

# Cupertino could start monitoring air quality near cement plant

**Matt Wilson, Bay Area News Group, 3-10-10**

Mounting public pressure about the air quality around the Lehigh Southwest Cement Plant just on the other side of Cupertino's border has prompted city leaders to consider setting up a mobile air-monitoring station in the city. Council said air quality is among its top issues for 2010.

City manager David Knapp said the city hopes to partner with the Bay Area Air Quality Management District to set up a station, possibly in the parking lot at Monta Vista Park near the recreation center at 22601 Voss Ave.

"There's a reasonable amount of concern from the members of our public," said Knapp. "This could be beneficial in that [the air district] might learn something that they don't already know. It's important to get more information out there."

The air district is the lead public agency entrusted with regulating stationary sources of air pollution in the nine counties that constitute the San Francisco Bay Area. The Lehigh facility is the only cement plant in the agency's jurisdiction.

Since the cement and quarry facilities are outside the city's borders, monitoring air is one of the few direct things city leaders can do to address resident worries.

Knapp said Monta Vista Park is the preferred choice as it is the closest piece of city-owned land near the facility. The monitoring station would be housed in a portable trailer and could take up three parking spaces.

BAAQMD would supply and operate the monitoring device. Knapp said the city might have to cover small costs like electricity and general staff time.

The device would run for a year and collect "moment by moment information," Knapp said. The device can look for elevated levels of pollutants like carbon monoxide, methane, oxides of nitrogen, non-methane organic carbon ozone and sulfur dioxide.

The air district would operate the device, collect data and analyze it. Any data pulled will have to account for known spikes in activity at the recreation center, including increased car traffic at the park, grass mowing and dirt kicked up from the park's baseball field.

Air-monitoring stations at the facility are different in that those measure directly what the facility is putting into the air. Eric Stevenson, an air-monitoring manager with BAAQMD, said the proposed station would measure ambient air, which makes it difficult to determine the exact origin of any potential pollutants.

The readings represent what a neighborhood is exposed to, but not where the pollutants are coming from, Stevenson said.

"What is really important is that we look at what the data show and compare it across Bay Area and the state and compare it to what you would expect to see. It's an extremely difficult exercise to try and determine where something comes from," he added

Stevenson, said similar mobile stations have been used in Benicia and Berkeley.

"Usually there is a community concern and a need to quantify the pollutants. [The station] is to answer community concern and get out there and see if there's a problem," he said. "Usually what we see is that when we take these community-based monitoring projects is that the limitations of what we can actually do on the data side and on the identification side of measuring compounds is limited by the technology. This particular station has all the technology that has been accepted and proven in the field. We've got the very best we can possibly use to go out there and find out what is going on."

The city council is tentatively set to review the issue in April or early May.