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CONTACT: [Name, Title if any, Phone, Email]

Time to Give Texans Breathing Room from Under-regulated Concrete Plants

Deirdre Diamond is a busy working mother spending too much time getting to know her noisy neighbors -- concrete batch plants. Like too many Texans, she has become a reluctant expert on air quality monitoring, complex state regulations, and the intense politics behind the essential — and powerful — aggregates and concrete industry that gives Texas bragging rights as top producer in the nation.

Diamond and other members of Gunter Clean Air have their work cut out in their small town north of Dallas. Gunter has 11 concrete batch plants, with number 12, Big D Concrete, only one step away from moving in.

Sen. Drew Springer, who represents Gunter, sits on the Texas Sunset Advisory Commission, which just completed its audit of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), the agency that regulates the aggregates and concrete industry. Springer is up for re-election this fall and, not surprisingly, his top campaign donor is the concrete industry.. State Senators and Representatives routinely request public hearings on TCEQ permit applications, but when Senator Springer was asked to do so for this latest TCEQ permit,, Springer said no, stating he was satisfied with “the pristine air and managed growth that the City has done such a good job of managing.”

Diamond knows better. She knows, as a Registered Respiratory Therapist, that crystalline silica particulates from the concrete plants, as well as from the dozens of trucks that roll in and out of Gunter each hour, are compromising the community’s health and safety--and she has data to back it up. Gunter Clean Air hired a professional firm to model the air quality impacts of one of two highly concentrated sites home to five concrete batch plants. The study found that the concentration of so many plants operating in Gunter is likely contributing to high levels of particulate matter in the air. So high, that the levels are not deemed safe by the EPA’s National Ambient Air Quality Standards. In fact, the firm found that the modeled levels of PM10, a dangerous air pollutant, are 10 times higher than the concentrations deemed safe by the EPA.

Gunter Clean Air and many other groups aligned with the Texans for Responsible Aggregate Mining (TRAM), are asking TCEQ to consider the cumulative impacts of multiple pollution permits in near each other.. Currently, these cumulative impacts aren’t considered in TCEQ’s air pollution permit rules. Instead, the agency considers each plant separately so, theoretically, as long as each plant falls within its individual pollution limits, any number of plants could be permitted on the very same block in Gunter, or in any Texas community.

TRAM’s 22 member organizations are working hard to change this. They believe the TCEQ must address cumulative impacts of multiple polluters in close proximity to one another, the problem that is plaguing Gunter, parts of Houston, “quarry row” just north of San Antonio, and many other places in the state.

If you agree with TRAM’s concerns, or if have your own views about the TCEQ, now is the opportunity to let your voice be heard. The next TCEQ audit is isn’t expected for another 12 years (though TRAM is proposing six years instead). You can email your comments to

sunset@sunset.texas.gov (the comment period will end on June 27th) and you can deliver your comments in person on June 22nd, 9am, when the Sunset Advisory Commission meets at the Capitol in Austin (Senate Finance Committee Room E1.036).

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About TRAM

The coalition, composed of member groups across the state, seeks to work with lawmakers, state agencies, and good-faith industry operators to create state standards for BMPs in the APO industry and to adopt those standards into law. Its 22 member organizations represent 40 counties where APOs have dramatically expanded to meet the region's rapid growth. Stay informed by visiting www.TRAMTexas.org and following our Facebook, Twitter and Instagram pages for news updates.