

Tempers taking off over helicopter pad

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ZAYANTE — Neighbors were somewhat bothered when a data storage company hidden away in the mountains began cutting trees and removing brush on a steep hill recently.

They got even more upset when a worker at the site told them the company was building a landing pad for helicopters.

But when a huge Ranger helicopter appeared among their homes Friday and landed at the site, formerly known as the "Atomic Vault," neighbors went nuclear.

"Our phone lines lit up like a Christmas tree," said San Lorenzo Valley Supervisor Fred Keeley, who went nuclear along with the neighbors, accusing the owners of breaking faith and lying to the county.

"I'm very unhappy about this. I

don't know what they think they're doing," said Keeley. "They went from being an inconspicuous member of the community to what I consider a very, very poor neighbor."

Keeley called on the District Attorney's newly formed environmental strike force to help quash what he said was illegal activity by Filesafe Inc., a San Francisco-based data storage company that has owned the property since 1989.

The property is an old railroad tunnel, now climate-controlled, which has been used for data storage since 1954.

Late Friday afternoon, Judge Sam Stevens issued a temporary restraining order halting any helicopter-related activity at the facility.

Keeley said the company had reassured the county earlier this week that it was not planning to put in a heliport, claiming it was

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trimming the trees to improve ventilation in the storage vaults by lowering the humidity of the surrounding air.

The company also repaved its parking lots, and it was there that the helicopter landed Friday.

The flight was part of "disaster preparedness," said Mehrdad Saberi, manager of electronic data storage for Filesafe, and the company does not intend to airlift data in and out on a daily basis.

"This was a test run and we're done," he said. "We landed on our property. We didn't break any

laws."

The pad would be available to community agencies in the event of medical or other emergencies, he said.

Saberi said there has been "a great deal of overreaction" and promised that the company will co-operate "100 percent" with the community.

Keeley was unimpressed with Saberi's comments, and said he'd have "serious problems" approving any heliport proposals, because of the "outrageous" way the firm has operated.

"These are people who lied to us before and I don't believe anything they say," he said. "...In one week, they've positioned themselves to be the ogre of Zayante."

A judge will decide Jan. 30 whether the restraining order should be permanent.

The company has also invited residents to a meeting at 7 p.m. Jan. 22 at the Zayante Fire House, 7700 E. Zayante Road, Felton, to discuss the matter.

When the site opened in 1954 — during the height of the Cold War — it was billed as a way to safeguard important corporate data against the possibility of a nuclear war.

It was purchased two years ago by Filesafe, Inc., which owns other, more conventional, storage facilities in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Today, the 100,000-cubic-foot facility stores electronic data for companies that range from defense

contractors and Fortune 500 companies to the Disney Corporation.

Nuclear war may be less of a worry to these corporate clients than the problem of how to get their data if heavy rains, earthquake or other natural disasters blocked the narrow mountain roads leading to the vault.

Keeley noted "disturbing similarities" to the Arrowhead Drinking Water situation, where an international corporation quietly — and without permits — improved the facilities at a remote San Lorenzo Valley spring water operation, installing water tanks that were just slightly smaller than the size that required a permit.

After neighbors complained, the county shut down the operation and imposed a \$25,000 fine.

"I don't think that kind of corporate lawbreaking can be tolerated," Keeley said.