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Asbestos worries park neighbors

El Dorado Hills residents say hazardous rock runs through the proposed site.

By Sekhar Padmanabhan -- Bee Staff Writer - (*Published September 11, 2003*)

A group of El Dorado County homeowners is raising concern about the danger asbestos might pose in the construction and use of the proposed Bass Lake Regional Park.

The Bass Lake Action Committee cites a study from the California Division of Mines and Geology that looks at where asbestos naturally occurs. According to the committee's David Glazier, the report showed "large concentrations" of asbestos rock running through the proposed park site in El Dorado Hills.

In an interview Tuesday, Glazier said the county has skirted the issue. "The county says it has done some studies (of its own) and that it doesn't think it's a problem. What constitutes a problem? Is the asbestos harmful to people? We never really got a clear answer."

The issue of asbestos -- a long-standing one on the county's west slope -- received publicity again this summer at Oak Ridge High School in El Dorado Hills.

Extensive testing, cleaning and retesting were required at Oak Ridge as a precaution against asbestos contamination. Officials also blacktopped the running track and fenced off a baseball infield after tests in July showed elevated levels of a particularly hazardous form of asbestos in dust kicked up during sampling.

The committee has sent letters to the county to make sure its concerns are considered in preparation of the draft environmental impact report, which is expected to be ready early next year. Such reports usually list ways an agency proposes to mitigate impacts a project might have on biology, geology and traffic, for example.

Responding for the county, a representative of the Sacramento consulting firm Environmental Stewardship and Planning maintained the issue of asbestos has not been ignored.

"We don't see this as a debate, so there is no rebuttal needed," said Steve Peterson, a principal with the firm.

Peterson said the firm is preparing an environmental site assessment, which looks at the potential for hazardous materials, including asbestos, at a site.

"We will meet with the responsible folks related to project components, including health, environmental management and planning," he said.

Within the next six weeks, he said, his firm also will meet with various county departments to review comments received on the project.

But he added, "The county has been aware of asbestos there since the acquiring of the property. It's no

big secret."

Glazier maintains that the public has not had access to an asbestos report on the park site, done by Youngdahl & Associates. And he still wonders how construction -- should the project go forward -- will affect the surrounding neighborhoods off Bass Lake Road when particulate matter is spread into the air.

"We've asked what is going to happen to the workers when the grading starts," Glazier said. "And then what are the protections from airborne particulates when they have to dig up a sprinkler line?"

Peterson said copies of the report are available to the public.

The Bass Lake Action Committee does not oppose the park but says it should be scaled down.

About the Writer

The Bee's Sekhar Padmanabhan can be reached at (916) 608-7452 or spadmanabhan@sacbee.com.

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