

Silicon Valley / San Jose Business Journal - April 20, 2010  
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Tuesday, April 20, 2010, 12:37pm PDT | Modified: Tuesday, April 20, 2010, 2:37pm

## Calif. clears pesticides from 17 acres in Santa Clara

Silicon Valley / San Jose Business Journal - by [Katherine Conrad](#)

After years of controversy, California has begun to rid a 17-acre site in Santa Clara of pesticide contamination so 275 houses can be built.

Known as BAREC -- for Bay Area Research Extension Center -- the site has been the subject of controversy since SummerHill Homes of Palo Alto proposed building homes across one of Santa Clara County's last flat parcels located near Westfield Valley Fair mall in 2006.

Protesters fought the project but lost a ballot measure to forbid development and then an environmental lawsuit.

Now that cleanup of the site has begun by California's Toxic Substances Control Department, those opposed to the project are accusing the state of not taking proper safety measures. Kirk Vartan, who led the campaign against development, is urging supporters to attend Santa Clara's City Council meeting Tuesday evening to protest the state's remediation efforts.

Vartan said in an e-mail, "The State rushed so quickly into this activity that they mowed directly through the highest concentration of dieldrin contamination on the site."

Vartan added that the state promised "the strictest controls, monitoring, and attention to detail" and yet failed to use a water truck to dampen the ground to prevent dust.

But Jeffrey Young, spokesman for the Department of General Services, said a water truck is not required during mowing, and especially not when the ground is wet.

"Mowing generally does not require a water trunk especially when green," he said. "A water truck is used when the soil is dry. It's wet right now, and wet soil does not generally create lots of dust."

Young also said the highest concentration of pesticides is in the middle of the property, not on the outskirts, as Vartan alleged.

Regarding the notice period, Young said the state has met the requirement to alert neighbors that 5,000 to 6,000 cubic yards of contaminated soil will be removed starting May 6 and ending May 24. Before the soil is excavated, the schedule calls for erecting 10-foot tall wind fences intertwined with cloth.

SummerHill originally agreed to pay the state, which owns the site, \$34 million so it could build 165 single-family homes. That price allowed the city of Santa Clara to pay just \$10 million for the remaining 6 acres, which will be developed as senior housing by the nonprofit Charities Housing.

SummerHill president Robert Freed indicated last summer that he wanted to renegotiate the price given the falling real estate values.

But Young said "there has been no renegotiation." The property is in escrow for the agreed-upon price, he said. If the price changes, the new deal will not be revealed until escrow closes after the clean-up is complete this summer.

The total cost to the state to clean up the property is \$780,000 -- \$540,000 to the general contractor, Environmental Business Solutions Inc. of Folsom, and \$240,000 to Environ International Corp. of Emeryville to monitor hazardous materials, according to Young.

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