

Marina sees increase in complaints, seeks origin of big stink

By [James Herrera](#), Monterey Herald Posted: 05/02/17



Cars pass by Highway 1 on the west side of Marina on Tuesday. The mayor has received several complaints of a bad smell blowing through the city during the past few months. (David Royal - Monterey Herald)



Marina is seen in the distance from strawberry fields and grazing land just off Del Monte Boulevard near the Monterey Regional Waste Management District and Monterey Regional Water Pollution Control facilities on Tuesday. Officials are investigating where a bad smell that residents have complained about is coming from.

Mayor Bruce Delgado wants to sniff out the source of the stink in his city.

“I heard a citizen say that if he had known there was this problem, he wouldn’t have moved here,” said the mayor.

Almost 50 complaints about foul air have come across Delgado’s desk in the past few months, mostly from folks in the northwest section of Marina.

“I’ve smelled it but nothing like what’s been reported,” said Delgado. “It’s different ... sometimes like polluted water, other times like manure.”

The mayor added that something else he could compare it to would be the smells that come off the areas where sea lions congregate in Monterey.

Delgado met for about an hour and a half on Friday to discuss the results of analysis regarding the 49 odor complaints with the general manager, district and staff engineer of the Monterey Regional Waste Management District, the general manager of the Monterey Regional Water Pollution Control Agency and Marina’s city manager and public works director.

“At this point we don’t have a definitive source,” said Paul Sciuto, the Water Pollution Agency general manager. “... the complaints vary in times of day and night ... and with different prevailing wind direction.”

Possible sources

The Waste Management District and the Water Pollution Control Agency have their operations in close proximity to each other about a mile northeast of Marina.

The Waste Management District is home to the Monterey Peninsula landfill and the Organics to Energy Program which includes the Landfill Gas Renewable Energy Project and Anaerobic Digestion Project, among other operations.

The Water Pollution Agency facility’s wastewater treatment plant has many components including holding ponds for treated water.

Between the two waste-handling agencies’ properties and the city, are acres of agriculture and grazing land.

According to the results of the analysis, the largest number of odor detections were when winds were blowing from the west. These indicate that some of the odors may be coming from ag fields west of Highway 1 or other coastal sources.

Given that the landfill facilities and sewage treatment plant are northeast of the city, they are not likely the cause of odor detections during westerly winds.

But several of the 49 observations were during calm wind conditions. This indicates odor were coming from sources immediately adjacent to the city such as cattle grazing or nearby strawberry field cultivation.

Several of the observations were during east winds which could be moving odors from the landfill and sewage related facilities or Salinas Valley ag fields to Marina, all of which are east of Marina.

Taking action

Mayor Delgado said the Waste Management District has taken four actions to minimize the potential of odors from its facilities, including no longer accepting the most odoriferous materials (mushroom compost) for composting operations, spending \$50,000 to pump water out of two storm water ponds, the installation of wind socks so on-site personnel near the composting and anaerobic digester could avoid odor-causing activities when east/southeast winds are blowing toward Marina, and extensive discussions between the Waste Management District and the Monterey Bay Air Resources District to provide information to the agency so that it can ensure compliance with regulations regarding air quality.

“Any odors coming from ag related sources, I am told, are exempt from legal requirements to abate,” said Delgado. “These would include cattle and food production.”

Three things have changed over the last 12 to 18 months, said Delgado: 1, a heavy rain season; 2, hundreds more acres have gone into crop production north of Marina while the area for cattle grazing has decreased becoming more concentrated; 3, areas north of the landfill that were once dedicated to flower farms are now used for row crop production.

These could be related to the increase in odor complaints or, coupled with the waste operations that have been ongoing for years, could have culminated in a perfect combination to produce the stink.

“The landfill is inspected by the health department,” said Tim Flannagan, general manager of the Waste Management District.

An inspector comes out and goes through everything, keeps a list and turns it over to the state and includes the air district and water quality control board.

“Regulatory compliance is pretty rigid. Public health and safety in California is tougher than in many other states,” said Flannagan. “But the best observations come from our customers who come out to use our site.”

The wastewater district’s treatment facility has detected an increase in pollutants in its treated waters stored in ponds.

“During west wind days since the fields have gone into production, every once in awhile, coliform is detected in the water,” said Sciuto. “It could be in the soil or fertilizer.”

“We’re as regulated as anything out there,” he said.

The water pollution control agency treated wastewater is bound for agriculture irrigation use and is tested on a regular basis, according to procedure, to make sure that quality is met.

Once the bacteria has been detected, the agency notifies the customer and chlorinates the water to kill the coliform.

Sciuto said it is mentioned in the report as an aside because it does not have a direct correlation to the odor issue but is worth noting because the land to the west has gone into crop production recently and coincides with the rise in coliform detection.

“We’re committed to working with our neighbors, waste management, and the city, any way we can,” said Sciuto.

What’s next?

Delgado said the next step is to hire odor consultants for a more in-depth analysis of past and future occurrences, have the waste management district work to prepare a public presentation of the data, request the public post their observations to the Nextdoor social media site or call 831-647-9411 to report directly to the Monterey Bay Air Resources District, and have the Marina city manager meet a second time with the strawberry and leafy green growers north of town to tour their facilities and discuss the potential for odors coming from the ag fields.

“If it is an agriculture odor, we’re prohibited against regulating it, they’re exempt from the public nuisance regulations,” said David Frisbey, planning and air monitoring manager with Air Resources District.

Delgado is optimistic that as the weather becomes dryer, the problem will become less prevalent. But he said everyone should remain vigilant, communicate, document and prepare for a recurrence.

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