

Study monitors Felton quarry dust

By Terri Morgan
Special to the Mercury News

Air quality officials are monitoring dust in the San Lorenzo Valley after residents complained that emissions from a Felton sand quarry are contributing to a variety of chronic health problems.

The Monterey Bay United Air Quality Control District stepped in after numerous complaints about the Quail Hollow Quarry, between Felton and Zayante. Residents said the quarry's dust has led to an unusually high number of respiratory ailments, including asthma, chronic nosebleeds, pneumonia and bronchitis.

Health risks involved, residents say

Quail Hollow officials are "bragging that the sand has an 85 percent silica content," resident Merydith Fox said, noting that breathing silica is a known health hazard.

"It's like having little shards of glass in your lungs," Fox said.

Ed Kendig, chief of the enforcement division for the air quality control board, said an investigation is under way to de-

termine whether dust near the quarry could be detrimental to health.

He said it could take as long as a year to complete the study, which will include a comparison of dust levels surrounding three other Felton quarries: Lone Star, Felton and Kaiser.

"Practically all the complaints" received were directed at the Quail Hollow Quarry, Kendig said.

Fox said she has newspaper clippings to show that residents have been complaining since 1977 about dust generated by Quail Hollow. The complaints resurfaced several years ago when the quarry sought, unsuccessfully, to expand its mining operation, and were renewed after high winds sent clouds of dust into the air one week-end late last month.

The following Monday, the board videotaped dust rising from the quarry.

The Quail Hollow Quarry is owned by the Granite Rock Co. and has been operated by Santa Cruz Aggregates under a lease

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Dust from quarry may add to health woes, residents say

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agreement since the early 1970s.

The owner of Santa Cruz Aggregates, Tom Nicholson, declined to comment on either the air quality investigation or the residents' complaints.

Fox said her son has undergone four sinus surgeries and developed asthma during the six years her family has lived near the quarry. After she mentioned his condition to neighbors at a public hearing on the proposed quarry expansion, about 40 residents contacted her saying they also had chronic respiratory problems.

"People started coming out of the woodwork saying, 'I've got asthma here, but not when I travel,'" Fox said. "Others called to say they have nosebleeds three or four times a month for no apparent reason, or have come down with pneumonia or bronchitis.

"One family with chronic asthma moved after their physician told them there is a lot of asthma in our area. They're fine now, liv-

ing in a snowy area, but their (Felton) house has been standing empty for a year and a half."

Kendig said sand quarries are not the sole source of dust in the valley.

"The Zayante Valley is a large sand box built out of consolidated sand dunes," Kendig said. "Any open area with loose sand is amenable to wind erosion."