

Board learns about asphalt plant blast

By Nick Baptista, The Valley Springs News, Friday, August 28, 2015

A public safety concern about operating an asphalt plant near Rancho Calaveras was brought to the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors attention Tuesday.

Longtime Valley Springs resident Clyde Clapp during the public comment portion of the board's meeting presented a 2001 article from the Lodi News-Sentinel about an explosion at a similar asphalt plant near Clements.

"My supervisor (Steve Kearney) has information and stuff about an explosion in Clements and was wondering if he made you guys aware of it," Clapp told the board. Kearney was absent.

Ford Construction Inc. and CB Asphalt Inc. want to place an asphalt-making plant at the Hogan Quarry located at 3650 Hogan Dam Road. The board considered a pair of appeals regarding the proposal Aug. 11 and a third appeal is working its way through county staff.

Clapp said Kearney was made aware of the Clements plant explosion prior to the Aug. 11 meeting and withheld the information.

"He seems to be representing the plant more than his district," Clapp said as he gave copies of the April 19, 2001, article to the board.

Kearney, who missed his first meeting since being sworn into office at the beginning of this year, acknowledged the topic came up during a short conversation at a Valley Springs barbershop.

"I heard about it, but I never saw the article, and at the time it just seemed to be hearsay," Kearney said. "I've heard a lot of things (about the asphalt plant issue), but I don't see how this applies to the vote in particular," which were on technical decisions made by county staff.

"I'm not hiding anything," Kearney said, "things happen in business (such as fires and explosions) and that doesn't mean a business shouldn't exist."

"(Clapp) should have presented it at the hearing," Kearney said, but he did not think it would have changed the board's actions at the time.

In addition, Kearney said it would be appropriate for the information to go to the Environmental Health Department as the asphalt proposal works its way through the review process.

According to the News-Sentinel article, the nearly five-story asphalt plant north of Clements was about a week from being completed when the explosion ripped through it.

The blast sent pieces of pipe - some as large as a small vehicle - flying across the plant site, located off Jahant Road.

One employee sustained slight injuries and was treated for minor cuts on his hands at Lodi Memorial Hospital and released. Six other employees near the explosion site were uninjured.