

LaderaHOPE files suit against County of Orange; demands answers and inclusion in process to determine environmental, safety and health risks of Power Plant

Community outreach event scheduled for Saturday in Ladera Ranch

When a 46 megawatt jet-turbine electrical generator/plant with an 18,000-gallon tank of toxic aqueous ammonia is approved to be built inside a community a few hundred feet from a pre-school and thousands of residents, people are bound to ask a lot of questions and stand up and fight. Ladera HOPE, a non-profit watchdog organization has been formed by the residents of South Orange County's Ladera Ranch and its supporters in kind, is working to determine how a privately owned and operated jet-turbine power plant in their neighborhood was approved with calculated misinformation tactics and a clear abuse of public policy standards. A suit has been filed to halt the process and force the careful examination of a suspicious chain of events and the construction of this clear hazard to the community. Ladera Ranch is an unincorporated area of Orange County and has no City Council, thus leaving it under-represented and vulnerable to well-funded corporate interests to take advantage of the community, arguably endangering the many families and their respective quality of life.

"It's not that we don't want this in our backyard," explains Ladera HOPE spokesperson Jon Forrest. "We don't want this in anyone's backyard." The organization seeks to alleviate what will be precedent-setting as one the closest plants of its kind to any homes in the country. There are clear alternatives to the proposed plan and the community organizers look to raise awareness of the clear facts in the case, have the proper environmental concerns diligently addressed, and ultimately cause the plant to be moved to a more remote area.

The County of Orange, named as the primary defendant in Ladera HOPE's legal complaint filed on January 2 with the Superior Court of California, was inadequate in covering many standard factors deemed vital when determining the plant's location. Included, but not limited to, these unreasonably overlooked factors are the nature and scope of the proposed operation of the jet-turbine generator, air quality impacts, land use compatibility, noise and zoning and traffic impacts, security risks, storage and use of large amounts of toxic materials, fire safety, and the nature and location of alternative sites. Just 3 months prior to the intended groundbreaking day, in October 2007, a fire swept through the same hills within a quarter mile of the site, a risk that any reasonable mind couldn't possibly overlook when considering the proximity to an 18,000 gallon tank of toxic aqueous ammonia. Moreover, the site will not typically be physically manned by a human, thus leaving no ability to address security concerns in a timely manner.

"It is unconscionable that the people who are trying to sneak this past us would not at the very least do the proper research to assure that our families and health are not in danger," proclaims Elizabeth Hall, spokesperson for Ladera HOPE. "Of course I don't want this risk a couple blocks away from where I am raising my kids, but more than that, I don't

want this to be near anyone's kids. There are such clear alternatives, and obviously these companies have options. It just doesn't make sense that the profit potential should outweigh safety."

By law, the County of Orange Planning and Development Services Department, also named explicitly in the complaint, was required at the very least to notify all residents within 380 feet of the plant site. Even this requirement went unmet, as the notice that went out was misleading and inadequate. "The arrow on the project map showing the project's location points to an area somewhere south of the El Toro "Y" in the Irvine Spectrum/Aliso Viejo area," said Hall. Government officials admit this required public outreach failed, and some are currently endeavoring to remedy this, by simply requiring an appropriate level of environmental review by noted outside experts in each of the areas in question.

Another glaring concern, and clearly expected intent of the project's chief financier, Wellhead Power, is the proclaimed operation of the plant. Publicly, both county and corporate parties involved, are stating the plant will be used to subsidize power for numerous counties for up to 200 hours per year, while simultaneously filing for 2,460 hours in the official documents. It doesn't take a creative stretch of the imagination, or much time to discover these companies' precedents set at other sites, to see that the intent to run the plant to reach a level of profit is clearly in the works. The plant, a glaring eyesore and blight on the relatively new family-gearred community, will include a looming 50-foot stack visible throughout the community. In addition to Ladera, many local communities are downwind of the stack. Emissions of more than 20 toxic contaminants, many of which are known carcinogens, will certainly put these communities at risk of the potential health hazards, as well as an unchecked propensity for leakage of the massive amounts of aqueous ammonia onsite.

Organized by the newly established non-profit community organization, the residents and their supporters demand a concise and reasonable set of circumstances, set forth in their official position statement.

Ladera HOPE is calling for a process which will allow fully informed decisions about this issue to be made by the Ladera Ranch community and permitting authorities. The appropriate review process would include participation and input from technical experts and professionals, and the community, some of whom will be living and raising families as close as 300 feet to the jet turbine plant.

This position statement, and many other relevant pieces of information are available online at www.LaderaHOPE.org.

On Saturday January 12 at 9am, there will be a community outreach program where an army of volunteers will be apportioned out into Ladera neighborhoods with flyers, yard signs, and banners. The mission is to make sure that as many of the residents from the 8000 homes in Ladera Ranch are properly informed about the building of the 46

megawatt jet turbine electrical plant and the goals of Ladera HOPE, as outlined. A group of volunteers will also talk to local store owners and ask to display placards in store windows.

Event organizers and all interested participants will meet at the Ladera Ranch Town Green at 9am on Saturday. Those interested in attending this event and experiencing the momentum and urgency of the Ladera HOPE project are invited to contact to the organizations' representatives.

“We must act now,” urged Hall. “There is simply too much at stake for Ladera Ranch and our neighboring communities.”

For any questions or information regarding this press release or if you would like to speak with a Ladera HOPE spokesperson, please contact:

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