

Newberry Springs Community Alliance

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May 8, 2018

Joshua Dugas, Division Chief
Environmental Health Services
County of San Bernardino
385 North Arrowhead Avenue, 2nd Floor
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Sent via e-mail (PDF):
Joshua.Dugas@dph.sbcounty.gov

Re: Major Health Issue / RECE Original Policy 4.10 / Daggett Solar Project
(P201700679), et al.

Dear Mr. Dugas,

There is a growing environmental health risk associated with a certain land use in the county that we believe falls directly under your division of Public Health.

A number of commercial and utility-scale renewable energy solar developments have targeted sites that are within the county's jurisdiction. These are not on federally controlled lands in the county; they are in county jurisdictional lands that are in or nearby populated rural living areas.

Many of these already established or proposed solar sites are dangerously located within Sand Transport Paths.

Sand Transport Paths are areas where sand rivers are formed during windy periods. During wind events, large amounts of sand become airborne and is transported. Normally, nature does a good job in keeping the sand in place with shrubs, bacteria, compaction, et cetera, but when human activity disturbs the soil, such as blading large areas for solar panels, the natural anchoring elements of the soil are overturned.

Solar developments are blading thousands of acres of land in and nearby residential communities which is creating a severe health hazard by allowing the unanchored soil to become airborne.

The problem lies in the particulate matter crystalline silica dust (PM10) that is being allowed to go airborne and become suspended in the air for days and

travel over populated areas. PM10, as you may know, is so small that it can bypass human defenses. The crystalline silica dust, when inhaled by people, has the same effect as asbestos in the lungs. Scar tissue is formed and sometimes cancer will develop. There is no cure and the scarring in the lungs can continue even after a person's removal from the hazardous source.

Many of our county's communities are becoming hazardous areas to live because of the rapid increase of crystalline silica in the air from solar development. We believe that your division is directly responsible for controlling this land use hazard and controlling the associated litigation liability to the county.

Once informed of a public hazard under its control, the county holds the responsibility of eliminating the unnecessary hazard.

We believe that placing renewable energy development in Sand Transport Paths ignores common sense and that it must stop until the PM10 silica problem emitting from solar developments can be remedied.

The Newberry Springs Community Alliance is currently addressing this matter on behalf of many community members who are directly downwind to three proposed developments that are planning to blade approximately 5.5-square miles of desert soil. All three projects are within a Sand Transport Path. These projects are going to unleash a litigious amount of crystalline silica dust upon our community. A very similar scenario is also happening in the Lucerne Valley, the Morongo Basin, and elsewhere.

The solar projects have available sites where they can be built within the federal government's Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan's (DRECP) targeted areas. Better yet, the proper location to generate the power is at the point of use, using distribution solar (rooftop solar) which the county should be solely promoting.

Your division of Environmental Health Services needs to be actively involved in controlling the land use emission of airborne PM10 by the renewable energy industry. This may be an obligation shared with the Mojave Desert AQMD, however, the problem starts with the county granting Conditional Use Permits to build solar facilities in known hazardous areas. As such, the county may justifiably be the biggest litigation target.

Last August 8, 2017, the Supervisors voted to attach the county's Renewable Energy and Conservation Element (RECE) to the upcoming revision of the General Plan later this year. Unfortunately, Policy 4.10, an important portion of RECE was removed for review by the Planning Commission.

Policy 4.10, as it was originally presented in August 2017, will largely prevent utility-scale renewable energy development in sensitive rural communities (Rural Living zoning). On May 24, 2018, the Planning Commission will be considering the adoption of Policy 4.10.

The county's Land Use Services Department has recently developed an alternative Policy 4.10 for the Planning Commission's consideration. The alternative policy, designed to the renewable energy industry's specifications, would allow solar construction within rural communities.

Therefore, the Planning Commission meeting on May 24, 2018, will be a very important meeting regarding the future health of tens of thousands of county residents. The Planning Commission will either vote for the original Policy 4.10 and limit solar development in rural communities, vote for the alternative policy to allow solar development, or vote for neither which would still leave the solar development door ajar.

Because of the enormous health implications, your Environmental Health Services Division may want to chime in on this important Planning Commission matter with a guiding recommendation.

Cordially,

TS

Ted Stimpfel, Executive Director
Newberry Springs Community Alliance

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