

Landfill controversy prompts emotional citizens' meetings

By Mike Odom Navarre Press

The second meeting of the PACE-EH group got off to a rocky start.

One man at the back of the room was angry.

"You don't have to wake up to it," he shouted.

"We've been here smelling this for too long."

By the time he stormed out of the room 50 minutes later, more than half of the 90-minute meeting had passed.

The Protocol for Assessing Community Excellence in Environmental Health is a pilot program of the local Department of Health. Its purpose is to help local citizens seek solutions to a major environmental issue identified by the residents affected in the area.

At the first meeting on May 25, that group identified the alleged pollution and health problems caused by the Coyote Landfill off Highway 87 in Holley as the problem it wanted to address.

But the man who said he lived near the landfill and left the meeting early was not the only angry one in the group that night. Among the approximately 40 people at the June 8 meeting at the Holley-Navarre Water System offices, the loud voices and occasional shouts tested the facilitator's ability to keep order and get their objectives for the night accomplished.

"These folks aren't the enemy," local resident Howard Jones said after listening to 30 minutes of people shouting, sometimes at the health department facilitators.

"They've got their process they want to work through. It may not be the answer, but it's a start."

In the back of the room, one person could be heard coughing during the entire meeting.

At Porter's Nursery the next day, Pam Porter said she had not been able to shake the cough or respiratory problems that began in autumn of 2005 when Coyote Landfill caught fire, spewing black clouds of smoke into the air.

The smoke is mostly gone, she says, but she and her husband who own the nursery down the hill from the landfill live with odors they claim are toxic.

They also have concerns about what the landfill is doing to their well water.

After the fire last fall, they noticed that after watering their plants from their well the plants would turn a dirty red color. They could not sell the plants that way, she said.

A test of the water showed abnormally high levels of iron. The Porters had to install a \$5,000 filtration system in December to keep their business going.

In an inter-office memorandum of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection dated Jan.20, 2006, that agency summarized the "November 2005 Semi-Annual Groundwater Report Review."



Photo by Tim Dixon Coyote Landfill

“Iron was present in concentrations above groundwater monitoring standards in compliance monitoring wells MW-3 (12,000 parts per billion), MW-7 (4,000 ppb), and in MW-8 (14,000 ppb),” the memo stated.” The iron concentration in background well MW-2 was reported at 250 ppb.”

The report further stated that “the M (maximum) C (contaminant) L (level) for iron is 300 ppb.”

The memo also stated that “arsenic and benzene were reported above Florida Primary Drinking Water Standards. Additionally, sulfate, Total Dissolved Solids, iron and aluminum were reported above Florida Secondary Drinking Water Standards.”

The Coyote Landfill has been making people angry since last fall, but many of those people are glad that there now is a process to combine their voices. After the June 8 meeting, several people said they hope to use the process to get some answers to their questions and solutions to the problems they claim are caused by the landfill.

The meeting resulted in the formation of a 13-member steering committee called the Community Environmental Assessment Team.

That team met Tuesday night, June 13, to begin a year-long process to develop strategies to resolve the environmental health problems in the area they believe are caused by the landfill.

A representative from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection was scheduled to attend that meeting.

“Any time that you can get info out to citizens on issues or situations that are of concern to them is a great thing,” FDEP spokesperson Sally Coeey said. “I would say that we are very interested in being involved in the committee if that’s what the citizens want.”

Brandi Kempf, the PACE coordinator for the health department, wrote that FDEP has also expressed interest in forming a partnership with the residents of Holley-Navarre regarding the landfill concerns.

She also stated that a large meeting of the group is planned for the future when governmental agencies and landfill representatives will be invited.

“Our door is open,” said John Warren, general manager for all of the Coyote Land Co. landfills in the area. “If there’s a committee formed, we’d love to answer their questions. We would be happy to meet in a constructive way. We have nothing to hide. We are operating in accordance with state regulations.”

The landfill, officially known as Coyote Navarre Construction & Demolition Debris Disposal Facility, has been the subject of numerous warning letters citing violations of environmental laws.