

Asphalt plant near Río Grande Gorge raises ire of Earthship community

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A plan to relocate a mobile asphalt plant from the Taos Regional Airport to a property west of the Rio Grande Gorge has some residents of the nearby Earthship subdivision worried about possible impacts to their health, homes and property values.

Now that most of the construction for the airport expansion is done, Joe Perovich, owner of Taos Gravel Products, is ready to move the portable asphalt operation to his other property, he told The Taos News on Monday (April 8).

Taos Gravel Products has a general construction permit, specifically for asphalt plants, that was originally issued in

2011.

This is the second time the company has moved the asphalt plant, according to an April 10 letter from Denise Huff of the New Mexico Environment Department, which issues and monitors such permits for air-quality standards.

According to a publicly posted notice, Perovich is preparing to relocate a 250ton asphalt plant under the current permit. Asphalt is principally used in road construction and patching, such as filling potholes.

However, that plan has some residents concerned.

“Greater World is an example to the rest of the world of how to live in these environmentally stressed times,” said John LaSala, a resident at the Earthship community northwest of the Río Grande Gorge Bridge, known as Greater World.

“What [Taos Gravel Products] proposes flies in the face of what is beautiful, unique, otherworldly and clean about [Northern] New Mexico. It offends the forward-thinking sensibility and environmental sensitivity of those who live here at Greater World .

The environment department’s Air Quality Bureau must approve or deny the relocation request. “Based on our preliminary review of the relocation notification, the applicant will meet the requirements for relocation,” according to the department’s letter to the public.

The operation of the mobile plant in this location is estimated not to exceed 25 days, the projected length of the project being undertaken for work on State Road 68.

“The asphalt plant is set up at the gravel pit but not operating until [the department] approves the notice,” read the letter. “The project will run consistently from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m., 5 days per week, but definitely not Saturday and Sunday due to overtime costs.

“The public notice posting relocation notice contains the maximum amount of emissions that are allowed to be emitted under the GCP-3 [General Construction Permit]. This facility will actually emit fewer pollutants than are listed in the relocation notice,” read Huff’s letter.

Huff’s letter also says that should the relocation be approved, it would have several limitations imposed on the project.

“This facility’s permitted production limit is 600 tons per hour (tph). The production at this location, however, will be limited to 250 tph,” it read.

“Rock-crushing operations will cease prior to the startup of the asphalt plant and cannot resume until after the asphalt plant ceases operations at this location. The facility will be required to apply base course (a mixture of sand and gravel) to the haul roads and water these roads to minimize dust emissions.”

The New Mexico Environment Department regulates six common air pollutants under the provisions of the Clean Air Act.

According to an environment department map of regulated pollution sources, Taos Gravel Products has two other permits along U.S. 64 west between El Prado and the Gorge Bridge. Robert Medina and Sons operates a rock crusher in the area, while Vigil’s Asphalt & Gravel operates an asphalt plant.

Still, the public is invited to submit comments on the proposed asphalt plant relocation. Comments are due by 5 p.m. on April 24.