

# Chemical storage law 'garbage,' says Farm Bureau spokeswoman

SANTA CRUZ — Is it better to have no ordinance regulating the storage of hazardous materials underground, than to have one that's been rushed through without public comment?

That question was raised Tuesday morning at the ~~Board of Supervisors~~ meeting by an angry Sherry Mehl, vice president of the Santa Cruz Farm Bureau.

After a rather heated debate between Mehl and Third District Supervisor Gary Patton — an avowed environmentalist — the board voted to consider final approval of the ordinance Dec. 20.

The only supervisor voting against was E. Wayne Moore, whose fourth district encompasses Watsonville and would be greatly affected by the planned law.

Moore found himself defending the Farm Bureau and Mehl against Patton.

The debate began when Mehl told the Board the Farm Bureau would rather have no law than one that's been rushed through without public comment.

She said there had been "nothing but garbage" put into the law, and that the county has "thrown everything but the kitchen sink in here" to be regulated.

The Farm Bureau, she said, felt the state law was adequate in covering the handling and storage of underground materials that are considered dangerous. Many of these materials are farm-related.

Mehl's comments raised the ire of Patton, who responded angrily that she was "in error."

He noted that unless the county gets a law on the books by Jan. 1, it will be forever prohibited from enacting such an ordinance.

This is because the state has set a deadline of Jan. 1, by which time cities and counties have to act.

Other counties across the state are doing what Santa Cruz is doing, said Patton.

He closed by charging Mehl's statements were "deliberately deceptive."

Moore jumped in the fray by saying he was "appalled" at the "attack on the Farm Bureau."

Noting that agriculture is the prime industry in the county, Moore said he wanted to disassociate himself from Patton's "hogwash."

In the final analysis, the board voted to revise its proposed ordinance in minor ways and reconsider it Dec. 20 — in time to meet the state deadline.