

Chevron seeks backup plan for oily sand

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Chevron officials only recently completed a long process to get permission to move tons of oily sand from the Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes to the Santa Maria Landfill, but they are also trying to develop an alternative plan.

The oil company has applied with San Luis Obispo County to once again amend their controversial Coastal Development Permit and Development Plan for the dunes cleanup.

Currently, the permit allows the transportation of 860,000 cubic yards of contaminated sand from the cleanup site to the Santa Maria Regional Landfill.

The newest amendment would add two Kern County facilities to the list of disposal options.

Company officials were surprised by the opposition to the project, and appeals of the plan threatened the cleanup process, said Chevron spokesman Gonzalo Garcia.

Now that the last administrative appeals have been exhausted and the project still has the green light, Garcia said, company officials don't think the backup arrangement will be used.

"It's good prudent planning," however, Garcia said. "(We) better have something just in case it goes in a direction unforeseen today."

The San Luis Obispo County Planning Commission is slated to hold a public hearing on Chevron's request Aug. 24. The meeting begins at 8:45 a.m. in the county Board of Supervisors chambers, 1055 Monterey St., Room D170.

Chevron is looking to add the Clean Harbors Buttonwillow Landfill and the McKittrick Waste Treatment Site Landfill to its list of options for dumping the sand, but the Santa Maria Regional Landfill will remain the primary disposal location, according to the San Luis Obispo County notice of public hearing.

Garcia was unsure how any change in the disposal location would affect the various mitigation agreements Chevron has made, such as the payments to the city of Guadalupe in exchange for sending heavy trucks through town.

But, he noted, the process to create a contingency plan began when the project seemed to be up in the air.

"Where we are today is not where we were a month ago," he said.

Today, the company is poised to begin the transport of the contaminated sand to the Santa Maria Regional Landfill.

The project overcame the last administrative barrier earlier this month when Santa Barbara County and the city of Santa Maria reached an agreement to allow Chevron the use of county roads to transport the sand.

Santa Maria City Manager Tim Ness said city staff knew the company was looking at contingency plans when Santa Barbara County initially indicated that it might not allow Chevron trucks to use county roads.

But that is no longer an issue and officials think the project will move forward as originally planned. The other two landfills are between 133 and 140 miles east of the cleanup site.

The Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes are the site of a cleanup effort that has lasted more than a decade. Unocal, which is now owned by Chevron, has been working on this phase of the project since 1999.

Originally, officials looked at other means of cleaning up the soil, but transferring the 1 million tons of material to Santa Maria was found to be the best alternative.

Santa Maria uses contaminated soil as part of its Non-Hazardous Impacted Soil program, which is used as a capping layer for closing the landfill. Layers of soil help the city achieve a 5-percent slope on closed sections to keep rain from accumulating.

A group of Santa Maria residents have appealed the transportation of the contaminated sand to both the San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors, the lead review agency of the project, and to the California Coastal Commission. Both appeals were decided in favor of Chevron. The residents have said they are now weighing their legal options.