

Copyright 2003 MediaNews Group, Inc. and Los Angeles Newspaper Group, Inc.

San Gabriel Valley Tribune (San Gabriel Valley, CA)

November 28, 2003 Friday

SECTION: NEWS

LENGTH: 476 words

Waste firm's expansion challenged

BYLINE: By Rodney Tanaka , Staff Writer

Neighbors are circulating a petition against the proposed expansion of Athens' materials recovery and transfer station, saying the company should comply with its existing permit before asking for more.

Athens Services, at 14048 E. Valley Blvd., near the border of Industry and Avocado Heights, wants to increase the amount of trash processed at its site from a maximum of 1,920 tons per day to 8,500 tons per day.

The public comment period for the expansion's draft environmental impact report closes Wednesday.

Raul Rodriguez, who has lived near Athens since 1991, said he hears noise at all hours and dust accumulates in his pool and on his vehicles. He has also noticed foul odors and an increased number of crows and sea gulls in the area. Athens has not done anything to help neighbors, he said.

"They never fixed anything," Rodriguez said. "Nothing ever improves." But Athens has worked with the community and has made changes because of complaints, said Duane McDonald, Athens director of environmental services.

"We have installed equipment to address those complaints," McDonald said. "We don't think we're finished either. We understand this is a continuing process."

The South Coast Air Quality Management District received 44 odor complaints regarding Athens since July, spokeswoman Tina Cherry said, but by the time the inspector got there there were no odors, the source could not be traced to Athens or the company was found to be in compliance.

The California Occupational Safety and Health Administration has inspected Athens seven times since 1999 - two initiated by complaints, three following accidents and two random inspections, Cal/OSHA spokesman Dean Fryer said.

A Sept. 13, 2002, accident investigation, following the death of an employee, resulted in five citations totaling almost \$29,000, which are under appeal, Fryer said.

Before an expansion is considered, Athens should be given a probationary period to see if it is able to stay in compliance, Rodriguez said.

"It's like building on a bad foundation,' he said. "They haven't listened to our complaints. They've been putting profits over people.'

Athens has also had fires and was evacuated due to odors, said neighbor Debbie Barragan.

"It doesn't seem as if they're operating very safely,' she said.

Athens goes to great lengths to look out for the safety of its employees, McDonald said.

"We run an operation in compliance with all the many regulatory agencies,' he said. "We run it we believe to be in a manner that's sensitive to the neighborhood and sensitive to the environment.'

A public hearing is tentatively set for Jan. 26, with a time and place to be determined, in addition to a hearing set for Dec. 10 in downtown Los Angeles.

Rodney Tanaka can be reached at [626]962-8811, Ext. 2230, or by email at rodney.tanaka@sgvn.com .