

Pollution board gets tough on harbor stench

Harbor - Jew Bad smells could bring fines

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The "rotten-egg" stench at Santa Cruz harbor must cease, the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District declared Wednesday.

SANTA CRUZ
Santa Cruz Port District administrators say they will comply with the order, which the air district board imposed after hearing dozens of complaints from harbor neighbors. Failure to comply could result in fines or revocation of the district's permit to dredge the harbor mouth.

The air board also ruled the district must put up signs alerting people to the

source of the smell — rotten seaweed contained in harbor dredge spoils. These produce smelly hydrogen sulfide gas, which is dangerous at high levels. The signs will include phone numbers for the air board and harbor district for those who want to complain.

The district also must monitor hydrogen sulfide emissions with a \$15,000 piece of equipment the administration will rent at first, but may eventually buy. The district was ordered to stop dumping dredge spoils on the nearby beach except in emergencies.

Brian Foss, port director, said the district will do its part to keep emissions to an absolute minimum but added, "it can't be zero parts per billion. That's probably impossible."

Patricia Matejcek, one of the critics of harbor dredging, said the decision is a dramatic step for people worried about the emissions.

"The public deserves to know (about potentially harmful emissions)," she said. "This is a public beach we are talking about. Monitoring and the signage ... and the acknowledgment that dredge materials emit hydrogen sulfide will be a great step forward in protecting the public."

The district already had agreed to use its 400-foot dredge-spoils outfall pipe whenever possible. But county Supervisor Ellen Pirie, who leads the pollution board, said the air board amendments to the port district's use permit will make the process much more formal.

The air board action comes on the heels of numerous complaints about the harbor smell. Pirie said the board received dozens of complaints, mostly from neighbors.

While neighbor Richard Rivoir has pointed to the emissions as a possible source of his health woes, most complaints fall into the "public nuisance" category, with residents and visitors com-

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plaining of bad smells that cause watery eyes and queasiness.

At a previous pollution board meeting, a harbor district consultant argued people can smell the gas at very low, non-harmful concentrations. But neighbors have questioned that assertion, arguing the emissions can harm people even at low levels.

Lance Ericksen, manager of the air board's engineering division, said the district has demanded that the harbor district keep hydrogen sulfide levels "near the threshold of being able to smell it at all." He said this is the first time the air board has ever taken this kind of action to stop hydrogen sulfide emissions. Ericksen said fines "can be in the thousands" when agencies don't comply with pollution board orders.

Pirie said the resolution appears to satisfy all parties, and added that the port district has been very cooperative.