

Landfill causing health concerns

BY FRANKLIN HAYES Gulf Breeze News

The Santa Rosa County Commission (SRCC) recently agreed to fund medical, air quality and groundwater testing for residents living in close proximity to the Coyote Landfill in Holley Navarre after hearing residents' testimony about pollution concerns.

Area residents are complaining of a broad range of symptoms including burning eyes, scratchy throat, burning nose and headaches, just to name a few. Many of the affected residents said their symptoms began when the construction and demolition landfill caught fire last fall. The landfill contains construction materials from demolished homes, and it is thought that hydrogen sulfide is in the air because of burning drywall. Arsenic and benzene from treated wood may be percolating into groundwater.

"Since that time there has been an ongoing problem of a chemical type stench emanating from the site. This stench has affected people throughout the area, varying from the inconvenience of not being able to enjoy being outdoors or having their windows open to being physically ill while in their homes due to the stench penetrating the interiors of their homes," said Holley Navarre resident Howard Jones.

Health Department official Kathleen DeVore-Jones presented SRCC with the results of health surveys that represented 200 people living in the vicinity of the landfill located near Five Forks Road.

"When there is just a forest fire and there's smoke, people will have breathing difficulties but they won't have all these other symptoms. The conclusion is there's something more than wood smoke in the air that's causing people to be sick," DeVore-Jones said.

Air contamination was not the only pollutant affecting residents in the area. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) reported benzene was found in groundwater 21 times above the federally allowable limit. DEP representatives said that their agency monitored groundwater emanating from the construction waste facility, but did not have the equipment, funds or authority to evaluate air contamination allegedly emitted by the facility.

"It shocks me to know that the DEP would admit that they don't have the tools to get this job done. I can't believe that that statement was made. Somebody somewhere dropped the ball," said Commissioner John Broxson.

Coyote Landfill general manager John Warren said his company agreed to contribute \$5,000 to testing efforts, adding that the source of the contamination would be difficult to determine because there are several other landfills in the area.

"We are a neighbor and we are a part of the community. We're doing a lot of things to address that situation because if we don't, we're out of business," Warren said.

County Commissioners will add \$15,000 to the landfill's \$5,000 and plan to help pay for the following:

- . Lab costs for medical screening/ health testing
- . Water well testing proximate to the facility
- . Air quality testing conducted by a qualified consultant

Commissioners also considered a moratorium on construction and demolition landfills in the county.