

No major impact on air from Azusa mining, regulators say

Daniel Tedford, Los Angeles Newspaper Group, 2-28-10

AZUSA - Air quality will not be sullied by Vulcan Materials Co.'s new mining plan as long as imposed limits are enforced, air quality regulators said last week.

Officials with South Coast Air Quality Management District said an environmental report on a new mining plan in Azusa was well-prepared but needed adjustments, AQMD Executive Officer Barry Wallerstein said.

AQMD officials wanted to make sure the report had provisions that would punish Vulcan for infractions.

"We are not expecting the project to worsen air quality compared to today's air quality," Wallerstein said. "But it is predicated on having an enforceable condition that limits the amount of ... materials processed."

Specifically AQMD wants a way to make sure Vulcan doesn't mine more than the permitted six million tons per year for the new mining plan.

"We are clearly identifying this ... issue as one that needs additional clarification and enforceability through a permit or another mechanism," Wallerstein said.

They also want Vulcan to continue to move material on conveyor belts, not trucks.

Vulcan Material's Co. has a permit to mine 190 acres near Fish Canyon. The company wants to exchange 80 acres of land on its eastern property line for the ability to mine 80 acres near its western property line.

The 270-acre Vulcan property is in Azusa but rests along the Duarte border. For Vulcan to move forward, Azusa officials would have to approve Vulcan's plan to mine the western 80 acres.

Residents in Duarte have expressed concern at public hearings about how air quality in the city will be affected by the proposal.

Opponents of the project said there is a lot of uncertainty over how much pollution mining causes.

"I think, probably on a regional level, it is not going to do much," said Azusa resident Richard Deem, a member of the Save Our Canyon group that opposes the mining plan. "In terms of a local level, it may or may not be significant. (AQMD) doesn't really have a good handle on the particulates that are produced from the quarry."

Deem said more and better-located monitoring sites for dust and particulate matter are needed to truly assess the mining's impact on air quality.

Duarte Mayor Margaret Finlay didn't have a comment on AQMD's findings.

"I am going to have sit down and review it before I make any salient comments," Finlay said.

Azusa officials, who hired Lilburn Corporation as its consultant to prepare the environmental report, felt AQMD's comments supported the findings in the environmental report, Assistant Director of Economic and Community Development Conal McNamara said.

Officials with Vulcan said they have no intention of exceeding the six million tons per year and were pleased with AQMD's assessment.

"That is a requirement in the AQMD permit, and as we do with all the requirements, that would be strictly adhered to," spokesman Todd Priest said. "We have been surprised that some in the community have reacted to this being an increase when the AQMD has verified the production will go from 10.8 (million tons per year) down to six."

Besides the tonnage enforcement, officials believed there was only one other moderate concern.

"The only other major comment was we asked that in the revision to the conditional use permit, that they continue with the requirement to convey their material with a conveyance system instead of using trucks," said AQMD planning manager Susan Nakamura.

Vulcan Materials uses a conveyer belt to move material from the mining operation to a facility miles away.

The AQMD said it wants something in the permit to make sure Vulcan kept using conveyors.

Priest said Vulcan planned to keep using conveyors.

"The conditional use permit requires the materials be moved via the conveyer system and that all the trucks not be used to move the product off site," Priest said.