

To: Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors
Cc: Santa Barbara County Planning Department
Cc: Chief Eric Peterson, Battalion Chief Rob Hazard
From: Renée O'Neill, Fire Associate/Advocate for the Community of Tepusquet (F.A.C.T.)

October 1, 2018

Re: Agenda item 18-00776 - Pre-fire Plan
Pre-Fire Plan for Tepusquet Community

Dear Board of Supervisors,

Tepusquet Community was identified as 'an area in need of pre-fire planning assistance.' As lead Fire Associates/Advocates for the Community of Tepusquet, Linda Tunnell and I plan to attend the meeting. Having served on the Board of the Santa Barbara County Firesafe Council, I hope to encourage and support a more, "Proactive Approach," to Fire Prevention. This can be accomplished in many ways and was thoroughly addressed in Chief Peterson's detailed report. Linda and I have been avid supporters of our Fire Crews' efforts to prevent wildland fires in our county, for years.

The following identifies specific Tepusquet fuels issues and other hazardous concerns:

➤ **Reduce Hazardous Fuel Loads**

This includes but is not limited to, a reduction of fuel loads along Tepusquet Road, Colson Canyon Road, Ruiz Canyon Road (access road to Tepusquet Towers) and areas where our community borders the Los Padres National Forest or BLM Lands. (A TALL REQUEST!)

➤ **Take a More Proactive Approach to Fire Prevention** (This is Critical!)

Remove unnatural fire hazards, associated with escalating numbers of non-compliant Cannabis growers, not only in Tepusquet but in all, unincorporated areas of our county. Remove same hazards, associated with same non-compliant Cannabis growers that have encroached on LPNF In-holdings (Peach Tree Canyon), which border our community.

➤ **Specific, Fire-Related, Cannabis Concerns:**

Commercial Fuel tankers (Trojan and JB Dewar), deliver hundreds of gallons of fuel (*weekly*) through our narrow, undivided canyon road and then, up steep, substandard access-roads. Growers must rely on commercial, diesel-fuel-generators, to operate their 'cannabis farms.'

Fuel is delivered to *unpermitted storage tanks* (violations verified by Planning Department). Growers use commercial generators and numerous extension cords, to supply power to hoop houses and other, various site-operations/sources.

Per County and State Ordinances, 'growers are *prohibited from using any source of electricity* in hoop houses (high fire hazard),' yet growers continue to disregard these laws, even after inspections. Growers are unconcerned about county fines. Our '*favorite grower*' boasts, "I have more money than God and the best attorneys in the state! Just try and stop me!" He is a well-known 'Player' in both SB and SLO Counties, as well as other areas in CA.

NOTE! Because Cannabis growers operate under LLC's (Limited Liability Corporations), there is a 'limited' amount of money that they can be sued for. As I recall, the maximum is about \$250,000, a mere drop in the county/state 'Wildland-Fire-Bucket.' Most folks are unaware of this critical fact.

Since 2014, residents of our community have reported, documented, attended meetings and written letters, to our County, re Cannabis violations. We have repeatedly requested that our County authorities enforce on multiple violations and prevent ever-increasing dangers, associated with the 'non-compliant growers.' Yet, these illicit growers continue to put our communities' safety and environments at risk. Illegal growers increase in numbers, continue to expand existing grow-sites, (including into bordering forests) and operate, unregulated, untaxed, unenforced and therefore... unhindered.

If this isn't considered an unnatural, avoidable fire hazard, then what is?

Re: "State of California Executive Order B-52-18 California Governor Brown issued Executive Order (EO) B-52-18 to support the State's resilience to wildfire and other climate impacts, address extensive tree mortality, increase forests' capacity for carbon capture, and improve forest and forest fire management."

Re: Resilience to Wildfire and Climate Impact – Hazardous fuels transported through our community; toxic fumes from generators, which operate on diesel fuel, 24/7

Re: Capacity for Carbon Capture – Removal of hundreds or maybe thousands of heritage oak trees. Aerial photos of Tepusquet (2014 to current), identify the devastating impacts Cannabis growers have had on our oak woodlands, our natural environment and our once pristine, native lands. This is a living nightmare! We have tried and failed to have all governing authorities halt this, since 2014.

Re: Improve Forest and Forest Fire Management – Growers have encroached on our forestlands. In 2009, our community was evacuated due to illegal growers that caused the La Brea Fire! These grower-caused-fires are prevalent, throughout California. It is just a matter of time, WHEN, not IF, these tragic and costly, Preventable Wildland Fires, occur. You can be PROACTIVE in stopping it.

In my fourteen-years as volunteer fire associate, I have never felt more vulnerable or threatened, than now. We already face many, 'natural hazards' but do we have to add 'Cannabis fuel to the fire' and be threatened by these unpredictable, undesirable, 'unnatural hazards?' It's Ludicrous!

The recent, devastating wild fires have brought both local and national attention to this ever-increasing concern. Please remind all agencies to take a more Proactive Approach, by supporting the reduction of not only fuel loads but removing 'unnatural fire-hazards' (illicit, unregulated, unenforced growers that threaten our communities and our environments). Tepusquet growers may have 'Temporary, State Permits' but they DO NOT COMPLY with County or State Regulations!

Thank you for any support you can provide, in our mutual efforts to maintain Tepusquet as a, "Model Fire-Safe Community!"

Most Sincerely Grateful,

Renée O'Neill

Fire Associate/Advocate for the Community of Tepusquet (F.A.C.T.)

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