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Arguments against quarry cracking?

By: MARK MUSH - The Californian

Earlier this year, I wrote a column in which I criticized assembly candidate Kevin Jeffries and his lack of action against the proposed Liberty Quarry.

One of my good friends called me afterward and suggested that I visit the Granite site in Indio. His argument was that I shouldn't be criticizing something I hadn't seen.

On Tuesday of this week I invited Dan Branstine, who was a very strong antiquarry advocate during his Assembly run in June, to visit the Indio plant with me. One of Branstine's notable campaign mailers was a postcard with a large truck practically jumping off the page with the warning, "Do you want this headed your way?"

We arrived at the Indio site shortly after 2 p.m. and Gary Johnson, aggregate resource development manager for the plant, was very eager to get us out on a tour of the site before it shut down. We both got the sense that Johnson had nothing to hide and, in fact, he took us out to their main crusher unit ---- the noisiest part of the quarry.

Was it noisy? Yes, but we were within 100 feet of the crusher and the noise was less than my lawn mower. Would a quarry's regular operations be heard in nearby Temecula? If Granite's plans that include enclosed modern equipment are correct, I doubt that anybody would ever hear regular noise coming from the site --- especially with Interstate 15 so nearby.

Another noticeable aspect of the Indio facility is the lack of dust in the air. Granite is very careful to locate misters at points where dust could develop. I saw nothing during my visit that would indicate a dust problem.

Johnson told me, "If dust is coming out of this facility, we should be shut down."

Maybe if the granite quarry is approved, the approval process can take note of Johnson's claim about dust.

Branstine made an excellent point about the lack of load-covering tarps on trucks and that this should be mandatory in the future. Granite's response was that this has been a cost issue and that they have always been careful to not overfill trucks.

We both asked questions regarding the issue of dynamiting, since we both heard varying reports of how often this would take place. According to Johnson, there would be five scheduled explosions per week between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. How these explosions compare to what we already hear from Camp Pendleton on a regular basis is anybody's guess.

So what were our conclusions on this trip? Branstine still remains an opponent of the quarry and said of his visit, "It reinforced my belief that such mining operations are best located in remote locations ---- like the location outside of Indio."

I walked away impressed by the operations and the efforts to mitigate dust and waste, which leads to pollution. I have to admit it, the site is very clean. The final answer however, and the final say on the purported dangers of silica dust, will be decided in the environmental impact report.

If this report indicates any potential dangers, I believe the quarry is dead. If it doesn't, then that first rumbling sound you hear won't be gravel trucks, it will be lawyers falling over each other to file lawsuits.

-- Mark Mush is a regular columnist for The Californian. He can be reached at markwmush@hotmail.com.