

California Approves Toxic Waste Site Expansion

SCOTT SMITH, Associated Press

FRESNO, Calif. (AP) — Residents of a small California farming community who have worried for years about the health effects of a hazardous waste landfill learned Wednesday that the state has cleared the way for it to expand.

Rather than scaling back the Kettleman Hills landfill, as residents had demanded, state officials announced the approval of a plan for the operator to increase what is already the largest toxic waste landfill in the West by 50 percent.

Maricela Mares-Alatorre, who has lived in Kettleman City most of her life, said she knows residents whose children have been born with birth defects that they blame on the landfill.

She also said she doubts studies cited by the state and Chemical Waste Management Inc. that found no link between the landfill and the children.

"I definitely think there's something going on," Mares-Alatorre said. "The only thing we know is that they all share the same environment."

With the state approval, the landfill can grow to 15 million cubic yards. The additional 5 million cubic yards allowed under the plan equals about 15 acres of landfill space, said Lily Quiroa, a spokeswoman for Chemical Waste Management.

She said the studies show the facility has had no health impacts on the community.

"A lot of contentions are brought up by groups that don't live in the community," Quiroa said.

In announcing the approval, Deborah Raphael, director of the California Department of Toxic Substances, said state and federal studies done in Kettleman Hills have found no link between the landfill and birth defects.

Raphael said the expansion will give California a much needed safe place to dispose of its hazardous waste.

"The expansion, we understand, is a deep concern to the families of Kettleman City," Raphael said. "We did not make this decision lightly."

Raphael said the state held 23 public meetings and considered more than 5,500 written comments during the formal public comment period last year while eyeing the expansion.

Chemical Waste Management first sought permission in 2008 to expand the site nearly four miles from Kettleman City, located off Interstate 5 midway between

California Approves Toxic Waste Site Expansion

Published on Chem.Info (<http://www.chem.info>)

Sacramento and Los Angeles.

The landfill has operated for more than 30 years and is one of two in California that accepts hazardous waste. Officials said it is nearly full, and the expansion would give it at least another eight years of life.

The new permit also tightens environmental safeguards and public information requirements, officials said.

Opponents have until June 23 to appeal the state approval.

Kings County Supervisor Richard Valle, who represents the city of 1,400 residents, said he has no reason to dismiss the state and federal reports that say the landfill isn't the cause of birth defects.

He noted key studies that blame agricultural pesticides and exhaust from nearby roadways for making people sick.

Valle intends to make sure a tax from the hazardous waste goes to Kettleman City.

In past years, the tax generated up to \$3 million annually, but the lack of space at the landfill has decreased that amount to about \$150,000 in recent years, he said.

Kettleman City lacks sidewalks, street lights and recreational activities for children, which he said the tax money will help provide.

"It's been a public mission of mine from day one," Valle said.

A study by the dump operator released in early 2011 and conducted at the EPA's request showed its level of cancer-causing chemicals was too low to harm residents' health. It followed another report by California health officials that found no common cause for the birth defects.

Source URL (retrieved on 01/27/2015 - 8:48am):

<http://www.chem.info/news/2014/05/california-approves-toxic-waste-site-expansion>