

FD 34284

January 27, 2007 #E1-2801
RJ

Section of Environmental Analysis
1925 K Street NW
Washington, DC. 20423-001
Attention: Anil Ghosh

Received
1/27/07

Dear Mr. Ghosh:

I am submitting a newspaper article dated Jan. 26, 2007 from the San Antonio Express News.

This article concerns the burning mulch pile in Helotes, TX. The efforts to put out this fire are causing well contamination in the area.

This contamination is caused because this mulch pile is on or very near the Edwards Aquifer recharge zone.

I am sending this article as a follow-up to my letter of Jan. 15th, where we ask that the fuel storage and maintenance area be moved south out of the recharge zone.

This mulch pile was not supposed to burn, however we know that accidents do occur in spite of expert testimony to the contrary.

Please respond to this in your final EIS. The Edwards aquifer is vital to South Texas.

Sincerely

Mary F. Walpole
Tom Walpole
5201 FM 2676
Hondo TX 78861

Today in

PINK MARTINI/S.A. POPS READY TO SWING

Duncan is All-Star starter

SPORTS

SPURS

Win tickets to Spurs vs. Grizzlies!

PAGE 3D

FRIDAY, JANUARY 26, 2007

Metro Edition

www.MySanAntonio.com

THE VOICE OF SOUTH TEXAS SINCE 1865

50¢

San Antonio Express-News

Parker and Longoria set a date: 7-7-07

Tony Parker and Eva Longoria have set a wedding date, according to reports.

The San Antonio Spur and the

"Desperate

Housewives" star will get married

July 7.

Page 2A



Mulch may burn till March

Proposal to protect aquifer would involve digging, lining trench to carry water.

By ANTON CAPUTO

EXPRESS NEWS STAFF WRITER

Extinguishing the smoldering mulch pile near Helotes without polluting the Edwards Aquifer would take at least another month if a new plan is adopted.

State and local officials hope to finalize the back-to-the-drawing

>> MYSA.COM
Keyword: Metro
Read the entire draft report outlining the plan to fight the fire.

board plan today, which would open the way for crews to resume fighting the fire, which could last until March.

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality halted firefighting efforts a week ago Thursday after smoke and ash residue was found in area wells.

Environmental and firefighting experts have been looking for a method to fight the blaze and pro-

tect the aquifer ever since. They hope a combination of clay-lined pits and a water treatment system will do the trick.

"I think that we have a good plan," said Kelly Cook, TCEQ homeland security coordinator. "We're going to do everything possible to protect the aquifer and to put the fire out."

That has proved tricky because the massive pile of brush, dirt and mulch that caught fire around Dec. 26 is on or very near the Edwards Aquifer recharge zone.

This means water in the area leaches through the porous limestone landscape directly into the drinking water supply. This, con-

plied with the massive size of the burning heap, has made firefighting difficult. The pile is estimated to be 700 feet long and 80 feet high.

The new plan calls for using heavy equipment to tear the pile apart from the top and place the burning debris in a lined trench and large pit where it can be doused with water and firefighting chemicals.

The trench, a 30-foot-wide sluice that would be dug next to the burning pile, will be lined with plastic sheets and 2 feet of clay to keep the water from seeping into the aquifer.

See MULCH/10A

Mulch fire plan being readied is aimed at protecting aquifer

CONTINUED FROM 1A

The sluice will connect to a massive pit — about 325 feet by 175 feet — that's already on site. This pit also will be lined with 2 feet of clay and house a water treatment plant, which will purify the water so it can be reused for the firefighting effort or pumped into nearby Helotes Creek.

Crews will use at least 300,000 gallons of water a day.

According to the timeline in the plan, the sluice and pit would be ready by Feb. 7, and the firefighting would take another three to five weeks. That means the fire would burn until at least the end of February and maybe even until mid-March. Despite the ambitious strate-

It has been a month since the fire started pouring sometimes-dangerous levels of smoke into the air around Helotes.

gy, environmental experts aren't not certain they can keep all the ash out of the aquifer while fighting the fire, said Yvonne Escamilla, Bexar County public information officer.

The Bexar County fire marshal's office hasn't determined the cause of the fire yet, but investigators have said they suspect arson. Road contractor

Henry Zumwalt owns the pile and has been running a recycling operation on the site since 1981.

It has been a month since the fire started pouring sometimes-dangerous levels of smoke into the air around Helotes.

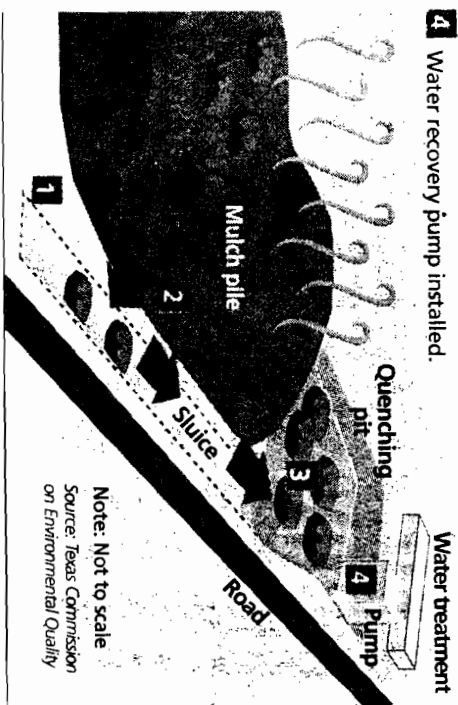
Bexar County's lawmakers in Austin sent a letter Thursday to Gov. Rick Perry calling the current firefighting efforts inadequate and asking him to "direct the Division of Emergency Management to use overwhelming force to extinguish the mulch fire."

"The bottom line is we don't have the resources allocated," said Rep. David Leibowitz, D-San Antonio.

acaputo@express-news.net

Details of draft proposal

- 1 A 600-foot-long, 30-foot-wide sluice must be dug. Surface of sluice covered with clay and other material to create an impermeable membrane. Preparation of sluice should take 2 weeks.
- 2 Burning mulch is placed in sluice, which contains water to extinguish the fire. The water flows to the quenching pit.
- 3 Quenched mulch is moved to the pit for additional cooling.
- 4 Water recovery pump installed.



Note: Not to scale
Source: Texas Commission
on Environmental Quality

EXPRESS-NEWS GRAPHIC