

## Dunes contamination cleanup begins

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**Ed Souza/Staff – A truck laden with contaminated sand drives south through Guadalupe on Highway 1 Monday afternoon.**

Ten truck loads of contaminated sand rolled out of the Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes Monday as part of a massive cleanup effort that was delayed by months of appeals and is expected to take about five years to complete.

The trucks followed the approved route from their starting point in San Luis Obispo County to the Santa Maria Regional Landfill in Santa Barbara County, officials said.

Each truck, carrying up to 18.5 tons of contaminated sand, drove south on Highway 1 through Guadalupe; east on Highway 166; south on Simas Street; west on Betteravia Road, through Santa Maria; and then north on Philbric Road to the landfill at 2065 East Main St.

Unocal, which is now owned by Chevron, has been working to clean up the Nipomo-Guadalupe Dunes site since 1990. Initially, the contaminated sand was to be cleaned on site but that solution didn't work, so officials decided to transport the sand to the officially permitted landfill in Santa Maria.

Santa Maria officials will use the contaminated sand, which according to city and Chevron officials meets the definition of a nonhazardous impacted soil, as a capping layer to close the landfill. The city expects to make millions of dollars from the fees charged for taking the sand into the landfill.

Chevron officials expect to ease into the project with about 10 trucks rolling, said Gonzalo Garcia, a company spokesman. Once the project is fully underway, about 15 trucks should be running, making multiple trips each day.

"Our whole emphasis is safety," Garcia said. "The biggest thing is to go and not put anyone at risk."

The hauling, which includes about 60 trips per day, is scheduled from 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Garcia said.

The sand that is being loaded for transport has been sitting in a stockpile on the cleanup site. The giant mound contains about a half million tons of sand.

Garcia noted that the company can now resume excavation at the cleanup site because the removal of the longstanding mound will give them more room to work.

Monday's transports ushered in a new chapter for the cleanup, which had been stalled for months when a group of Santa Maria residents began appealing the project to both San Luis Obispo County, which is the lead oversight agency, and the California Coastal Commission. Both appeals were denied.

Now the group has asked the federal Environmental Protection Agency to determine whether the contaminant falls under federal regulations, said Santa Maria resident Dave White.

"That question has not been asked, nor has it been answered," White said.

He added that the group also recently asked that the EPA issue a temporary restraining order while they wait for the determination.

The Santa Maria residents have said that not enough public input was sought in Santa Barbara County, where the sand would eventually end up, and that the contaminants in the sand are not appropriate for the landfill.

The project was further delayed because Chevron had problems getting the OK to use Santa Barbara County roads to transport the sand.

An agreement for the usage reached in July involved Unocal paying fees to Santa Maria and the city taking over maintenance of some county roads.

To compensate the city of Guadalupe for the increase in truck traffic through its downtown, the oil company has agreed to fund two full-time firefighters, a first for the tiny town, for five years and crossing guards at key locations along Highway 1, which is also the town's main street.

In addition, the company has agreed to keep the truck speed at 20 mph through downtown, though the posted speed limit is higher. Furthermore, a one-time donation of \$250,000 was made to improve the recreation fields at Jack O'Connell Park.