

Recycling Landfill Property

Shopping centers, resorts being built on closed dumps

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People driving past the Pacific Palms Conference Resort in Industry, with its lush, green golf courses, might not know the place used to be a dump. Literally. The Industry landfill, on top of which the resort is built, shut down operations in 1970. Later, the Industry Hills & Sheraton Resort was built on top of it.

Now it's a resort that attracts thousands to play golf, stay overnight during a business trip and hold conventions and meetings. Other cities in the San Gabriel Valley with closed landfills are also banking on big projects to turn the eyesores into recreational or commercial sites. One of the main reasons, according to Industry Mayor Dave Perez, is because landfills need to be maintained forever. Some of the closed landfills require wells to deal with gases and keep hazardous materials from seeping into the water supply. "Those wells are there forever and ever, and need to be maintained," Perez said. "If they don't put something up there that will generate revenue, it will be a drain."

Turning a heap of trash to a bustling resort, shopping center or park is not easy. It takes years to get a closed landfill up to code to satisfy federal and state regulators. "Generally speaking, landfills must be confined, compacted and covered," said Francisco Arcaute, spokesman for the Environmental Protection Agency. "Special care must be taken when dealing with sites that contain potentially hazardous substances, for these may require additional ventilation, treatment or processing."

The cities of Monterey Park and West Covina both have plans for their closed landfills. Monterey Park's former [Operating Industries Inc.](#) was dubbed by the Environmental Protection Agency as one of the most-polluted sites in the country. The federal government listed it as a Superfund site, an area in which the EPA carries out the clean-up effort.

The 60 Freeway bisects the landfill. A 45-acre parcel on the north side is the spot on which Monterey Park looks to build a retail shopping center, said City Manager Chris Jeffers. Most of the building site is flat, non-landfill land. Only about eight acres actually has trash underneath. A Home Depot and shopping center by Zelman Development is expected to open on the property in 2010. One of the obstacles the EPA faced was finding the money to pay for the landfill's closure.

The potentially responsible parties - usually large corporations and government agencies that dumped their trash at the landfill - had to get together to pay for the closure. Nearly 20 years after it became a Superfund site, all the parties are on the same page, and the cleanup and preparations are expected to be completed in about three years, Jeffers said.

"Everybody gets very anxious," Jeffers said of people who want to see something done with the landfill as soon as possible. "What they don't see is all the prep work and aggravation that goes on before - especially when other government agencies are involved."

It has been about 10 years since the [BKK Landfill at Azusa Avenue](#) in West Covina closed for good. The Big League Dreams baseball park is now under construction there. Officials expect a Home Depot and a Target will soon undergo construction on another part of the former landfill. In the 10 years, the BKK corporation ran out of money to complete the closure, the state Department of Toxic Substances Control took over and about 50 companies and government agencies were forced to pay for the cleanup.

With the landfill up to code, the long-awaited development on what used to be an eyesore has started. The city has scheduled a ground-breaking ceremony today for the Big League Dreams project.

"I believe this is going to exceed everybody's expectations, and it will be a showcase project for the San Gabriel Valley," said West Covina City Manager Andrew Pasmant. "It's been a challenging project with some obstacles."