

Murphy: Criticisms of Vector Control

Contributed by Philip Murphy
Wednesday, 24 June 2009

All Lake County property owners should know the following:

Lake County Vector Control has nine employees (seven full- and two part-time). In the 2008-09 fiscal year it budgeted \$871,000 for salary and benefits, and the average employee received nearly \$100,000 in compensation. The office manager is paid more than our county supervisors while the director is now paid \$103,690 in salary alone. In the same time period requests for service dropped by almost 50 percent.

Vector Control spent roughly 7 percent of its entire 2008-09 budget to spray rice paddies in Tule Lake and the reclamation area with over 13 tons of pesticides, over \$90,000 was spent on the pesticide and crop duster alone, at no charge to the growers.

Vector Control owns 12 road vehicles including a new GMC Yukon SUV, the only Vector Control vehicle without the Vector Control logo on its side. Vector Control owns 10 acres of unused land in the reclamation area, several more acres at its facility on Todd road and several more parcels in downtown Lakeport.

While the lab facility on Esplanade is in need of some improvements, the office (located behind the lab), is very modern and spacious, with a nicely appointed board room that has an outstanding view of the lake and Mt. Konocti, and which also overlooks the large and elaborate dock featuring a covered electric boat lift. Vector Control also owns four large motorized barges, which have been virtually unused since 1975.

Vector Control's 2008-09 fiscal year budget was \$1,348,030 (an increase of 75 percent over the 2004-05 budget), but it has no Web site though public outreach/education is one of its main stated goals. It has no computerized record keeping for bookkeeping or research, in spite of accounting software being very affordable.

Budget reserves for 2008-09 are \$358,432, and over \$126,000 was spent on the assessment proposal.

This isn't the same picture promoted by Vector Control in the local media, where residents were warned that if the assessment failed to pass it would result in staff reductions and reduced service.

Vector Control has not made any serious attempt to deal with any potential cuts other than asking property owners for a permanent assessment, which is likely to increase by 3 percent every year – forever.

The Vector Control director has been made aware of multiple significant misstatements in the media regarding Vector Control, but has chosen not to correct them.

One of these misstatements is that Vector Control relies entirely on "environmentally friendly" methods including mosquito fish to control mosquitoes. Such methods are employed, but so are three toxic pesticides, two of which kill fish and another which kills bees.

Vector Control has a capable, hardworking and experienced staff that performs an important function, yet it fails in several respects. It has failed to show proper fiscal restraint and oversight, in part due to its primitive bookkeeping methods.

It has failed to properly inform the public, due in part to its lack of a Web site and also due to the failure of its director to correct misinformation in the media and Vector Control literature.

Vector Control has failed to explore other means of reducing costs before asking for the assessment, and failed to properly utilize existing assets.

Ballots are due for the proposed assessments by June 30 and many people have already voted.

However, in view of the fact that so little correct information has been available to the public about this issue I will personally collect requests from voters wanting to change their vote and submit those requests to the board.

Please contact me at 279-9836 or hellsbnd@pacific.net and leave your name and phone number.

As Vector Control's newest trustee I look forward to helping correct the deficiencies I have mentioned, regardless of whether or not the tax measure passes.

Philip Murphy lives in Finley.