

Lehigh Quarry Update

Early in 2011, Los Altos and Los Altos Hills formed an ad hoc alliance to examine allegations against the Lehigh Quarry, just North of Cupertino. The primary goal of the effort is to transparently and objectively examine the data and information surrounding the facility and to seek an independent expert opinion of its impact on our communities. In February, an on-line library (www.southbayquarrylibrary.org) was created in which many available public documents about Lehigh are posted for all to see. Now it is much easier for people to be informed and to make their own decisions about the Quarry if they choose.

In early March, the Los Altos Mayor Ron Packard and Los Altos Hills councilmember Gary Waldeck, along with staff, visited the Bay Area Air Quality Management District and CA Regional Water Quality Control Board offices in San Francisco and Oakland. The detailed report of those visits is posted on the referenced library website. One outcome of the visit was an understanding that the quantity of emissions that naturally occur from an operation like Lehigh's is not the best indicator to signal a public health concern. Instead, the best indication is the specific Concentration of a Toxic Contaminant that might occur in any given area. Given that the Quarry's emissions are spread over a very wide dispersal area, the local individual component concentrations may, in fact, be very small.

We also learned that there are active, calibrated monitoring stations installed in both the Lehigh Plant as well as at a nearby Cupertino site. The secondary station verifies the accuracy of a predictive aerial distribution computer model used to estimate deposition concentrations of emissions in urban locations. They reported that no observed emissions have ever exceeded accepted toxic trigger limits. Indeed, the normal readings of such emissions have been typically from 100 – 300 times LESS than the levels that the EPA uses to identify a toxic contamination concern. However, to make sure, the ad hoc alliance will hire the services of an independent expert in the field to review all available data and to render an expert opinion. If a toxic concern is determined, our group will insist that our County Governmental authorities act quickly to rectify the problem. On the other hand, if Lehigh has operated within the bounds of safety guidelines, the efforts of this ad hoc alliance will become unnecessary and will disband.

In the meantime, we will expand our outreach to the community. In late May or early June, we plan to have the regulatory agencies participate in a forum, TBD, to describe their work, the rules by which they operate, the steps they have taken to regulate Lehigh and to make themselves available to answer community questions about their work and in particular, the Lehigh Quarry. As the event is developed, we will have another bulletin to share with the community.

Los Altos Mayor Ron Packard

Los Altos Hills Councilmember Gary Waldeck

Los Altos Councilmember David Casas