



Proposed Landfill Subject of Heated Dispute; Historic African-American Community Dumped on Again By Local and State Officials.

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Maricopa County's historic community of Mobile, population of around 100, is being dumped on yet again. Currently, home to three major landfills, it was recently approved to receive a fourth by the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors. The only thing left standing in the way of yet another dump is the requirement that the facility get a municipal solid waste permit from the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ).

Community leaders who are protesting what appears to have been a technically and ethically deficient zoning process have formed the Mobile Community Council for Progress Inc. and have obtained legal representation. The fourth landfill, proposed to be the second largest of the four at 690 acres, would be situated near the three existing facilities -- the Butterfield Station (960 acres), the Sierra Estrella Landfill (315 acres) and The Rainbow Valley Landfill (238 acres) -- all located within the tiny vicinity of Mobile.

Owned by Southpoint Environmental Services Inc., the fourth landfill cannot move forward on construction without ADEQ approval. ADEQ received a solid waste facility application for the Southpoint facility on June 3, 2003. On June 25, ADEQ determined that the application was incomplete and was returned for revisions and completion. Nonetheless, officials at the Solid Waste Plan Review Unit hastily agreed to approve the permit "if and when the application is completed," according to plaintiff's attorney Howard Shanker.

Shanker said, "The state has a track record of not considering the civil rights or environmental justice impacts of its decisions, even when such consideration is required by federal law. Existing law mandates that ADEQ, as well as other state and local entities receiving federal funding, ensure that no group of people -- including a racial, ethnic or socioeconomic group -- should bear a disproportionate share of negative environmental consequences. If ADEQ approves this fourth landfill, it will mean that Mobile will be the 'home' to more than 44 percent of Maricopa County's entire landfill capacity, even though the residents of this predominantly African-American community account for only .003 percent of the county's population."

ADEQ Director Stephen A. Owens and Gov. Janet Napolitano have been notified of the situation. Shanker contends that if the Mobile Community Council's request for help from the state and local agencies that are charged with protecting the rights of their populations continue to be ignored, they are prepared to move forward with appropriate legal action. "Notwithstanding all the protections these citizens are entitled to, it's not clear why ADEQ insists on being an accomplice to this type of discrimination. I think when all is said and done, they had hoped that no one would notice."

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