



Complaints of dust pollution threaten horse ranch

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Chris Wilson is frustrated. After receiving a public nuisance notice from the county about dust on his horse ranch, he said he has been trying to comply with the regulations but so far not to the satisfaction of the San Diego County Air Pollution Control District.

Wilson and his wife, Jennifer, own CJ's Ranches at Highway 78 and Ash Street. They train, board and sell horses and give lessons. Since opening on Aug. 1, business had been good. But, Wilson said, evidently some neighbors complained about the dust, resulting in the Air Pollution Control District issuing the Wilsons a public nuisance violation on Sept. 30.

Although he was given a timeframe in which to respond and tell what he did to comply, Wilson said there was no guidance with the violation. He contacted the county's small business assistance program to find out what to do and said he was told "use as much water as you need to use."

Anita Tinsley, public information specialist for the air pollution control district, agreed that watering the ground as much as possible is the right thing to do.

Asked about using so much water to abate the dust while the county is facing a water shortage, Tinsley replied, "It's a balance."

Wilson said he bought a water truck to use on the arena and driveway. He has lined all the pastures in front with sprinklers. He irrigates at night so the water can soak in, the ground can stay moist and keep the dust down.

"I try to be smart about it," he said.

Wilson leases the 20-acre property. When he first leased the land, he said there were partial fences "here and there."

Currently, he has about 100 horses on 10 acres. As time goes on and he is able to build more fences, Wilson said he can spread the horses around the property.

"It takes time and money," Wilson said of creating more pastures and irrigating.

He knew one neighbor complained about the dust and the traffic, but said another neighbor seemed happy to see someone move in.

Over the decades the property, which is zoned agricultural, has seen a variety of businesses. From what he has heard, the property has been used to raise thoroughbreds for the horse track, conduct horse auctions, and was once a turkey farm. Wilson said he has talked to people who used to go to dances in the barn, which he estimates to be around 60 years old. In recent years, Wilson said, the property was used by a drug dealer.

The land is hard, he said, and had not been used in 15 years.

With the increased watering and moving the horses around, the dust situation has vastly improved, said Wilson. He saw the air pollution control inspector come to watch the property a couple of times and waited for some word from the county. That came this month in the way of a second notice.

According to Wilson, the letter from the inspector stated that he had been watching the property for a month and steps had not been adequately taken to abate the violation, so the second notice was sent.

With the first notice, Wilson said he thought the district only received two complaints, followed by the inspector then interviewing neighbors.

Tinsley said the violation was based on a number of complaints received by the department. She said she could not discuss the details of the violation because it is an ongoing investigation.

The amount of dust and the size of the particulates and how they impact the people in the area is what concerns the air pollution control district, explained Tinsley.

Tinsley referred to information posted on the district's Web site which states that particles 10 microns or less are capable of bypassing the body's natural defenses in the nose and throat and entering the lungs. Particles 2.5 to 10 microns tend to collect in the upper portion of the respiratory system, according to the web site.

The district wants to protect people's health around there, Tinsley said.

Owning a horse ranch is a new experience for Wilson, a former crew chief on helicopters in the Marine Corps. He learned about horses when he met his wife while he was based at Miramar.

"She trained horses for most of her life," he said.

He is enjoying the work on the ranch. "I've always been an outdoor person," he said.

Now he'd just like the public nuisance violations to be resolved and to receive some guidance.

Before the second notice was mailed, Tinsley said, "We'll work with him and try to resolve the matter," to protect the health of the residents and to help Wilson succeed.