Lawsuit against Tracy dropped

Tracy Press, Staff reports, Wednesday, December 27, 2006

A Sacramento lobbyist has dropped his lawsuit against the city of Tracy and the city's new general plan.

Steven Hamilton of the Urban Environmental Affairs Council sued the city in August. The lawsuit claimed that the new general plan, approved by the city on a 4-1 vote in July, failed to consider the effects of growth on traffic, air quality and city services.

The agreement, signed by former Mayor Dan Bilbrey on Tuesday and signed last week by a representative of the Urban Environmental Affairs Council, dismisses the legal action and requires the city to pay only its own legal fees in the case. Hamilton must also pay his own legal expenses.

City Attorney Debra Corbett said the city's expenses total about $12,000. She said the city had filed a counter-challenge and claimed that Hamilton missed the 30-day deadline to file his case following the City Council's vote in favor of the new general plan.

Hamilton previously had described the Urban Environmental Affairs Council as a nonprofit group with no staff or income other than his own contributions.

Beijing officials try to convince people to use public transportation

By Stephen Wade, The Associated Press
In USA Today, Tuesday, Dec. 27, 2006

BEIJING - Beijing officials are trying to convince the city's 13 million residents to use public transportation, a step that should please 2008 Olympic planners troubled by the capital's snarled traffic and dirty air.

Without offering specific money figures, Liu Xiaoming, spokesman for Beijing's Transportation Commission, said Wednesday that spending on public transportation would be boosted in the 600 days remaining before the 2008 Olympics begin.

Liu also said new bus and subway passes would be introduced early in 2007.

The city's subway system is expected to grow from its present 120 miles, reaching 185 miles by 2010 and 350 miles by 2015.

Despite the optimism, Liu offered figures suggesting the city was losing ground in its battle with chronic traffic congestion which, along with nearby heavy industry, is the source of frequently choking air pollution.

- Beijing has 2.85 million vehicles, a figure expected to swell by 35% to 3.8 million in 2010.
- The number of commuters using public transportation has increased from 26.5% in 2000 to 29.6% in 2005. In the same span, the number of private cars used for commuting has grown even more quickly, from 23.2% to 29.8%.

"Our effort in alleviating congestion has been mitigated by the growth of urban construction and population," Liu said.

Liu said city officials were encouraged by the fall in car usage during last month's China-Africa summit. Using mandatory and voluntary measures, about 30% of vehicles were removed from the roads during the six days of meetings between Chinese and African leaders.

The measures may be a preview of the 2008 Olympics.

"It was a very good experience for us for the 2008 Olympic Games," Liu said. "I think the China-Africa forum has accelerated our efforts in developing and reforming our public transportation."

However, Liu said there was no plan to stem the soaring number of vehicles in the capital.

"At present, the government does not have any policy or intention to control the number of private cars," he said. "But that does not mean the number of private cars can grow without limits."

Tracy Press, Commentary, Wednesday, December 27, 2007

No health risks from Site 300 explosions

Gary Mansfield/Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory Wednesday, 27 December 2006

It is unfortunate that, in his Dec. 15 column, “A wicked wind from Site 300,” Jon Mendelson chose to frighten, rather than to inform, his readers about potential risks from explosive tests at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory’s Site 300 facility. Mendelson tries to link the tragic results of the recent polonium-210 poisoning in London with the use of depleted uranium at Site 300 with the statement: “Although polonium-210 is several orders of magnitude (powers of 10) more toxic than uranium, the illustrative effect is the same.”

This is, at best, very misleading. In fact, polonium-210 is 6 billion times more toxic than depleted uranium when you compare the mass of material inhaled that would cause the same radiation dose. To conclude that “the illustrative effect is the same” is roughly similar to saying that eating a few grains of salt will produce the same health effects as eating 13 million pounds of salt.

Uranium is in very low concentrations in the rocks and minerals all over the Earth. Consequently, this “natural” uranium (which is twice as radioactive as depleted uranium of the same physical form) is in low levels in most foods and grains and in most water supplies. Very low levels of natural uranium also are in the air — due to resuspension of dirt and dust and to human activities, such as coal-burning power plants.

On average, everyone in the United States eats or drinks about 2 micrograms of uranium and inhales about 0.007 micrograms of uranium every day. This uranium contributes significantly to the annual background radiation dose that we receive — about 300 millirem each year.

A key issue is that the health effects (if any) of a substance depend not on whether any of the substance is inhaled or ingested but on how much of the substance is taken into the body. Because it is so weakly radioactive, it is very difficult to take enough depleted uranium into your body to cause any harm.

I am not only a health physicist and radiation safety expert employed by LLNL but also a resident of Livermore who cares very much about this area. I am certified by the American Academy of Health Physics, have 30 years of experience in radiation safety and am a nationally recognized expert in determining radiation doses from inhaled or ingested radioactive material. I have recently been asked to provide estimates of the toxicity of polonium-210 to several federal agencies in response to the London poisoning.

It is important for the citizens of Tracy to have enough accurate information to allow them to make informed decisions about any potential risks from Site 300 operations. Both the LLNL Annual Environmental Reports (www.llnl.gov/saer) and the Site-Wide Environmental Impact Statement (www-envirinfo.llnl.gov/Summary_LLNL_SWEIS_Final.pdf) are readily available to the public on the lab’s main Web site.

I encourage interested readers to look at these documents, recognizing that they are legally required documents that must withstand (and have withstood) critical technical review by external state and federal agencies. It is worth noting that one of those agencies, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, concluded in 2004 that “it is evident that there has been no appreciable atmospheric transport or deposition of contaminants from on-site explosives testing” and “there is no public health hazard to residents near (Site 300).”

The implication in Mendelson’s column that depleted uranium presents a similar hazard to polonium-210 is not only incorrect but also incorrect by a factor of about a billion. The use of depleted uranium in explosives testing at Site 300 presents no risks to the public.

Gary Mansfield, a Livermore resident, is a health physicist at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory.