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For Immediate Release: **June 24, 2020**



PRESS RELEASE

Contact: Luis Olmedo / Comite Civico del Valle (760) 587-9952
Bradley Angel / Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice (415) 722-5270

“Clean Harbors” Hazardous Waste Landfill in Westmorland, California to Close Permanently

Community & Environmental Justice Groups Cheer Decision, Demand Closure of State’s Two Remaining Toxic Dumps and Call for Comprehensive Plan to Reduce Generation of Toxic Waste

Westmorland, CA – California Environmental Protection Agency/Department of Toxic Substances Control has announced that Clean Harbors has notified DTSC that it will stop all operations and begin final closure for their Westmorland hazardous waste landfill in the Imperial Valley.” Clean Harbors’ notification letter on June 5, 2020 stated that any future treatment, storage and disposal operations have ceased.

The community-based organizations Comite Civico del Valle and Greenaction cheered the decision to close the Westmorland toxic waste landfill. Comite Civico del Valle, Greenaction, and the California Environmental Justice Coalition are now joining together to demand that (1) the remaining two toxic dumps in the state also be closed due to racially discriminatory permit processes and threats to the health of vulnerable communities who have been dumped on for decades; (2) DTSC immediately comply with its broken and unfulfilled commitment to begin an intensive and comprehensive program to work with industry to reduce the use of toxic chemicals and the generation of hazardous wastes; and (3) DTSC only allow hazardous waste to be disposed of in facilities that have no environmental or environmental justice impacts, and they should not be located in environmentally sensitive areas or in vulnerable low income or communities of color. “This is great news! The closure of the site is long-overdue, but it is a great action taken to rightfully serve the disadvantaged community of Westmorland and the rest of the Imperial County, especially with the cumulative impacts of COVID-19 on Latino and farmworker population.” Said Luis Olmedo, Executive Director of Comite Civico del Valle. “While this news is promising, there remains action to be taken in other underserved communities that face similar challenges of inequity, environmental racism, and social justice. Take the PureGro case in Brawley as an additional local example.”

Chemical Waste Management’s Kettleman Hills Facility and Clean Harbors’ Buttonwillow landfill, like the Westmorland dump, are all located in predominantly Latinx, Spanish speaking farmworker communities. All three dumps were approved decades ago with racially discriminatory permit processes where the government used English only permit processes, denying the Spanish speaking residents their right to meaningful civic engagement. In Kettleman City and Buttonwillow, the government used police intimidation and threats in illegal attempts to crush community opposition. Both of these landfills are operating on expired permits, and DTSC is dragging their feet on new permit processes where the public can raise their concerns.

“While we celebrate the closure of the Westmorland toxic waste landfill, it is time for industry and government to stop dumping toxic waste and polluting low-income and communities of color,” said Bradley Angel, Executive Director of Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice. “We need environmental justice, not more toxic dumping in vulnerable communities.”

235 Main Street, Brawley, CA 92227 • Tel: (760) 351-8761 • Fax: (760) 351-8762