

Friends Of the Harbor Group

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For Immediate Release

May 11, 2004

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Testing Of Sand At Twin Lakes State Beach Reveals High Levels Of Arsenic And Chromium Resulting From Burning Of CCA Treated Wood In Beach Fire Rings

Santa Cruz, CA (May 11, 2004) – Test results released today of a sand sample taken adjacent to one of the eleven fire rings at Twin Lakes State Beach, located at E. Cliff Drive & 7th Avenue, reported arsenic levels of 668 parts per million and chromium levels of 1087 parts per million. The Friends of the Harbor Group (www.fohg.org) announced that these tests, performed by the Environmental Quality Institute at the University Of North Carolina – Asheville, confirms the physical evidence found of the burning of CCA (copper chromated arsenate) treated wood by some beach-goers in the concrete fire rings and other beach burn sites.

It is typical for Twin Lakes beach-goers to bring tree branches, logs, pallets, and construction site wood scraps to burn for nighttime bonfires. CCA treated wood is commonly known to consumers as “pressure treated wood”, and is typically used for fence posts and outdoor decks. Major concerns regarding the use of CCA treated wood for playground structures have been cited in recent news stories.

Per the US EPA website at http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/factsheets/chemicals/cca_qa.htm: “On February 12, 2002, EPA announced a voluntary decision by industry to move consumer use of treated lumber products away from CCA pressure-treated wood by December 31, 2003, in favor of new alternative wood preservatives. As of January 1, 2004, EPA will not allow CCA products to be used to treat wood intended for most residential settings.”

“Friends of the Harbor Group(FOHG) normally focuses solely on harbor issues. But at the March 30th meeting of the Santa Cruz Port Commission, one Twin Lakes beachfront resident reported that testing in his home found levels of arsenic and chromium that ‘exceeded OSHA standards’. The resident attributed the indoor contamination to the dredging of the Arana Gulch sediment from the harbor. As we were concerned about any potential health effects from dredging, FOHG had an environmental engineer review the analysis of the upper harbor sediment and concluded that there was no known scientific theory which could explain how the minute trace levels of the naturally occurring amounts of arsenic and chromium in the sediment could be creating the problem reported inside the resident’s home. For both metals, the naturally occurring levels in the Arana Gulch harbor sediment (arsenic – 4.5 mg/Kg and chromium - 16 mg/Kg) were well below EPA’s reporting limits (arsenic – 8.2 mg/Kg and chromium – 81 mg/Kg).” said FOHG President Lorenzo Rota.

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“ So I decided to use the Google search engine to help us find some clues. Simply entering ‘arsenic’ and ‘chromium’ (the 2 elements reported by the beachfront resident) into the Google search engine provided numerous ‘hits’ to sites involving CCA wood. I soon found numerous warnings about the dangers of CCA wood, in particular many warnings to NEVER burn CCA wood as the arsenic can be volatilized into the air, and concentrates at very high levels in the wood ash. As I live only 2 blocks from the location where the resident reported the problem, I surveyed the beach area for clues. What immediately struck me one night was seeing the heavy clouds of low-lying smoke being blown directly towards the residences on East Cliff Drive. While the daytime prevailing winds in Santa Cruz typically are northwesterly, in the evening it is very common for the winds to shift and come from the east. On April 28th, another FOHG member and I returned to the fire ring area and that is when we found charred pieces of CCA treated wood next to some of the fire rings. I carefully collected the samples of charred CCA wood and then took a sample of sand next to one of the fire rings. I immediately sent the soil sample for testing. . In addition, we contacted the Santa Cruz County Environmental Health Services Department and the Monterey Bay Air Pollution Control District who later in the week also took test samples from the same beach area ”, explained FOHG president, Lorenzo Rota.

To get more information about the effects of burning CCA wood, FOHG contacted a national expert on CCA wood issues, John Schert, the Executive Director for the Florida Center for Solid and Hazardous Waste Management at the University of Florida’s College of Engineering. In an email to FOHG, Mr. Schert commented that “in general, arsenic volatilizes to some degree under normal combustion conditions. I have heard that about 25% of the arsenic in CCA treated wood can volatilize fairly easily at normal combustion conditions. Under this scenario, 75% of the arsenic would stay in the ash.”

At this time, FOHG has forwarded its findings and lab test results to the Santa Cruz Environmental Health Services Departments and the Monterey Bay Air Pollution Control District who have been conducting a health study in the area. FOHG is confident that the appropriate health and regulatory agencies will take the proper actions on this matter. “FOHG wants to make clear that we are NOT asking that beach fires be banned, simply that beachgoers be made aware of the dangers of burning CCA treated wood”, said FOHG president, Lorenzo Rota.

For additional information on CCA treated wood and arsenic:

1. Florida Center for Solid and Hazardous Waste Management, CCA Research Homepage - <http://ccaresearch.org/>
2. Environmental Working Group - <http://www.ewg.org/issues/arsenic/index.php>
3. The Environmental Quality Institute - <http://www.unca.edu/eqi/arsenic.htm>
4. Friends of the Harbor Group, Twin Lakes State Beach fire ring picture gallery - <http://fohg.org/images/>

Friends of the Harbor Group (FOHG) is a broad-based volunteer organization of recreational and commercial harbor users, as well as local harbor residents and businesses, whose purpose is to advocate for and to educate to the general public and governmental regulatory agencies the importance of maintaining safe and continual access to the Monterey Bay and beyond. For more information on the Friends of the Harbor Group, visit our website at www.FOHG.org.