



BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR SITE CHARACTERIZATION ACTIVITY

1. Visual inspection of site



The site is divided into four sections. To the east is a large swampy area not thought to be contaminated; to the north is an area of rolling hills, and to the south and west are city streets which are not paved. The site can be accessed on the south side via one of these dirt roads. A neighborhood of mobile homes is located along the south and west sides of the site, just across the road. From the fence surrounding the site (which is largely dirt), you can see what appears to extreme large piles of dirt, trash, and debris in three places; in addition, you notice a trench approximately 10 feet wide by 5 feet deep by 50 feet long running along the eastern edge, just before a mossy filthy swamp. Barrels appear to be strewn throughout the site in random fashion along with dozens and dozens of old tires. The barrels near the trench are partially covered by what looks like poison oak plants. From the city street on the western side of the site, you can sense a bitter, almond like smell in the air. From the top of the hill on the northern end of the site, you notice with binoculars that there appear to be the remains of a many small dead animals near the trench. Finally, there are three dilapidated old sheds in the center of the site, and what appears to be the burned out remnants of a fourth not far away.



2. Interviews with the Owner



Charles is a mean, spitting, swearing old man who has nothing but disdain and anger for the State Department of Health Services which has ordered the clean-up of his families land. He is normally found postured in an old wooden rocking chair just outside his home with his shot gun nearby. Last summer he was close a deal on the sale of his land when the prospective developer backed out because of his concern about site contamination. Since then, the State has received a number of complaints from neighbors about the awful smells given off by the site, and the unsightly items cluttering the property. The State has ordered the owners to pay for clean-up. Charles, who lives in a house with relatives to the east of the contaminated area, refuses to speak with you. In fact, last month he threatened a representative of the State Toxic Substances Control Division who tried to take some soil samples from the 100 acres of littered land to the east of the contaminated area (the area on which his house is built). Charles pulled a shot-gun and told the woman to return with a court order if she wanted to take more samples. Peter and Rachel two siblings both died of leukemia in the past 5 years, and Carlos the third brother, is sickly and can no longer see or speak.



3. An interview with residents in the neighborhood



James and Grace, a husband and wife who live across the road from the site, say that the Cisneros were a bit standoffish, though from time to time they did speak in the corner market. They grew the shrubs around the site very high, says Grace, so that the people in the neighborhood couldn't see what they were doing on their land. The site was full of strange smells, ranging from sulfur to something bitter, like almonds. Last year, the couple's German shepherd, whom they loved very dearly, disappeared. When they ventured door-to-door around the neighborhood asking for information, Charles said that he knew nothing, but he did say that people shouldn't let dogs go running around freely in the neighborhood. "One of our neighbors also lost their dog just about the time our went missing."

4. Chamber of Commerce



Records here date back to 1960, at which time the Perris Valley Chamber of Commerce began operation. That year the Cisneros Family bought a parcel of land in Perris for use as some type of hazardous material recycling and storage facility. By 1973, however, they were no longer members of the Chamber of Commerce.



5. U.S. Geological Survey



Records here date back to the turn of the century. The Cisnero Family parcel, as near as you can figure, is barren land with a large well. Aerial photographs are not revealing. Ground water runs at about 15 feet in the western area adjacent to the well.



6. U.S. Weather Service



Perris is a small city in the deep bowels of the Inland Empire. It is safe to say it is located between Los Angeles and San Diego. The weather is not typical of southern California. During the present month of August, the temperature ranges from 80F at 7am to 114F at midday. The prevailing wind direction is to the west.



7. Company records, receipts, logbooks, ledgers



Scattered company records dating back to 1950, and extending up until 1984 reveal that the family operated a multi faceted recycling storage facility, though they lacked much of what is considered the proper equipment. The types of waste received varied greatly, though PCBs, a variety of acids (including HCN and H₂S) and a variety of waste oils are there. It is also evident from the records that they took in a lot more waste than was ever sent out, as either a recycled product or as a waste. After 1980, in fact, it seems that shipments stopped going out. (Documentation of these shipments is unclear.)

8. State OSHA Office/State Attorney's Office



Neither OSHA nor the State Attorney's Office has any information on file about the Cisnero facility.



9. Regional Water Quality Management Board



Since 1980, the RWQMB has had a file on the family facility. Though the facility is a suspected source of ground water pollution a formal investigation of the facility has never taken place. You suspect that this is because all in all the Cisneros appear to be a relatively small fish in a big sea of polluters.

10. South Coast Air Quality Management District



No cohesive records on the Cisneros' operations are kept here, though the SCAQMD does have a copy of a report from the State Fire Marshal's office. This report tells of a chemical incident in 1984, at which time a \$50,000 fine was levied against the family.



11. State Fire Marshal's Office and local Fire Department



It was discovered that the site was virtually unknown to these agencies until 1980. In 1984 a fire broke out at their facility. The fire department report reads that one very hot sunny afternoon, a barrel of mixed waste expanded in the sun until it finally ruptured, catching a nearby shed on fire. The local fire department was called, and the fire was doused quickly. During the incident two fire fighters were transported to the hospital for inhalation related symptoms. The exact chemical exposure was unknown, but the fire fighters reported that it smelled like ammonia. Following this event, the State Fire Marshal's office ordered an investigation of the site. The Cisnero's paid a fine of \$50,000 for improperly stored chemicals, inadequate facilities, and inadequate emergency response procedures. They were ordered to reconstruct the facility before they would be allowed to operate once again. This act finally shut down the families business.



12. Water department and sewage district records



Perris, (where the Cisnero's family owned facility is located) has a fairly large amount of industrial chemicals in its sewage, though the numbers are not completely out of hand. When you compare the figure from 1970 to 1980 and again to 1990, however, you notice an impressive and consistent increase in the amount of Industrial solvents in the sewage - quite surprising for a relatively small, largely residential community. From the Department of Water and Power, on the other hand, you learn nothing about the brothers' operations, but you do learn that there are a number of fresh water wells within a one mile radius of the facility.

13. Utility company records



As expected, the records dating from 1950 to 1980 reveal increased electricity usage while the Cisneros' were operating a hazardous waste facility. In January of 1984, the power running to the property (with the exception of their house on the eastern side) was turned off.



14. Media reports



The local newspaper reported a chemical fire at the facility in 1984, during which time two fire fighters were taken to the hospital for chemical inhalation. The Cisneros' were fined \$50,000 for improperly stored chemicals, inadequate facilities, and inadequate emergency response procedures; and they were ordered to reconstruct the facility before they would be allowed to operate once again. In addition, in 1988 a "midnight dumper" was arrested while driving waste across the Mexican/American border into Tijuana. At his trial he was able to bargain for a relaxed sentence by naming sources of the illegal waste and other dumping spots. One of the dumping spots named was an undisclosed location in Perris. No other news reports exist.

There was a second article that revealed a real estate mogul was looking into purchasing the 100 acres to build new homes. This information caused a huge stir in the community as new homes would bring more revenue. Quietly this story was silenced as the developers uncovered the past usage of the property.



15. Employee interviews



For most of the life of this business, the family operated the entire business themselves. However, in 1976 they hired two men, one of whom you were able to interview. This man, Jamie Lourdes, told you that these Cisneros cats were really shifty low down characters in the later years. Jamie worked with the family until 1984, at which time he quit because, as he says, "I didn't care for the way they did business." "After that fire," Jim recalled, "they acted like they were shut down. But really, they just stopped the recycling stuff, or what they called recycling. What they were really doing was taking shipments of waste and just storing the barrels any which way, and sometimes pouring it straight into the ground! Their sister was such a beautiful girl until she became sick. The entire family refused to seek medical attention. I know a brother and the sister died, but I do not recall them having a funeral."