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Bass Lake Committee holds breath

By Ryan Rose

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As the dust settles over asbestos concerns at Oak Ridge High, some continue to hold their breath.

Of those still concerned: the Bass Lake Action Committee, a non-profit group promoting responsible development at the proposed Bass Lake park site.

The group raised concerns last week about naturally occurring asbestos at the park site to the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency, the organization that prompted massive soil cleanup at the high school.

BLAC's major concern: dust from construction of the park could prove a danger to the community.

Park supporters believe the committee is using the asbestos issue as a means to avoid building the park.

Eight months ago, the committee raised concerns over the park's lighting, security and size.

And they faced strong opposition from sports groups, who say the park is necessary to avoid cancellation of programs for the recreation leagues.

El Dorado County's Board of Supervisors and the El Dorado Hills Community Services District favor building the park.

The committee says they are not opposed to the park. They originally raised concerns about asbestos contamination last August.

Drawing on reports from the State Department of Conservation, committee members pointed to a ring of land surrounding Bass Lake that is suspected to be spoiled by naturally occurring asbestos.

According to the report, which was issued in 2002, Bass Lake sits in an area labeled as "more likely to contain asbestos."

Other areas listed in the report, such as Oak Ridge, have already tested positive for naturally occurring asbestos. The Department of Conservation issued these labels after it found the areas resided above a foundation of serpentine rock, the mineral found in connection with naturally occurring asbestos.

Yet, the committee's concerns were initially seen as an interference tactic to the park's construction. Then came the announcement from the U.S. EPA proclaiming soil at Oak Ridge High School as "hazardous."

As a result, the county delayed release of the draft Environmental Impact Report on the Bass Lake Park until August.

The committee says more tests and soil studies are needed before construction can begin.

"We are on record as urging the county to use more sophisticated testing methods," said BLAC Vice President John E. Thomson.

Most asbestos tests conducted in this area used California ARB Test Method 435. BLAC argues that tests conducted by the U.S. EPA are far more sensitive.

In the original asbestos survey at the proposed park site in 2002, the Youngdahl Consulting Group used Test Method 435, which found asbestos in one of seven test sites around Bass Lake.

Test Method 435 was one of the many tests conducted on the Oak Ridge campus that missed fibers found by the EPA's analysis last November.

In an effort to insure extensive testing occurs, BLAC has approached not only the EPA, but also the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease.

"We are concerned that not enough testing has been done at the proposed park site to determine if it is safe to use as a park," said Thomson, adding BLAC's primary concern is the safety of the community.