

March 12, 2007

Contacts: Ron Green: 210-316-9242

President Helotes Heritage Association
Helotes City Council Linda Boyer-Owens: 210-695-8875
Stuart Birnbaum: 210-355-9974

Request for Coverage

Rally at Helotes City Hall Citizens Call on SAWS to Protect Their Health and Safety

When: 5:30 pm Monday, March 12th

Where: Helotes City Chambers, 12951 Bandera Road

As described by Mayor of Helotes Jon Allan, efforts to extinguish the mulch fire have stalled again [see past emails at www.helotesheritage.org]. The fire has now been burning for 11 weeks. This has had a tremendous impact on the health and safety of the community. The City Council of Helotes is to convene at 6:30 pm Monday to reinstate the State of Disaster. Mayor Allan has called for a town meeting at 7:00 pm Monday to explain what SAWS has now done to stop efforts to curtail the fire.

HHA takes its (and our collective) responsibility to be stewards of our resources very seriously. This responsibility certainly includes the fact that Helotes is located squarely over the recharge and contributing zones of the Edwards Aquifer. But we also need to consider the impact the fire has had on the quality of the air we breathe.

Last week SAWS withdrew water from the fire suppression effort when the effects of the fire fighting activities impacted five nearby wells. But the fact is that fire suppression actions have resulted in the violation of only secondary water quality standards (i.e., odor and taste) in the five affected wells. Not to make light of this, but the impact to the wells was short-lived after water suppression activities ceased. There is no reason to think that the remaining actions needed to finally extinguish the fire would have either a long-term, wide-spread, or serious (i.e., violation of primary water standards) impact on the Edwards Aquifer.

The unfortunate reality of the mulch pile is that what remains is smoldering mulch in a 15-20 ft deep pit that directly overlies the Edwards Aquifer. If SAWS intention is to prohibit any influx of contamination into the aquifer from the mulch by halting continued fire suppression activities, that opportunity was missed a long, long time ago. The situation is now worst. Removing the top of the mulch pile now allows for direct and rapid recharge into the Edwards Aquifer. Every time that rain falls and drains into the mulch pit, another pulse of mulch-tainted water will be injected into the aquifer. This will happen every time it rains unless something is done to remove the remaining mulch from this pit.

So while SAWS impedes efforts to end this very real health threat, it is, in reality, guarantying that the mulch pile continue to provide the potential to indefinitely impact the Edwards Aquifer. This is not a very good example of a major utility demonstrating either vision or responsibility for the public good.

It is time for the community to express its outrage at the lack of comprehension of the impact that this fire is having on our community. We are asking you to attend a rally at the Helotes City Chambers at 5:30 pm Monday March 12 to let SAWS know that they cannot continue to make decisions without regard for our health and safety. Let's get this fire put out once and for all. Please try to participate in this opportunity to make our voice heard.