Santa Clara County Residents Push for Toxic Cleanup

Santa Clara, CA — The Bay Area Research and Extension Center (BAREC), which began operation in the early 1920s as a University of California agricultural testing site, now occupies 17 acres of urban Santa Clara County. Over the past 60 years, research at the station made mass production of strawberries possible, but also involved testing thousands of chemicals and pesticides. Unfortunately, decades of agricultural testing has left the land contaminated with a toxic legacy of pesticides, including carcinogenic chemicals.

Six years ago, the land went up for sale. If sold, the remaining soil would pose a threat to health of residents, so neighbors formed the group SaveBAREC to protect the sale and privatization of the land and to make sure the land is properly cleaned up. Unfortunately, the group has met resistance from the city, state, and developers.

In June of 2007, more than 300 members of the community turned out in San Jose on a Wednesday evening to voice opposition to the proposed development. Their testimony continued until 2:15 AM, but in direct defiance of public sentiment and without deliberation, the city council unanimously voted to allow the development to proceed.

After this setback, SaveBAREC community members hit the streets in the fall of 2007 and gathered the required 12,000 signatures—in just 3 weeks—to put two referendums on the ballot preserving the area as open space, and ultimately, ensuring its cleanup. Unfortunately, SaveBAREC could not compete with the $1 million that developers spent on ads, cold calling and mailers to convince residents to support the development.

As of this writing, the California Department of Toxic Substances has agreed to clean up only the most toxic hot spots. Having kept the developers at bay, SaveBAREC members are not giving up. According to SaveBAREC leader Kirk Vartan, “This is really just scratching the surface of the problem. Action must be taken to protect the health of the community to the fullest extent.” Residents are now embarking on a large-scale public relations effort to comprehensively clean up the entire area.

“We’ve got a new plan on how to both clean up and preserve this land in order to protect the public health and make it available for the greatest public use,” said Elizabeth Martin-Craig, a Pesticide Watch organizer working with the group.
Legislators Agree To Protect Children And Seniors

Oakland, CA — Last year, East Bay residents among the many who raised an outcry to proposed aerial pesticide spraying for the light brown apple moth. Through tireless organizing, residents stopped aerial spraying for the moth, one piece of the state’s “eradication” program, and moved their focus to problematic ground pesticide applications. One of the greatest concerns about proposed aerial spraying was the lack of protection for California’s most sensitive populations, including children, seniors and working families. In response, Pesticide Watch joined community organizations to advocate protection zones absent of pesticide spraying around schools, hospitals, and senior centers, among other places. "We have an ethical responsibility to protect the most vulnerable from pesticide poisoning: infants and children, the elderly, and those who are already ill," said Lynn Elliott-Harding, a registered nurse, leader of Stop the Spray - East Bay and a member of the California Nurses Association. "The literature is clear, we must be as well. Our laws must support the science and protect those at greatest risk.” Pesticide Watch

"Aerial pesticide spraying is an outdated and unsafe technology." —Assembleembmer Sandre Swanson

Over the past two years, East Bay residents descended on Sacramento, as well as Oakland, calling for greater protections from aerial pesticide spraying through meetings, phone calls and letters. Hearing the call from his constituents and across the state, Assembleembmer Sandre Swanson, recently took up legislation: the Clean Air for Children, Seniors and Working Families Act. “Aerial pesticide spraying is an outdated and unsafe technology,” he said.

Concerned community organizations are working to advance Mr. Swanson’s legislation, while working through the California Department of Pesticide Regulation and local County Agricultural Commissioners to create as many protection zones as possible for children and seniors.

Sacramento, CA — In early March, community leaders gathered to honor Pesticide Watch and celebrate emerging efforts to tackle pesticide misuse and increase food security in the Sacramento Valley.

“Sacramento has committed to being a leader in sustainability for the state and nation, and we are proud that organizations like Pesticide Watch are pushing us to get there,” said Sacramento City Councilwoman Lauren Hammond.

More than 3.2 million pounds of pesticides are used in Sacramento County, including thousands of pounds in urban homes, schools, parks and workplaces. Area organizations, including Physicians for Social Responsibility, Mothers’ Support Network and the Sacramento Natural Foods Co-op launched Pesticide-Free Sacramento as a comprehensive effort to reduce and ultimately eliminate pesticide use in the region.

“Sacramentans are challenging the way toxics pesticides are used in their backyards and finding creative solutions to fix an increasingly broken food system,” said Paul Schramski Towers, state director of Pesticide Watch. “By investing in local food and organic places, we can create a healthier, more vibrant community.”

Organic Sounds: New Campaign And A Sacramento Celebration

Executive Chef Michael Trusty of the Grange Restaurant speaks at Organic Sounds: Sacramento, highlighting the need for local food and pesticide-free communities.

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The Playing Fields Protector

Tiburon, CA — In the Fall of 2008, Jennifer Ringewald, a mother new to the Reed Union School District, received her state-mandated informational flyer about the pesticides that might be used on school grounds during the school year. This surprised and scared her.

"Why am I feeding my children organic produce and letting them play on fields sprayed with pesticides?" she asked.

While reading a Pesticide Watch newsletter, she realized she could get help. She contacted Elizabeth Martin-Craig, community organizer with the San Francisco office of Pesticide Watch. Jennifer soon realized that the effects of spraying on their children concerned many parents at all three schools in the district. She and other moms soon formed a group, the Reed Parents for Healthy Schools.

Their immediate goal is to, in partnership with the School Board, form an Integrated Pest Management Committee, on which at least one parent would serve, and through the collaborative process, reduce the use of pesticides.

Longer-term goals include extending the same principles to municipal and county fields and trails, making them pesticide-free as well. "I’m hopeful that once community leaders understand the effects on our children and how easy it is to transition to a much lower level of pesticide use, we’ll all be on the same page,” said Ringewald.

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Organic Sounds: washosted by Assembleembmer Dave Jones, Sacramento City Councilmembers Rob Fong and Lauren Hammond, Martha Guzman Acesev of California Rural Legal Assistance, Rene Guerrero of the Planning and Conservation League and Shamus Roller of the Sacramento Housing Alliance, among others.

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Contact Us

Is your neighborhood threatened by pesticide pollution? Are your government officials or company executives not addressing these issues in a timely and effective manner? If so, Pesticide Watch Education Fund and our staff can come to your community and help you. Please contact us at 916.551.1883 or info@pesticidewatch.org.

“No More Fogging” Say Santa Clara County Residents

Saratoga, CA — In yet another California community, residents are joining arms and calling on local agencies to stop the practice of fogging for mosquitoes. For years, the Santa Clara County Vector Control District has fogged pesticides to control the spread of West Nile virus. While West Nile virus poses threats to human health, the pesticides used in fogging are also increasingly linked to adverse health effects, especially in pregnant women.

Residents recently formed Community for Environmentally Sound and Natural Alternatives (CESNA) in response to outdated forms of mosquito management. “Fogging for public health or farming reasons does more harm than good," said Nancy Jamello, one of the leaders of CESNA. “Mosquito control agencies need to do more to prevent mosquito problems, rather than band-aid solutions like fogging,” she added.

Recent scientific reports indicate that controlling mosquito larva, rather than adults, through least-toxic methods like direct applications of soaps and oils, is a better alternative. While other reports underscore that fogged pesticides tend to drift, landing on homes, schools and other than the intended mosqui- toes.

For more information about mosquito fogging, visit our website and click the link for the “Overkill” report.