

Chevron trashes landfill plans after main proposal's approval

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In a quick about-face, Chevron officials said Wednesday they are abandoning their request to add two more landfills to their disposal options for tons of contaminated sand from the Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes.

With all the approvals now in place to begin moving about 860,000 cubic yards of sand from the San Luis Obispo County cleanup site to the Santa Maria Regional Landfill, the oil company doesn't see adding alternative routes as a "pressing issue," officials said.

The company had been in the midst of an amendment process with San Luis Obispo County that would have led to a public hearing before the county Planning Commission in August. However, Chevron spokesman Gonzalo Garcia said Wednesday the company is now asking that item be pulled off the agenda.

The oil company previously decided to look at contingency plans, which included adding two Kern County facilities as possible disposal sites for the contaminated sand.

The announcement that the hearing should be canceled came one day after company officials called the pursuit of the Kern County options "prudent planning."

Garcia noted those plans were made prior to truck route approvals in Santa Barbara County. That final go-ahead was given earlier this month when the county and the city of Santa Maria reached an agreement to allow Chevron the use of county roads to transport the sand.

"We have a lot of confidence in the agreements in place," Garcia said. "We don't need the alternative anymore."

As part of that plan, Chevron has a tentative agreement with Guadalupe to pay for work at Jack O'Connell Park and to add two full-time firefighters for five years to soften the impact of hundreds of truck trips on Highway 101 through the city's downtown.

Trucks with the contaminated sand may begin rolling as soon Aug. 9, officials said.

A group of Santa Maria residents continue to fight the project, though their appeals have been decided in Chevron's favor.

David White, one of the opponents, said the group is still weighing its options and declined to say what they would do next.

"Pulling the hearing means we have a slightly different position to consider," he said Wednesday.

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 after environmental and other studies, San Luis Obispo County officials decided that transferring the 1 million tons of material to Santa Maria was the best alternative.

The dunes sand was contaminated with diluent, a liquid resembling kerosene that oil companies use to thin oil to make it easier to move through pipelines.

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 mounded on top of the landfill help the city achieve a 5-percent slope on closed sections to keep rain from accumulating.