

## **City Council Approves Removal of Two Polluters in Old Town National City**

*Environmental Health Coalition says decision comes from historic 2006 ordinance that will restore residential area to health*

National City, Calif.—November 5, 2013—At tonight's City Council meeting, National City approved the terms to phase out two businesses that pollute Old Town National City and endanger the health of students at Kimball Elementary School and families in Old Town National City within the next two years. Environmental Health Coalition (EHC), which fights toxic pollution in underserved communities, thanks the governing body for prioritizing the removal of two of the city's most overt polluters and beginning the restoration of approved land uses in Old Town National City.

"We want jobs and businesses in our community, but those that pollute shouldn't be located next to schools and homes. More than 400 students attend Kimball Elementary School, where over 35 businesses with hazardous materials are located within 1000 feet of their playground," said EHC Policy Advocate Carolina Martinez, "We thank City Council for setting appropriate terms to phase out these first two businesses that grossly pollute the surrounding area and endanger our children."

Today's final decision gives Steve's West Coast Automotive one year and 252 days and Jose's Auto Electric one year and 234 days to relocate from Old Town National City. Old Town was rezoned in 2010 to residential and commercial compatible designation to reestablish the community as a safe, healthy and vibrant neighborhood. California considers a non-conforming use "grandfathered in" after a zoning change – that is, they allow it to stay in its current location. Because of the dangerous land use pattern, the City adopted the amortization ordinance in 2006, which gives the City the right to phase out non-conforming uses that endanger residents. According to the ordinance, the City should set a "reasonable" phase out timeframe to allow each owner to recuperate investments made into the business.

In 2012, Steve's West Coast Automotive and Jose's Auto Electric were ranked highest by a thorough ranking process as businesses that pose a significant risk and no longer conform to approved land uses in Old Town National City, capturing over 23 repeating code violations between the two of them during an eight-year period.

According to zoning [or publicly available] data, Old Town National City houses 222 polluters per square mile compared to 44 in National City or 17 in the county. This intermingling of industrial uses with homes, schools and parks creates air quality hazards for Old Town residents, including those with asthma or other

respiratory illnesses. National City ranks in the top 85th percentile statewide for asthma hospitalization rates. In the San Diego region, National City children visit emergency rooms for asthma treatment at twice the rate of the county as a whole.

"I experienced the negative impacts caused by the auto body-shops located in the area. I saw fires, breathed toxic odors and had to walk on the street because the sidewalks are blocked with cars. I also noted water coming out of the workshops that was mixed with pollution and ran down the sidewalk," said Gabriela Chavez, a National City resident for 17 years. "Due to all this, my eldest daughter suffered from severe headaches. I'm thankful City Council agrees that non-toxic businesses are a better fit for our community." Chavez's youngest daughter currently attends Kimball.

Historically, Old Town National City was a residential area, but to facilitate the car industry after World War II, incompatible land-use patterns were permitted and industrial businesses came into the neighborhood. For years, [EHC and community residents advocated](#) for a new community plan and zoning in the area because the many auto-related shops and small industries in residential neighborhoods raised high concerns.

These are the first two businesses to face the amortization process in National City, and eventually all ranked businesses will need to relocate to appropriately zoned areas.

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ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH COALITION: Founded in 1980, Environmental Health Coalition (EHC) builds grassroots campaigns to confront the unjust consequences of toxic pollution, discriminatory land use, and unsustainable energy policies. Visit us online at <http://www.environmentalhealth.org/>.