

Community Organizers Ask Governor To Pump The Brakes On Concrete-Crushing Facility

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State Senator Borris Miles speaks out against a concrete-crushing facility that would be built across the street from LBJ Hospital.

Local community organizers and religious leaders are calling for Governor Greg Abbott and the Texas Commission On Environmental Quality to reverse a permit allowing a concrete-crushing plant to be built across from the Lyndon B. Johnson Hospital.

The TCEQ approved the permit for Texas Coastal Materials LLC., despite backlash from community members, including those with the Harris Health System, the county's healthcare system.

If the approval holds up, the concrete-crushing facility would be built after Harris County voters recently approved Harris County Proposition A, which puts at least half of the \$2.5 billion bond into plans to create a new trauma hospital on LBJ's campus and provide mental healthcare services at the hospital.

Those against the plant's construction are concerned about residents' exposure, particularly patients and staff in the hospital, to fine particulate matter — a mixture of solid and liquid particles in the air.

Fine particulate matter or soot can cause several respiratory and pulmonary issues, such as elevated levels of heart disease, asthma and cancer — placing already immunocompromised patients at a heightened risk of getting sicker.

Last week, members of the Metropolitan Organization of Houston, an association of local churches, gathered with those with the county's healthcare system and other community members advocating for the reversal of the approved permit.

State Senator Borris Miles (D-Houston) referred to the TCEQ's decision to approve the permit as an act of "environmental racism." He pointed to the continuing trend of similar facilities bringing pollutants to communities of color and causing deaths in areas such as Fifth Ward and Acre Homes for decades.

"Folks, I want you to understand, we have been fighting against crushed concrete facilities since the coastal materials applied for this permit," Miles said.

"The TCEQ executive director ignored our voices and approved this permit. Let's be clear this plant will threaten the health of patients and staff at LBJ," he added. "Many of whom are already suffering from serious health issues. The hospital itself would even become less safe."

Pastor Reverend Father Martin Eke of St. Francis of the Assisi Catholic Church said it was a “slap in the face” for a company to build the plant where so many of the poorest and sickest people seek medical attention.

LBJ Hospital is known for providing healthcare to lower-income, underinsured or uninsured Houston area residents. Eke added that ignoring situations like these leads to long-standing issues within communities, such as the years-long cancer cluster in Kashmere Gardens due to exposure to creosote — a likely carcinogen or cancer-causing substance — from a nearby Union Pacific Rail yard.

Last month, the TCEQ revised its air quality standard permit for concrete batch plants in response to public outcry over the previously lax requirements. The changes called for operators of these industrial facilities to limit hourly and yearly production rates and expand their buffer zones and methods for controlling dust emissions.

Harris County Attorney Christian Menefee approved of these modifications but said more stringent guidelines were needed. Menefee had filed a motion in cooperation with Lone Star Legal Aid and Miles’s Office to overturn TCEQ’s decision to approve the permit for the concrete-crushing facility in early January.

In a statement, Menefee added that movement on the case would likely come within 60 to 90 days of the filing. According to Miles, the TCEQ has to submit a decision regarding the permit by Sunday, April 10, 2024.