



# County of Santa Cruz

## BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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THIRD DISTRICT

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JEFF **ALMQUIST**  
FIFTH DISTRICT

AGENDA: 2/2/99

January 28, 1999

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
County of Santa Cruz  
701 Ocean Street  
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

RE: PUBLIC COMPLAINTS RELATED TO THE  
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

Dear Members of the Board:

It is normal for members of the Board to receive public comments related to the operations of various County Departments. In our capacity as elected representatives of our districts, we frequently serve the public as interpreters of County policy, information gatherers and advocates. It is usual to receive complaints about the enforcement actions of departments that have the most public contact. However, for the past six months the number of complaints related to Environmental Health enforcement of septic regulations in the Fifth District has dramatically increased, exceeding by far the complaints about any other County department. The complaints from home owners, business people, realtors, and contractors are disturbingly similar and **call** to question the ability of the Department of Environmental Health to appropriately administer its public responsibilities. We have learned that other Supervisors' offices have received similar complaints.

Some complaints have identified arrogant, rude and capricious behavior to the public. Some charge arbitrary and inconsistent application of regulations. Some individuals have indicated there appears to be personal prejudice on the part of some department staff. It is the general pattern of poor public relations that causes my grave concern, particularly given the extraordinarily important mission of this program in our watershed.

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FROM: OMNIFAX

TO:

415 435 3675

JAN 28, 1999 4:09PM #118 P.03

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It is imperative that we protect and enhance the environmental integrity of the San Lorenzo River Valley watershed. I am absolutely committed to those principles. However, those goals cannot be achieved by the abuse of property owners or the rigid, arbitrary and capricious enforcement of regulations if the effect of such a practice is to undermine public acceptance of the enforcement program. I am in full support of the people of the Fifth District who have raised these concerns and I will do everything in my power to address their recommendations for department change.

For several months, our office has requested that Environmental Health address these problems by first reaching an internally consistent position on the relevant policy points, and then designing and implementing a program for communicating department policy to landowners and contractors. This has not yet been completed.

A number of people have expressed a desire to have their concerns about the program heard. This would best be accomplished by forming a Task Force composed of one or two Supervisors, a contractor, a realtor, a landowner, an outside environmental health consultant, the program director and the Administrator of the Health Services Agency. The Task Force should schedule several hearings around the County, gather public input, and report to the Board by April 27, 1999.

Accordingly, I recommend that the Board create a task force to thoroughly investigate the concerns received by my office and any received by other members of the Board, and to recommend appropriate action on this matter on April 27, 1999.

Sincerely,



JEFF ALMQUIST, Supervisor  
Fifth District

JA:ted

cc: Health Services Agency Administrator  
Director of Environmental Health

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