

Grand Jury Blasts Dumps, Planners

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The Santa Cruz County Grand Jury released its annual report this week, leveling the usual criticism at local county and city government operations. This year the jury's harshest words were aimed at the management of the county's Buena Vista and Ben Lomond dump sites, but there were also critical reports on disorganization in the county planning department, excessive power granted the county administrative officer, and the failure of several cities to let citizens know how to file claims against them.

The jury investigation found that poor performance by upper and middle management at both dumps

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has created safety and health hazards for workers and the public. The report says dump employees are poorly trained and have to work with faulty equipment. In addition, it says they are required to handle infectious and hazardous waste without proper cleanup equipment. Despite repeated state demands, neither facility has provided adequate shower facilities for use after handling dangerous materials.

In addition, the investigation found that neither site is adequately dealing with leachate (runoff) material. The report says that the pumps for moving the leachate are often not working, and that the material is not

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being properly disposed of. These problems, according to the report, increase the danger of environmental contamination.

The report recommends that two members of the county management staff be replaced, including the Buena Vista dump superintendent, and that the public works director take a more active role in managing the facilities. They say that training and equipment maintenance procedures should be overhauled and monitoring systems improved.

The grand jury also took aim at the county planning department, saying that the growing planning bureaucracy has "lost sight of the fact that it is an agency to serve the public." That department has been the target of past grand juries, and of the board of supervisors, which recently ousted planning director Kris Schenk. The jury report calls for increased streamlining of the department and continued monitoring by the county. •