



City of Arts & Innovation

News Release

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Contact:

Phil Pitchford

Communications Officer

951-826-5975

ppitchford@riversideca.gov

State Agency Agrees to Provide Health Assessment Requested by City of Riverside

California Department of Public Health will determine potential health impacts near Ag Park site

RIVERSIDE, Calif. – Responding to a written request from the City of Riverside made in March, the state Department of Health and Human Services has agreed to conduct an assessment of potential health impacts of the Ag Park project on the surrounding neighborhood.

“This decision is a step forward in the effort to determine exactly what happened at the Ag Park and whether surrounding neighbors may have been affected by the historic activities there,” said City Manager John A. Russo, who requested the assessment. “I’m pleased the state has agreed to undertake this important health assessment.”

The California Department of Public Health will work with the state Department of Toxic Substances Control to determine if, and to what extent, harmful polychlorinated byphenyls (PCBs) may have migrated from the 62-acre Ag Park site into the surrounding neighborhood and what impact that may have had on the health of people living there.

Residents have complained that PCBs released on the site from a sewage spill in 2003 have caused cancer and other illnesses among people living near the site. A developer who plans to build 113 houses on the site after earlier receiving an environmental clearance from the state is removing contaminated soil identified in a subsequent re-examination of the property.

In March, Russo asked the state Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) to conduct a public health assessment. In an Oct. 10 letter, Ileana Arias, Director of the Department of Health and Human Service’s Division of Community Health Investigations, wrote that the state Department of Public Health will work on the project with others agencies and groups, including ATSDR, the state Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC), and a working group of community residents.

The Department of Public Health will work with the DTSC to develop a plan to assess the extent to which PCB contamination may exist off the Ag Park site. That research will form the basis of an assessment by the Department of Public Health of any public health threat, Arias wrote.

The Department of Public Health will create a Health Consultation report explaining what health impacts could be associated with contamination at the site. As part of that process, the Department also will ask community members what outreach and education activities should be included in the effort.

“Much work has gone into determining the future of the Ag Park site,” said City Councilman John Burnard, who represents the area. “I’m encouraged to hear that the community will have an opportunity to provide input on future outreach efforts.”