



NEWS



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San Bernardino, state regulators investigating off-site dumps from High Desert waste pit fire site

By Charlie McGee, VVDAILYPRESS.COM

Posted: June 27, 2022



Inspectors have been documenting smolder fires, contamination and far more in mud-like piles of sewage at the rural High Desert site of Synagro

California and San Bernardino County regulators are giving their first substantial public acknowledgment to a nearly month-old fire in 80-acre solid waste pit in the High Desert — and investigating dumps of potentially harmful material beyond the state-permitted site’s boundaries since the blaze began.

Synagro Technologies Inc., a Maryland firm acquired in late 2020 by an investing arm of Wall Street giant Goldman Sachs Group Inc., operates Nursery Products Hawes Composting Facility: an open-air composting factory that’s permitted to take in up to 2,000 tons per day of sewage sludge and green waste from across Southern California, then convert it into fertilizer for farms that feed America.

The taxpayer-funded watchdogs of the composting practice are now responding to weeks of complaints from rural residents about not just the inferno in Synagro’s waste pit, but to further complaints of rancid, mud-like material being trucked off site and dumped on unmarked patches of Mojave Desert.

CalRecycle, the state’s oversight authority for waste composters like Synagro, consulted last week with the San Bernardino County public-health department’s Division of Environmental Health Services about the allegations of improper dumping, CalRecycle spokesman Lance Klug said Thursday night in an email response to a Daily Press inquiry about the dumping.

The environmental-health division, or EHS, “shared that they are investigating to determine if there was any wrongdoing involved with the delivery of the material” to off-site areas, Klug said.

Yet, according to county Department of Public Health spokesman Francis Delapaz, EHS isn’t handling the investigation of unmarked dump sites. The county division “regulates composting facilities to ensure material is processed according to State law,” he said in an email, “which includes the removal of pathogens and other contaminants.”

“EHS no longer has jurisdiction once the compost is sold and removed from the facility,” Delapaz wrote. “The complaints received have been referred to Code Enforcement to investigate.”

The Daily Press provided a detailed rundown of the off-site dumping areas reported by local residents in an email to county Code Enforcement on June 10, but didn’t receive a response.

The fire across the underbelly of Synagro’s solid-waste pit erupted in late May. It has fueled complaints of erratic ailments, sudden animal deaths and noxious air for dozens of miles. When winds are low, the impact has been subdued, but when gusts pick up, the fire’s reach has sparked reports as far as 60 miles north in Fort Irwin.

The most severe reports have come from unincorporated Hinkley: a small but storied town best known for the contamination of its water that cost Pacific Gas and Electric a \$333 million settlement and won Julia Roberts an Oscar for her role in “Erin Brockovich.”

Separate from off-site dumping, according to the CalRecycle spokesman, regulators on Thursday conducted what appears to be the largest multi-agency visit in a decade of operations at the open-air facility that Synagro took over in late 2016.

CalRecycle inspectors joined five county- and local-level agencies “for an unannounced facility inspection to gather additional information and assess the operator’s compliance with state’s health and environmental protection standards,” Klug wrote in an email.

Various agencies are tasked with oversight of specific aspects of Synagro’s activities. Aside from CalRecycle, agencies present at the Thursday visit include:

- The county EHS
- **San Bernardino County Fire**
- **San Bernardino County Hazmat, short for hazardous materials**
- The Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board
- The Mojave Desert Air Quality Management District

Klug shared few details on the results of the Thursday visit, saying that “the solid waste handling and disposal investigation findings will be published on CalRecycle’s web page within 30 days.”

“While no open flames were witnessed by the CalRecycle inspector, he reported that piles of material were still hot,” he added. “The operator was directed to take steps to reduce the threat of fire.”

Klug added that the county EHS “has the authority and responsibility to conduct inspections and take enforcement action to address documented violations.”

“CalRecycle monitors local enforcement agency’s programs to ensure they are carrying out their programs in full compliance with state requirements,” he wrote in an email. “When the department notes that appropriate action is not being taken, CalRecycle can take action to ensure they do so.”

Inspectors have been documenting myriad problems at the Synagro facility in recent years. They issued total of 39 violations at the site from November 2020 to April this year, the Daily Press previously reported in an analysis of CalRecycle disclosures, such as “unacceptable” forms of waste being processed and misreported, and excessive pathogen and contamination levels in ready-to-go loads including more than five times the legal limit of film-plastic contamination.

<https://www.vvdailynews.com/story/news/2022/06/27/synagro-technologies-goldman-sachs-high-desert-waste-pit-harmful-dumps-being-investigated-hinkley/7740864001/>

San Bernardino County firefighters rescue pair of puppies stuck in tortoise den in Yucca Valley

By Tom Coulter, DESERTSUN.COM

Posted: June 25, 2022



In what they described as "a unique public service call," San Bernardino County firefighters rescued a pair of puppies that were stuck inside the den of a 100-pound tortoise in Yucca Valley on June 19.

The county firefighters responded to the scene after the dogs, described as two "curious" five-month-olds, had been in the den for several hours and were "silent," according to a statement Tuesday from the **San Bernardino County Fire** Department.

The crew arrived at the scene to find a 100-pound tortoise (named Oscar) blocking the exit to its expansive den. They unsuccessfully tried to coax the tortoise out of its spot with "a tasty watermelon treat," and then proceeded to their back-up plan: digging.

"With Oscar blocking the exit, crews worked to dig an access hole to rescue the dogs," the fire department said. "After an hour of digging crews were able to get the puppies out of the den. 'Peo' and 'Finn' were unharmed & happy to reunite with their dog mom Kathleen."

<https://www.desertsun.com/story/news/2022/06/25/san-bernardino-county-firefighters-rescue-puppies-stuck-tortoise-den/7736539001/>

Downtown Needles, CA: Vehicle fire in the Jack In The Box fast food restaurant parking lot

By Staff Writer, ZACHNEWS.COM

Posted: June 26, 2022



Downtown Needles, California: A vehicle fire occurred in the Jack In The Box fast food restaurant parking lot located off J Street near Third Street. The vehicle fire was reported at around 3:21 p.m. PT on Sunday, June 26th, 2022.

San Bernardino County Fire District's Station 32 as well as the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department's Colorado River Station were on scene. Video sent into ZachNews shows firefighters on scene put out the fire. The driver of the vehicle was spotted outside the burned vehicle as firefighters were mopping up from the scene. No fire damage to the fast food restaurant.

Thanks to Cody from Needles, California for alerting ZachNews about the vehicle fire.

<https://zachnews.net/2022/06/26/breaking-news-downtown-needles-ca-vehicle-fire-in-the-jack-in-the-box-fast-food-restaurant-parking-lot/>

Motorcyclist Killed In A Crash On Southbound I-15 In The Cajon Pass Saturday Morning

By Staff Writer, PAININTHEPASS.COM

Posted: June 25, 2022



CAJON PASS, CA. (Pain In The Pass) >> A person on a motorcycle was killed after crashing into an SUV in the Cajon Pass on Saturday morning. California Highway Patrol and firefighters from San Bernardino County Fire Department responded to a two vehicle crash. The collision was reported at about 8:48am, Saturday June 25, 2022. It was located on southbound Interstate 15 about two miles after Cleghorn Road exit in the Blue Cut area. The vehicles involved according to the CHP traffic log were a black Harley-Davidson motorcycle, and a white Kia SUV.

The motorcycle rider was reported to be speeding driving reckless in disregard for safety. The rider was hit by the SUV and the rider was thrown from the bike. The motorcyclist was killed at the scene. That person's identity has not been released publicly at this time. CHP temporary closed all southbound lanes for about two hours due to the investigation. 11am two lanes were reopened.

CHP has not released a cause of the crash. Authorities say the motorcycle's speed before the crash may have been a factor in the person's death. No further details have been provided at this time. This incident will be under investigation by the California Highway Patrol Inland Office. Please check for updates on this incident.

<https://paininthepass.info/2022/06/25/motorcyclist-killed-in-a-crash-on-southbound-i-15-in-the-cajon-pass-saturday-morning/>

Head-On Crash On Highway 138 Jammed The Sunday Afternoon Commute

By Staff Writer, PAININTHEPASS.COM

Posted: June 26, 2022



PHELAN, CA. (Pain In The Pass) >> A male driver was airlifted after being injured in a two-vehicle head-on crash that happened Sunday afternoon on Highway 138.

The crash happened at about 1:50pm Sunday June 26, 2022. About a mile from Interstate 15 at the sharp turn of the highway. The crash was on the Hesperia side of Hwy 138.

California Highway Patrol, and San Bernardino County Fire Department responded to the accident. They located a red Ford F150 pickup truck and a black Ford F-150 pickup truck.

When CHP and firefighters responded to the scene, they located a male driver that had injuries to his face and both arms and in a lot of pain stated in the CHP traffic log. Firefighters then requested a medical helicopter to transport to a local trauma hospital. The medical helicopter landed at the scene, Reach Air Medical #43 airlifted the driver to Arrowhead Regional Medical Center. The drivers condition has not been updated at this time.

For reasons still under investigation, the red Ford truck lost control, then hit the black Ford truck. The incident will be under investigation by the California Highway Patrol Inland Office. CHP says additional information will be updated as it becomes available. Please check back for updates on this incident.

<https://paininthepass.info/2022/06/26/head-on-crash-on-highway-138-jammed-the-sunday-afternoon-commute/>