

Wednesday, March 30, 2005

Senator campaigns to get public to say no to sludge in Kern

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Florez launches ad, blog urging public to speak up at Tuesday board meeting

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State Sen. Dean Florez is turning to technology old and new to get the public behind a sludge-importation ban.

Florez, D-Shafter, started airing radio ads this week encouraging people to show up at the Tuesday Kern County Board of Supervisors meeting where the panel will be asked to support or rebuke Florez's proposed sludge law.

Florez also is launching a blog, www.stopdumpingonkern.blogspot.com, to capture community sentiment on the topic.

"The Board of Supervisors can be moved by public opinion," Florez said. "Momentum in politics is everything."

The current ad features a man and a woman -- Florez staffers -- talking about sludge's hazards and how awful it is to be Los Angeles' dumping ground.

Florez then asks, "Can you believe our county doesn't properly test all of it for health hazards?" He says he's "tired of it."

Kern County Supervisor Ray Watson called the ads "a political deal." Florez would do more good, he said, by making a few calls.

"If he wanted to help solve the problem, he could pick up the phone and talk to a couple supervisors, county counsel, the (county) Resource Management Agency and say, 'How can I help you?'"

Sewage sludge is a mix of treated human and industrial waste spread as fertilizer for nonedible crops. Kern County only allows a highly treated form of the material.

Florez would like to ban the transportation of biosolids over county lines to stop the nearly half-million tons of sludge trucked into Kern from Southern California annually. He's worried about environmental contamination, especially of groundwater.

Watson said an importation ban would violate the commerce clause of the Constitution. He said he'd like to see statewide regulation of sludge that "is defensible" in court but as for Florez's bill, he's just seen a "framework."

He said sludge is tested before it gets to Kern and afterward, officials monitor wells for signs of water contamination and crops to make sure the sites aren't "overloaded."

Florez plans to spend about \$15,000 in his own campaign funds on the current and future ads. The current ones will run until Monday on several radio stations. Future ads will feature people talking about what it's like living near sludge-application sites and scientists detailing the health risks, he said.

Florez said the supervisors meeting is a pivotal day for his bill. If the board doesn't back him, he said, he'll tell state lawmakers he's having to act.

But if the supervisors agree a ban is needed and pursue a county ordinance, Florez said, his bill won't be needed.

Several local cities have already voted to support Florez's bill.

Audio: <http://www.bakersfield.com/static/audio/florezsludge.mp3>

<http://www.bakersfield.com/local/story/5399254p-5412568c.html>

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Tuesday, March 29, 2005

Kern County cities take action against human waste trucking

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BAKERSFIELD, Calif. Kern County cities are taking action to stop a practice that's irritated local residents for a long time -- the trucking of treated human waste from Southern California into local farmland.

The county already adopted a partial ban on the practice.

But now cities like Taft, Delano, Tehachapi, Wasco, Shafter and Arvin are rushing to support a bill proposed by state Senator Dean Florez which would stop the shipment of sludge across county lines.

Sanitation districts in Los Angeles are suing, arguing the ban is discriminatory, since Kern County cities themselves apply their sludge to their land.

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