

December 11, 2008

## Quarry air monitoring firm, plan, presented

Tim O'Leary

Special to the Village News

Thursday, December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2008.  
Issue 50, Volume 12.

Rainbow and Fallbrook leaders are breathing easier due to a mining company's decision to test whether its Rosemary's Mountain operations expose area residents to dust, diesel fumes or other potential airborne hazards.

"People don't realize how significant it is that they are doing this," Jim Oenning, a member of the Fallbrook Community Planning Group, said after a detailed presentation last week.

The presentation at the Rancho Monserate Country Club attracted about 25 area residents as well as representatives of Granite Construction Co., the mine developer and operator.

The session capped a lengthy process in which an oversight group made up of Granite officials and community leaders forged plans to study potential air quality hazards that could migrate from the 94-acre site north of Highway 76 and east of Interstate 15.

Oenning and Larry Pearce, a member of the Rainbow Community Planning Group, helped anchor what became known as the Dust Monitoring Working Group.

The working group will remain intact as mining continues at the site and air monitoring data is tracked and released to the community. Granite previously hired a San Diego-based mediation and arbitration firm to improve the flow of information to area residents and provide ways for them to ask questions and monitor mine operations.

"We do have much more control than any other quarry in the area," Pearce said.

After reviewing the qualifications of five firms, the working group recommended hiring Tracer Environmental Sciences & Technologies Inc., which has offices in San Marcos, Santa Maria and a suburb of Houston, TX. Granite will pay the cost – estimated at \$80,000 to \$100,000 – to conduct tests next year.

"I'm doing this because I'm concerned about the community and I want people to know what we're doing," said Gary Nolan, who heads the Rosemary's Mountain operations. "This is very unusual. It doesn't happen very much."

Pearce and Oenning said their research did not uncover another quarry in North America that is the focus of such intensive air monitoring.

The Rosemary's Mountain surface mine was in the planning process for more than two decades. It was approved by San Diego County supervisors in 1997 and its operations permit was issued in 2002.

The mine is expected to produce about one million tons of material a year when it becomes fully operational in about two years, according to a report prepared for Granite by EnviroMine Inc. of San Diego.

Plans call for Granite to mine aggregate and other sand and rock materials from a 38-acre portion of its site over a 20-year period.

The mine is being closely watched because of past and anticipated future growth in a 10-mile stretch of Highway 76 where numerous fatal accidents have occurred in recent years.

It is also being tracked by many area residents because numerous commercial projects – including a proposed landfill – are planned along the two-lane highway that is currently being widened.

Rosemary's Mountain has also drawn the attention of Temecula-area environmental activists and citizen groups who oppose Granite's plans to develop a larger mine atop a rugged hillside south of that city.

That project, which would mine a portion of a 414-acre site west of I-15 near Rainbow, has been dubbed Liberty Quarry.

The land use proposal is pending before Riverside County supervisors. But Temecula officials are simultaneously taking steps aimed at annexing much of that area, a move that would likely thwart the development of a mine there.

Because of a downturn in construction and the lagging economy, Rosemary's Mountain probably won't begin full production for three or four years, Nolan said.

Most of the materials now being excavated are being used to widen and improve a 1.3-mile stretch of Highway 76 east of I-15.

Granite and the Pala Indian tribe, which plans to expand its casino and resort operations, will together spend about \$26 million on design, construction, habitat mitigation and other costs to widen the highway to four lanes.

Nolan said much of the grading has been done for the road improvement project and work to pave the new lanes and resurface the existing lanes is expected to begin early next year.

Some of the monitoring readings to be provided by Tracer could differentiate between the airborne particles that are caused by the road construction work and the mining operations.

Testing will begin January 1 and four monitoring stations will be established near the corners of the mine site.

Other monitoring equipment will track area wind speeds and directions.

Tracer will perform its air monitoring work every sixth day in order to coincide with regional testing done by government air quality agencies.

The monitoring frequency – which will total at least 61 days next year – is expected to provide coverage during the range of mine operations that include blasting, crushing and excavating.

State law prevents mine workers from setting off excavation blasts if wind speeds exceed 15 mph and the plant must cease operations when winds exceed 20 mph, Nolan said.

The results of the first round of air monitoring will be presented to residents in another forum – which is expected to be held in April – as well as be posted on Granite's Web site, officials said.

Future air quality findings will also be shared with residents in quarterly forums and via the Internet.

Long-term air testing is also expected, but its focus could be modified when asphalt production begins at the mine or other changes are made in quarry operations, Nolan said.

“The plan is flexible to monitor whatever could be a potential risk and this will continue for the next 20 years – as long as the plant exists,” he said.