

VISIT TO THE BRISBANE, CALIFORNIA BAYLANDS

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On Wednesday, March 1, I visited Brisbane, California, a small community just south of San Francisco. I met with Dana Dillworth, head of CLEAN (not sure what that stands for) and chair of the new Community Advisory Group overseeing the cleanup of the Brisbane Baylands. It was gratifying to learn that Dana had petitioned for the Advisory Group in the way that I had recommended to state officials several years ago. That proposal was included in the Site Mitigation statute.

The Brisbane Baylands comprises several hundred acres between the U.S. 101 freeway and the developed portion of the city. Roughly half is a former municipal landfill that operated in the pre-regulation area, from 1932-1967. Most of the remainder was a major Southern Pacific railyard, including tracks, a roundhouse, and shops. Contamination includes methane (which poses an explosive hazard), heavy metals, MTBE from a fuel tank farm that is still in business between the two major properties, a TCE plume migrating from industrial properties just across the San Francisco boundary, and heavy hydrocarbons (bunker oil).

Source remediation is taking place at the TCE and hydrocarbon sites, but Dana is concerned that the principal remedy will be capping designed only to prevent surface contact. Authorities have given up hope of making the groundwater safe to drink.

The City of Brisbane and a private developer are planning for a major, mixed-use redevelopment of the area. Located at the terminus of San Francisco's planned Third Street Light rail line, along a major freeway, and at a CalTrain station, this is one of the inner Bay Area's largest development parcels.



This is a complex site. Not only are there a variety of sources and contaminants, but environmental regulation is divided between the California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) and the Bay Area Regional Water Quality Control Board. Next week, at a meeting with top DTSC officials, I intend to discuss ways that public involvement activities at the two agencies can be combined better.

Dana has been working on these sites for more than 15 years. She has networked effectively with statewide and regional organizations, but she lacks a strong visible political base. She has tacit support, but she seems to be a one-woman show. She recently ran for city council and lost, and the current city leadership seems bent on not letting environmental conditions interfere with development.

I made a number of suggestions, including:

- Magnify her effectiveness by cultivating relationships with the local press.
- Work with my friends/former colleagues at San Francisco State University—working on the San Francisco sites that released the TCE.
- Contact the State Department of Fish and Game and the Golden Gate Audubon Society to determine whether leachate from the landfill and other sites is affecting the habitat at the Brisbane Lagoon, a large shallow tidal basin owned by the developer. The Lagoon has a significant migratory bird population. Even if the soil cap eliminates most human exposure pathways, it will not prevent the continuing infiltration of water.

- Focus on the environmental regulators, rather than the City's environmental studies, as a way of ensuring protective cleanup. The City appears to be "in the developer's pocket."
- Consider supporting residential and other sensitive land uses as a way to promote more protective cleanups. I explained how I and others identified early land use decisions at the Moffett Field wetlands as essential to protective cleanup decisions, and how our eventual victory on land use is leading to more cleanup. I referred her to my paper, "How a RAB works."
- Unless she opposes development for other reasons, make clear that she wants to improve the development, not prevent it. She sounded like most community activists, suspicious of the developer and the city's plans, but not necessarily against development. I explained that because the property was privately owned, it would be difficult to promote land uses that primarily served the public interest without benefit to the owner. However, I reminded her that housing, an important social need in the Bay Area, was the choice of the real estate market as well.



Brisbane is only a 35-minute drive from Mountain View, so I offered to meet with a small group of activists to help them better understand the parallel government processes of

cleanup oversight and development approval. If that goes well, I may make a presentation to the Community Advisory Group.

Dana and her friends are in a position to influence the degree of investigation and cleanup that takes place in the Brisbane Baylands, but they will need to better define what they want as well as expand their political base.

I took a number of pictures during our site tour. I am pasting three in this report: An overview of the properties, an oil-contaminated stream at the former rail yard, and a vandalized warning sign on a fence surrounding the source of the bunker oil pollution.