



Investigations and Air Sampling in Mecca, CA Status Report – August 24, 2011

Welcome back to school. We want to provide all Mecca families with the most up-to-date information regarding your community's air quality as related to operations at the Western Environmental, Inc. (WEI) plant. This Fact Sheet summarizes efforts to-date by the California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) and the South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD) to evaluate and address complaints from Mecca residents about nuisance odors. We are committed to working cooperatively with the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), Riverside County Environmental Health, the Coachella Valley Unified School District, WEI, Waste Reduction Technologies (WRT), and other facility operators, the Cabazon Band of Mission Indians, local public health officials, the office of Supervisor John Benoit, and local elected officials to address these community concerns.

SUMMARY

DTSC has informed companies that dig up hazardous waste and truckers that haul it that WEI does not have the appropriate permit to accept hazardous waste. DTSC stopped and inspected trucks earlier this year as they were about to enter WEI and believes this stopped hazardous waste from getting in. Until WEI gets an appropriate permit, hazardous waste cannot go to WEI. WEI, however, can still accept non-hazardous waste. DTSC is working to reach an agreement with WEI that will enable DTSC to sample materials and understand exactly what is on the property; DTSC will also look at WEI's records to see what material has arrived there. DTSC plans to begin sampling soon, and will make results public on DTSC's WEI web page: <http://www.dtsc.ca.gov/WEI.cfm>. Results of sampling will help DTSC take its next steps to ensure proper regulation of WEI. DTSC also plans to begin talks soon with the Cabazon Band of Mission Indians, and hopes to reach an agreement that helps the Tribe develop a permit proposal for WEI. The public will be informed and will be able to comment during this process.

AQMD has conducted a series of investigations and air monitoring activities in response to numerous odor complaints from members of the Mecca community, and from residents and local schools and community service facilities. AQMD has identified WEI and its co-owned adjacent facility, WRT, as the primary source of the odors. AQMD field staff has detected strong odors in the community, and has verified that such odors exist even if our equipment is not able to detect unusual amounts of air pollutants in the air. To date, levels of toxic pollutants detected in the community are below or within levels typical in urban Southern California. AQMD continues to collect samples in the Mecca area.

Known health impacts can result from exposure to strong and objectionable odors, and AQMD takes these health impacts very seriously. AQMD will continue to work with other agencies to provide technical support, to collect and analyze samples, and provide the results to the community of Mecca.

TO STAY INFORMED OF FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

If you would like to be on the DTSC e-mail list, please send your e-mail address to Jennifer Villegas at jvillega@dtsc.ca.gov. For those who wish to receive DTSC and AQMD updates through the U.S. Postal Service, please leave your name and address at your school's office; these will be collected and submitted to DTSC and AQMD for their mailing lists.

To report an air quality problem, you are encouraged at any time to call the AQMD's toll-free number at 1-800-CUT-SMOG (1-800-288-7664). For Spanish speaking community members, please call 1-800-876-3666.

[Please see reverse side for a description of recent monitoring results and enforcement actions.]

DETAILED AQMD MONITORING RESULTS

- From April through July 2011, a series of samples was collected at two locations and tested for toxic metals contained in airborne particulates. Results showed that levels of toxic metals in the air were below or within the typical urban range in Southern California.
- Some elevated levels of total chromium were seen in many of these samples, however total chromium is **not** considered to be a toxic air contaminant. Sampling for the toxic form of chromium, hexavalent chromium, started in late July and has not revealed elevated levels in Mecca, with levels (0.06 nanograms/m³ maximum; 0.02 nanograms/m³ average) below the typical average urban level in Southern California (0.07 nanograms/m³). Hexavalent chromium monitoring continues at Mecca Elementary and College of the Desert.
- Air samples were collected for the analysis of Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs), a class of chemicals known to have toxic effects, at two locations from May 27 through June 8, 2011. No PCBs were detected in the samples. The sampling equipment is capable of detecting PCBs at levels (0.3 nanograms/m³), which is lower than protective health values established by state agency Cal EPA.
- Continuous monitoring for hydrocarbons continues at Mecca Elementary and College of the Desert. When levels reach a certain threshold, a “grab” sample is automatically collected for further detailed analysis to check for air toxic or odorous chemicals. Since March 31, 2011, air toxic levels measured in all the “grab” samples were below or within the typical urban range in Southern California.
- Another set of long-term hydrocarbon sampling was initiated at four different locations on June 24, 2011 and is ongoing. These samples provide information on long term exposure and risk from air toxic gases. Levels detected thus far are below or within the typical urban range in Southern California.

DETAILED AQMD ENFORCEMENT ACTIONS

- AQMD provided a detailed Status Report on Investigations and Air Sampling Activities in Mecca at the end of March 2011 (for a copy of this report dated, March 31, 2011, please refer to AQMD’s website at the following address: [<http://www.aqmd.gov/tao/Mecca/MeccaOdorStudy.htm>]). Since that time, AQMD has received and responded to an additional sixty-five (65) odor complaints from local community residents and teachers and staff at Saul Martinez and Mecca Elementary Schools. In response to those odor complaints, AQMD has conducted complaint investigations by responding to complaints, and in addition, AQMD staff have conducted ten (10) facility inspections at WEI and its co-owned and co-located operations at WRT, both located at the Cabazon Tribal Land in Mecca.
- As a result of the odor complaints received by AQMD on April 15, 2011, AQMD conducted complaint investigations and made inspections at WEI and WRT and determined that operations at WEI had caused a public nuisance. Therefore, on May 11, 2011, AQMD issued a Notice of Violation for public nuisance (in violation of AQMD Rule 402 and the state of California Health and Safety Code Section 41700) to WEI for causing foul odors that affected several local residents as well as staff at Saul Martinez Elementary School for the April 15th incident. AQMD’s Rule 402 and the state Health and Safety Code Section 41700 prohibit facilities from discharging air pollutants that cause injury, nuisance or annoyance to a considerable number of the public, or damage to businesses or property. In addition, in April, 2011, AQMD completed a second area-wide inspection of all facilities operating outside the Cabazon Tribal Lands within the Mecca area to also assure their continued compliance with AQMD Rules and Regulations, and found no violations of air quality rules or regulations, including, but not limited to public nuisance.
- Since the beginning of July, AQMD has received just two odor complaints. AQMD inspectors continue to perform routine odor surveillance activities in the community of Mecca and conduct periodic inspections of operations occurring at WEI and WRT.