikers won't be able to pass through the quarry's land, which is the fastest way to get to the canyon.

"This is one of the issues we have been talking about from day one, Vulcan using family events like this to intercede and stop the access to the falls," City Manager Darrell George said. "It is exactly what we feared and it is coming true now."

Rumors have been circulating that some people planned to use Wilderness Day and the hike as forums to protest a proposal by Vulcan to move its mining operation to a site closer to Duarte. Vulcan owns the Azusa Rock Quarry, which produces rock used in concrete.

Vulcan's plan is scheduled to go to the Azusa City Council on Monday.

A Vulcan official said the company reached out to Duarte in an effort to make sure the event was safe and peaceful.

Vulcan sent over a liability waiver form Monday and asked for it to be returned by noon the next day.

"After numerous phone calls from the Duarte city manager in which he indicated his desire not to sign the standard liability agreement for this year's event, we notified the city of Duarte we would not be able to participate in the April 17 event," Vulcan spokesman Todd Priest said.

Since the inception of Wilderness Days, people have been bussed through the mining operation site to get to a hiking trail to Fish Canyon.

George said Vulcan sprung the agreement on Duarte and gave them a limited timeline to review and send it back. When Duarte officials took time to review the document, which contained language they didn't agree with, Vulcan called off negotiations, George said.

"They are using this as another pawn in their game," George said. "I never refused (to sign) and (Priest) knows that. They should be disgusted with themselves to think there is going to be a riot. Or are they really concerned people are going to see the beauty of the hillsides?"

Priest didn't think George ever planned on signing the waiver.

"Given ... their lack of cooperation regarding our participation, we had to seek assurances that their event could be conducted with public safety being a priority," he said. "At no time did the City Manager express an interest to either have the city sign the standard insurance liability agreement."

Duarte will still have the event at Encanto Park and will lead hikes that go around Vulcan's property, George said.