

## Santa Rosa proposes landfill reforms

BY FRANKLIN HAYES Gulf Breeze News

County officials held a workshop Tuesday, Jan. 16 to discuss proposed ordinances to regulate debris disposal and excavation pits. Nearly 100 residents from Navarre and Milton gathered to voice their concerns about construction and demolition material disposal pits they believe are causing health problems and destroying their quality of life. Joiner Landfill in Milton and Coyote Landfill near Navarre were the topics of many residents' tongue lashing sessions as they discussed offensive odors and rumbling dump trucks as major points of contention.

Already aware of and quite familiar with many of the grievances, officials from the county's engineering, environmental and zoning departments sought input on the proposed regulations, but were instead subjugated to a stream of complaints that lead to few suggestions from the citizenry. County Staff had a list of proposed changes, and of the approximately 15 proposed regulation changes drafted, the most significant included:

- Local permitting of all pit types
- Specifying operational criteria as conditions of annual permit renewal
- Clarifying local permitting, monitoring, and inspection procedures
- Guidance for future land uses
- Directing future pit locations away from residential areas
- Increasing public notification ranges from 150 feet to 500 feet
- Increasing setbacks from residential areas from 100 feet to 500 feet or 1,000 feet from potable water wells
- Installing fences, walls, gates, and buffers to screen visibility from nearest residential zoning, with cleared pathways to allow site inspections
- Installing on-site fire suppression systems
- Increasing weekly surface cover and a max operational lift height of 20 feet
- Installing liners with water runoff collection systems

Most residents in attendance agreed with a majority of the reforms but some, like former Five Forks Road resident Robert Neil Grant, argued that the ranges should be extended. Grant said landfills and similar pits should not be allowed within one mile of residential areas and anyone living within one mile of a new landfill should be notified. Grant claimed fumes from the Coyote Landfill area threatened his health and forced him to move from his home located within a mile of the facility.

John Warren, general manager of Coyote Landfill, also agreed with many of the reforms presented but said distances should be kept within reasonable limitations.

"I obviously understand the concerns of the citizens, but there have to be sites that are economically feasible," he said. "There is a definite cost factor. For us, it's like having to buy your groceries from a store in Fort Walton."

Some residents from the Navarre area are not waiting for the county to implement its reforms and are taking matters into their own hands. In late August of 2006, 83 people filed suit against the Coyote Landfill and persuaded county commissioners to conduct air quality sampling in the area.

"People know it's hydrogen sulfide coming from [the landfill]," said Navarre resident Bill Kolb. "Dry wall is one of the things going into the landfill. When it decomposes, it liberates hydrogen sulfide."

Warren remained skeptical of the hydrogen sulfide claims, noting that neither he, nor any of his 20 employees working directly on the site reported any illness. Although Coyote Landfill is the only area pit permitted to accept construction and demolition material, Warren said there are seven other various pits right next door that could be contributing factors.

"No one's tried to educate the public on all the sites in the area," Warren said. "We're not the ideal neighbor they want to have. But we want to be a good neighbor and address any issues they may have."

The air quality sampling will be facilitated by the county health department and should be complete in the coming months. No court date has been set for the lawsuit against the Coyote Landfill.