

Hazardous materials:

County residents given access to information on types of chemicals stored near their homes

By DENISE SIEBENTHAL
Sentinel Staff Writer

SANTA CRUZ — County residents will be able to find out information on hazardous materials stored near their homes under an ordinance tentatively approved Tuesday by county supervisors.

The ordinance requires business and industries in the unincorporated areas to disclose the type, location

and amount of hazardous materials used. It also will give valuable information in case of an emergency involving hazardous chemicals.

Supervisors unanimously approved the ordinance in concept and set it for a final vote in two weeks. They also tentatively approved a related ordinance which sets up a hazardous materials advisory commission.

The ordinance gives all residents access to information on hazardous

materials, but provides some protection to materials considered to be trade secrets.

Before the unanimous vote, Supervisors E. Wayne Moore Jr. and Dan Forbus attempted unsuccessfully to give the county health officer control over who would get this information. They feared unlimited access could allow those with criminal intent to get this information.

Supervisors' Chairman Joe Cucchiara and Supervisors Robley Levy and Gary Patton rejected the suggestion to give the health officer the right to refuse this information, saying it would obstruct the public's right to know.

The Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau originally suggested the changes that would have removed references to the public's access to this information from the ordinance. It suggested wording that would only recognize the

citizens' right to know that the "proper agencies" had the hazardous materials information.

Patton said it would be "the essence of totalitarianism" to allow a bureaucrat to deny a citizen this information by saying the government has the situation under control.

Forbus replied it never was his or Moore's intent to allow the health officer to deny access to this information simply by saying the county has

everything under control.

It was their intent to balance citizens' right to know against citizens' right to be protected from criminals who want to steal valuable materials for resale or use in illicit activities, Forbus said.

In an attempt to keep criminals away from hazardous materials, the board agreed those affected by the

SEE BACK PAGE

Hazardous chemicals

FROM PAGE 1

ordinance won't have to reveal the precise location of the materials.

"The discussion this morning has been absent of why people would want this information . . .," Cucchiara said.

"They want this information so they can decide for themselves whether they want to submit their bodies, their relatives, their families, their friends to substances that may some day affect their health and how long they can live."

As the board voted, Moore pledged to attempt to change the ordinance to keep potential criminals from gaining access to this information. He got the board to agree to review the effectiveness of the ordinance annually.

The Scotts Valley City Council re-

cently approved an more far-reaching hazardous materials ordinance that not only gives the public access to information, but regulates the use of toxic materials. The city of Santa Cruz is drawing up a hazardous materials ordinance.

The county ordinance wouldn't directly affect farmers since they are already restricted in this area by state law. However, it would have far-reaching affects on more businesses than the board is aware of, Farm Bureau representative Sherry Mehl told supervisors.

The ordinance exempts materials that aren't toxic to humans. This exemption was included, Health Officer George Wolfe said, so farmers using non-toxic pesticides wouldn't come under the ordinance.