

## **Santa Susana Field Lab – Rocketdyne**

by Ventura County Supervisor Linda Parks, November 2006

Activities at Boeing's Santa Susana Field Lab (SSFL) have been shrouded in secrecy and controversy for years and it's time for our government agencies to force full disclosure of the extent of the Lab's toxic pollution. When the SSFL was first located in the hills of Ventura County on 2,800 acres south of Simi Valley, the area was remote. Since then, urbanization has crept up to its borders. Hundreds of thousands of people now live within five miles of the SSFL, and some are questioning the SSFL's impact on the public's health and safety.

I remember growing up in the West San Fernando Valley and hearing the occasional roar of rocket engines that would emanate from the rocket test facility, owned at the time by Rocketdyne. What the public didn't know until decades later was that the work at the SSFL, now owned by Boeing, also involved the disposal of toxic waste, including radioactive waste, and that the Lab experienced a partial meltdown of an on-site nuclear reactor in 1959.

The release of information about the level and extent of contamination from Boeing's SSFL has been painfully slow. Much of the information currently available to the public comes from records provided to regulatory agencies in Boeing's pursuit of wastewater discharge permits, and in their required cleanup efforts. Yet, it wasn't until August of this year, in anticipation of a permit to remove contaminated soil, that Boeing disclosed that napalm and dioxins were incinerated SSF: open-air burn pits. Additionally, the California Department of Toxic Substance Control (DTSC) now believes it is possible that radioactive waste was also disposed of there.

The public has continually been denied information regarding the extent of the contamination and associated risks. The lack of disclosure of information has been a serious and on-going problem. Questions about radioactive releases, types of radioactive and toxic materials shipped to and from the SSFL, perchlorate in off-site wells, TCE in the groundwater, tritium in the soil, all remain unanswered.

The time is long overdue for Boeing to provide full disclosure regarding toxic materials that were disposed of by the SSFL. After years of investigation, we still do not know the full scope of the contamination. A recent epidemiological study estimates between 260 to 1,800 people may have developed cancer as a result of the SSFL's activities.

It is time to invoke State and Federal laws to compel Boeing to release all information that is necessary for regulatory agencies to develop plans for the cleanup and remediation of the SSFL. Full disclosure is needed so regulatory agencies that oversee the cleanup efforts can ensure the public's health.

Two years ago, I was able to change Ventura County's environmental review procedures to require developers of large projects within two miles of the SSFL to test the

groundwater and soil on their property for TCE and perchlorate. These two cancer-causing pollutants are known to have spread beyond the SSFL property. That requirement allows us to gather more data and protect the public from inhabiting areas that may be contaminated.

We also know that perchlorate, a constituent of jet fuel, has been found in wells in Simi Valley. There was also a finding of large amounts of perchlorate near a water outfall coming from the SSFL. Yet surprisingly, no regulatory agency has yet to conclude that these findings of off-site perchlorate are coming from the SSFL.

As public officials, it is our responsibility to protect the public's health and safety. The polluter's continual failure to disclose and abide by the regulations, the lackluster performance of regulatory agencies that give minimal fines to Boeing for releasing contaminants into our creeks, the recent appointment to the head of DTSC of an industry attorney whose law firm defends Boeing's SSFL, all show that the public trust is not being upheld.

It's time for full disclosure, rigorous enforcement, and, in the end, full cleanup of the site. Development of the land for housing or even parkland should be prohibited until the area meets all environmental cleanup requirements and the public's health and safety can be ensured.