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Tonopah Resident Appeals, Wins Favorable Order on Hickman Egg Operation from Maricopa County Air Pollution Hearing Board

Hickman facility potentially operating without valid accounting of harmful industrial henhouse emissions; County ordered to review compliance with federal Clean Air Act

PHOENIX, AZ—December 20, 2016—The Maricopa County Air Pollution Hearing Board (APHB) quietly issued an important and potential far-reaching order for Tonopah residents fighting the negative impacts of a massive industrial egg-laying facility in their neighborhood. The APHB upheld an appeal by local resident Daniel E. Blackson challenging the Maricopa County Air Quality Department (“Department”) on its June 10, 2016 approval to modify an air pollution control permit for the Hickman Egg Ranch operation.

The final order issued on December 2nd by the APHB determined that there was sufficient cause to question the propriety of the permit and remanded the permitting decision back to the Department for reconsideration of the pollution emissions from the industrial-sized henhouses.

Representing himself pro se at the APHB hearing, Blackson was supported by the local citizens group [STOPP Inc. \(Save Tonopah Oppose Poultry Plant\)](#) and the national nonprofit [Socially Responsible Agricultural Project \(SRAP\)](#).

“Every member of our community has the right to expect enforcement of the rules that protect us from unlawful and unhealthy air emissions,” said Blackson. “For nearly three years, no one from the state or county government has given the Hickman pollution issue an honest listen and weighed the facts fairly. I’m gratified that the Air Pollution Hearing Board has given health and happiness a toe-hold in Tonopah.”

The basis for Blackson’s appeal was the Department’s refusal to account for all of the air pollution being emitted from the Hickman operation. The permit issued in June only regulates minor sources of pollution from the facility generated by emergency generators used to operate the fans on the buildings in the event of a power outage. The Department did not account for pollution, including volatile organic compounds, being emitted from buildings that house up to 8-million birds -- a calculation misstep that vastly understated the amount of potentially harmful pollutants coming from the Hickman operation. Industrial animal confinement air pollution can also carry other harmful elements out into the community if not properly regulated, such as methane and ammonia, and particulates carrying fecal matter, dander, bacteria and viruses.

STOPP, SRAP and Blackson agree the facility should have been regulated as a major source of pollution under the federal Clean Air Act, which the County is responsible for administering under the authority of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

“From the Clean Air Act to the County’s own air quality rules, the Air Quality Department had a more than sufficient regulatory framework to consider the henhouses as sources of air pollution,” said Blackson. “And they chose not to. Without question, the henhouses are the greatest source of pollution of the entire operation.”

The Department contended that the Hickman egg operation, as a whole, is an “agricultural practice” and is exempt from air pollution permitting. The APHB has now ordered that decision to be reviewed.

Hickman Family Farms is an Arizona corporation with a history of receiving public complaints involving noxious odors, significant air emissions, large-scale fly swarms, hazardous dead animal spills, rodent infestation, dust, feather and insect proliferation, and escalating noise pollution. It is also currently the target of an ongoing Clean Air Act investigation by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

“It’s only a first step for the residents, but we’ll take it,” said Dan Mack, Chairman of STOPP, Inc. “This operation threatens our air, our water, our health and our local economy. Why the County thought it was acceptable to approve the construction of such a dangerous source of community pollution without proper environmental review is a mystery that needs solving.”

The APHB order comes at a time when the Hickman operation continues to grow. Plans are for they egg production facility to expand to nearly 10 million birds at an industrial-scale compound of 28 large laying houses, 2 processing plants and 4 industrial-sized egg production wastewater ponds storing more than 3 million gallons of contaminated liquid open to the environment and the community.

“This milestone finding by the Air Pollution Hearing Board validates concerns that have been raised by members of this community over the Hickman operation from day one,” said Danielle Diamond, Executive Director of SRAP. “A light has been turned on, and now the County needs to revise its approach to regulating the facility and make decisions with more than just local residents watching.”

To view the Maricopa County Air Pollution Board Final Decision and Order, please click [here](#).

To view videos highlighting the impact and effects of the Hickman operations on the residents of Tonopah, please go to the [STOPP YouTube channel](#).

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About STOPP Inc. (Save Tonopah Oppose Poultry Plant)

STOPP is a not-for-profit community organization working to protect the safety of their local community and the quiet use and enjoyment of residents’ property, as well as to encourage and maintain the financial health and growth of businesses in the Tonopah community. More information can be found at www.tonopahstopp.com.

About Socially Responsible Agricultural Project (SRAP)

SRAP is a national nonprofit organization working in rural communities across the country on the front lines of factory farm expansion. SRAP provides no-cost engineering, technical, educational, organizational and communications support, assisting citizens in the protection of their homes and the preservation of responsible family farming and ranching. For more information, go to www.sraproject.org.