

Environmental Health Coalition

COALICION de SALUD AMBIENTAL

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New Law Will Place Limits on Toxic Trucks National City Council Listens to Community Demand To Sweep Out Polluters

(April 4, 2007) – National City, California. The City Council of National City responded yesterday to community residents and school parents who have complained loudly about the Momax Truck Driving School that has been operating several hours each day within 50 feet of Kimball Elementary school and homes. The council voted to introduce an ordinance that will prohibit diesel trucks from practicing close to schools or homes.

Margaret Godshalk, a teacher at Kimball Elementary School, celebrated the Council's decision: "This would be a great improvement for the children of Kimball School, the residents of the Old Town community, and the City as a whole. It's good to know that the City Council is responsive to the voices of the community."

Current zoning in the neighborhood of Old Town, also known as Westside, National City, allows homes, and schools to be mixed with industrial businesses. Under these rules, Momax is legally allowed to operate and practice within the community. While the City is on its way to certifying a Specific Plan this summer that would change the zoning, over 100 industrial businesses in the neighborhood would be "grandfathered in" and allowed to continue operation. The ordinance introduced on Tuesday would force Momax, and any other driving school, to take its trucks elsewhere to practice.

"We are certainly pushing for a comprehensive solution in the neighborhood. But, we have to respond immediately when toxic businesses such as Momax are endangering the health of children," said Tony Lopresti, Policy Advocate for the Environmental Health Coalition (EHC), a 27-year old environmental and social justice organization based in the neighborhood.

On the morning of January 30th, Momax trucks warmed up below the Jimenez residence, releasing large plumes of exhaust. That afternoon, Javier Jimenez died of complications related to asthma, family members say. Just after Mr. Jimenez' death, EHC measured toxic levels of particulate matter, as much as 8 times higher than normal levels. Diesel emissions are a major source of particulate matter, which is a powerful asthma trigger and can cause cancer.

In response to this public health crisis, EHC staff, local residents and teachers from Kimball Elementary School held a community meeting with Councilmembers Frank Parra and Louie Natividad. The Council was swift to respond, ordering the City Attorney to investigate and bring back the law that was introduced at Tuesday's meeting.

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