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Brentwood's Toxic Grave

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Historic dumping grounds beneath the spectacular VA land finally get tested.

By Michael Collins Thursday, Dec 10 2009 ...continued from page 1

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But in a 2006 interview, Ben K. Spivey, then chief of occupational health and safety at the VA, said that a mound of plant-covered debris, roughly near the center of the historic dump, marks an area where biomedical waste was deposited — after being excavated from land now beneath the exclusive, adjacent Brentwood School.

Some residents and parents were worried after Phase One results by a testing contractor found potential problems near and on Brentwood School land and the arroyos, or washes, that run along the western edge of the VA's land.

"The average readings for the East Arroyo, West Arroyo and the Brentwood School lower soccer fields were notably above" control areas with natural levels of radiation, according to the contractor, Pleasant Hill-based Millennium Consulting.

Millennium recommended further investigation, citing "strong concern by members of the community," historical documentation of dumping, and radiation detected by the contractor.

Buried radioactive materials may not be the only problem. After analyzing thousands of pages in dozens of VA reports that Waxman posted on his Web site, the Weekly has learned that Brentwood School's fields may contain heavy metals. According to heavy-metal readings from a November 21, 2000, Locus Technologies report called "Brentwood School Athletic Fields Grading Project and Recreation Facility Project," arsenic was found at 32 times the natural level while thallium was at an amount that the government terms "chronic" for causing disease. Brentwood School head Michael D. Pratt says that in 2006 Environ conducted a \$150,000 study in response to findings reported on EnviroReporter.com. According to Pratt, testing for "radionuclides, hydrocarbons, VOCs and various heavy metals,



Courtesy of enviroreporter.com. Circa 1970s- Dumping into unlined VA ravines and lands adjacent to Brentwood went on for decades.



Courtesy of enviroreporter.com. A discarded grave marker unveiled by soil erosion at the old dump. Strict rules governing how to discard military gravestones went ignored.



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including arsenic and thallium," failed to detect any thallium and arsenic "in concentrations above normal background levels."

However, according to documents and maps obtained by the Weekly, only four of the 12 soil borings taken by Environ were in areas known to contain toxic waste or incinerator ash from cremated lab animals at UCLA and the VA.

In one January 2000 document, the firm URS Greiner Woodward Clyde reported to the VA that Brentwood School's athletic fields were built in an area used as a dump by three hospitals until the early 1970s.

Brentwood School has insisted that the property where the football and baseball fields are located is free of waste. However, according to the Locus report, old medical syringes floated up to the surface in October 2000 during construction of a drain for the school's football field.

"The syringes were often in plastic bags," reported URS. After that, the so-called lower bench, where the Brentwood Eagles play football, was covered by a thick layer of asphalt that today is hidden beneath the turf.

—Contact the writer at EnviroReporter.com, where reporters Michael Collins and Denise Duffield exposed the existence of the historic dump in May 2006.

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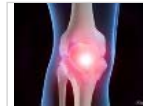


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