

HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

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# Waste routes rile Watsonville mayor

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WATSONVILLE — Mayor Betty Murphy is fighting the county transportation staff's recommendation to use south-county highways for moving hazardous waste.

Noting that most of the county's hazardous wastes originate in Scotts Valley's high-tech industries, Murphy said Wednesday she can't understand why the transportation staff would recommend Highway 152 and Highway 129 as preferred routes for transporting the stuff.

The recommendation, part of the draft Santa Cruz County Hazardous Waste Management Plan, would send trucks from all points in the county, laden with hazardous materials, into the heavily driven Highway 1 corridor and through Watsonville's high-density residential and business district, she said.

The dicey question of where to locate

hazardous-waste transfer sites, and on which routes to move the toxic materials, has surfaced in the debate surrounding the draft plan. Virtually no city or county wants the waste, which is why the state passed a law requiring each county to devise a plan to handle its toxic wastes.

The county transportation staff has recommended banning transportation of toxic waste over Highway 17 north of Scotts Valley, and Highway 1 north of Davenport, leaving the Watsonville highways as the only routes left for taking the materials out of Santa Cruz County.

"The county Planning Department recommendations are ill founded and contribute to poor hazardous waste-material management priorities," Murphy wrote in a letter to Supervisor Joe Cucchiara, chairman of the Board of Supervisors and a member of the Hazardous Materials Commission.

According to Murphy, "most hazardous

waste is treated in Santa Clara Valley," yet the transportation staff's recommendation would close off the closest access route by eliminating Highway 17.

"The county gives a favorable recommendation to Highways 129 and 152. Both highways lead through the middle of Watsonville, where high-density housing and the business district reside," Murphy said.

"Highway 129 has four times the average accident rate experienced in the state. Further, both highways rate with the heaviest-used streets and roads in the county," she said.

"Monterey County has designated Highway 156 as the hazardous-waste route to Highway 101, so the Highway 17 and Highway 1 designated routes will allow for transportation both north and south bound."

Murphy noted the only roads in the county on which explosives may be moved are Highways 1 and 17, according to state law.

She urged the transportation staff to change its hazardous-waste designations to those two routes.

This isn't the first issue regarding hazardous waste that has irked Watsonville officials. As the plan developed into its current draft form, Murphy and Watsonville Fire Chief Gary Smith fought various proposals to use south county as the transfer station and repository for the rest of the county's hazardous waste.

One of the original proposals was to make Scotts Valley a repository for heavy metals, Murphy said, while designating Watsonville as the agricultural waste site. Fire Chief Smith agreed to that.

But the plan was changed to suggest Watsonville become the transfer station for both kinds of hazardous waste, which Murphy objected to.

The draft plan now calls for no transfer stations in the county.