

Nitrates handled cheaply?

SCIENTIST TALKS OF WASTEWATER SYSTEMS

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A Cayucos scientist said he knows how to cheaply solve Los Osos' nitrate problem, but has felt discouraged in the past by the lack of interest from governing agencies.

John Alexander presented his ideas at a meeting June 7 for Citizens for an Affordable Safe Environment.

Alexander and others addressed possible alternatives to the Los Osos Community Services District's \$84.6 million plan to install a centralized sewer to clean up the nitrates in the area, said to be caused by septic tanks.

The Sun Bulletin interviewed Alexander before the meeting.

"The treatment plant water isn't nearly as clean as what we're talking about," Alexander said. In fact, one of his inventions, the galvanic agglutinator, was designed to clean up the mess made after traditional sewer treatment plants were used or in industry where traditional treatment doesn't work, he said. In addition to removing nitrates, his system removes pathogens and heavy metals, which the standard treatment plants don't.

"I hope that we can take care of all our problems — water, flooding and so called nitrate problem — all for under \$10 million," Alexander said. "It really grieves me to see the people taking such a licking in Los Osos."

But Alexander acknowledged the Regional Water Quality Control Board is calling the shots, and hasn't ac-

Alexander

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cepted any of the solutions the CSD offered except a centralized system.

Alexander said he presented his solutions for cleaning up Los Osos' problems even before the LOCSO was formed, when the CSA-9 was looking at the nitrate situation.

He'd also gave information to former supervisor Bud Laurent, the County of San Luis Obispo, and the Regional Water Quality Control Board.

"I'd given them four different methods," Alexander said, adding, "I never got any response," other than being told nothing new would be done. "I figured it's a hopeless case," Alexander said.

But he became involved again this past year, after CASE formed and began to hold public meetings and broadcast on cable television.

The CSD sewer is "unbelievably expensive," Alexander believes, and serves no practical purpose.

He said that the CSD board has hired consultants that make money on big systems, who in turn find data to support using centralized sewers.

Alexander said his plan, at an eighth of the cost, involves initially pumping the upper aquifer from some existing contaminated wells, treating it and putting it into the bay.

Once the water table is lowered, then most of the leach lines from the septic tanks would work again, he said.

The next step would involve buying land up valley, pumping treated water to irrigation areas there, with the water underneath



SUN BULLETIN PHOTO BY LEE SUTTER
James Alexander

the land serving as a reserve supply for Los Osos.

Alexander differs with those who have said farmers aren't interested. He said farmers have told him they like the idea.

Eventually, Alexander would like to the excess water used in a shellfish industry, giving the community a means to make money to pay for the system.

Lowering the upper aquifer water table would allow existing septic tanks that are too close to water to work effectively, he said.

Although the controlling agencies say that 30 feet is necessary between the tanks and the aquifer, Alexander said with Los Osos soil, only 6 feet of dry soil is needed to clean up the waste.

Although the CSD and RWQCB have said the Porter Cologne Act restricts moving water, Alexander feels that's a convenient excuse for the governing agencies not to consider the export plan.

Alexander said that law is broken all the time, such as with the California aqueduct, or moving water from Nacimiento or San Antonio lakes or allowing farmers to exchange water amongst themselves.

Because Alexander gets royalties from his water-cleansing inventions, he's wary of seeming self-serving. He offers his equipment for free for the experiment. "I would loan the community equipment that would knock nitrates and pathogens out of the water if they would just put in lines to the bay.

One to three systems could handle 1 1/2 million gallons of water a day. Six wells are already available to pump from, he said.

Even though the danger of nitrates is still disputed — based on two cases of blue baby syndrome — Alexander sees no point in addressing that now, since the RWQCB is focused on reducing nitrates.

One of Alexander's recent projects was assisting two carrot processing plants in Bakersfield who have gone from using 8 million gallons of water a day to a half million, the scientist said.

Alexander is seeking to help his neighbors in the South Bays as part of his global outlook, not for personal gain.

"My main thrust is to try to solve water and pollution problems and even famine in the world," he said.

John Alexander Research is a versatile environmental solutions corporation, he said, and among reasons the International Biographical Center named him scientist of the year. Among other honors: the International Who's Who.

While president, Ronald Reagan named Alexander to his science committee.