

# State of emergency request over Chiquita denied

TYLER WAINFELD(HTTPS://SIGNALSCV.COM/AUTHOR/TWAINFELD/) OCTOBER 24, 2024 7:57 PM



*Protestors and local officials gather at Hasley Canyon Park Tuesday morning for the Chiquita Landfill Press Conference to call on California and Los Angeles to declare a State of Emergency on Oct. 15. Habeba Mostafa/ The Signal*

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A bipartisan request made to Gov. Gavin Newsom seeking a state of emergency regarding the situation at Chiquita Canyon Landfill was denied on Thursday.

In a Thursday letter to 17 California legislators, including Rep. Mike Garcia, R-Santa Clarita, and Assemblywoman Pilar Schiavo, D-Chatsworth, California Office of Emergency Services Director Nancy Ward said a state of emergency “would not at this time assist efforts to respond to this event.”

“In particular, no state laws or regulations impeding response or recovery have been identified to date, and therefore, no suspensions pursuant to the Emergency Services Act authority are presently necessary,” Ward wrote. “Further, a proclamation is not necessary for deployment of state resources or a federal response.”

The Signal obtained a copy of the letter after business hours on Thursday. Responses from legislators and county officials will be sought Friday morning.

Garcia and Schiavo had sent a letter to Newsom Oct. 9 calling on the governor to declare a state of emergency and to request assistance with helping residents in the Castaic and Val Verde areas, two of the closest to the landfill.

Residents of both Castaic and Val Verde have been complaining for more than a year of potential health risks involved with a subsurface reaction at the landfill that has created inordinate amounts of leachate and a nauseating smell.

In the bipartisan letter, it was stated that Schiavo had spent a night at one of the 14 homes closest to the landfill, which have been reported to be the home of a "cancer cluster," and Schiavo experienced "difficulty breathing, burning eyes and skin, a headache, and the next morning she had a nosebleed."

Four people in that cluster of homes have been diagnosed with cancer in the past year, the letter states. It also called for a "longitudinal health study to collect appropriate data and fully understand the impact of the toxic landfill on the health of the community."

L.A. County Supervisor Kathryn Barger has said a declaration of a state of emergency would not resolve the issues surrounding the landfill. County officials have repeatedly cited all of the resources that have been deployed to help residents, including a pair of joint county, state and federal task forces.

Last week, Barger and Barbara Ferrer, head of the county Department of Public Health, asked for the county's Cancer Surveillance Program to investigate the reported "cancer clusters."

"The concerns regarding cancer clusters are serious," the letter from Barger and Ferrer states. "Identifying increases in cancer cases and identifying a definitive cause can be challenging. Given your expertise in analyzing cancer trends, we believe your insights will be invaluable."

The Cancer Surveillance Program's mission is to monitor and identify cancer disparities by delivering high-quality, complete, and robust data to reduce morbidity and mortality, according to the county release. The program has existed since 1972 and is operated by the Keck School of Medicine of the University of Southern California.

The federal Environmental Protection Agency has collected data that shows an unhealthy amount of airborne chemicals coming from the landfill, which has led to "extreme precautions" being taken at excavation sites, though no such precautions have been granted to neighborhoods in close proximity to the landfill, states the bipartisan letter that had sought the emergency declaration.

Ward referenced those coordinated efforts in her letter, saying the state EPA and multiple agencies under its umbrella have been devoting resources on top of federal resources that have been deployed.

"The various federal, state and local regulatory agencies involved continue to exercise their regulatory oversight authority and take enforcement actions against Chiquita Canyon Landfill as warranted," Ward wrote, "including actions by the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board to ensure slope stability and by the Department of Toxic Substances Control to minimize the potential release of hazardous waste."

Residents affected by the landfill have complained of difficulties in receiving the benefits administered by Waste Connections, which owns the landfill.

The landfill continues to deny the existence of any health impacts and cited studies that have showed “no anticipated short- or long-term health impacts due to emissions.”

“Chiquita fully recognizes and regrets that neighboring communities are suffering odor-related impacts as a result of the reaction,” according to an email last week from John Musella, spokesman for Chiquita Canyon Landfill. “Chiquita is working hard to address and mitigate these impacts. Adjacent neighbors participating in the Chiquita Community Relief Program have thus far directly received nearly \$9 million from Chiquita. In addition, Chiquita has distributed over 1,700 air purifiers to local residents and ensured every school classroom around the landfill has been outfitted with carbon filtration devices.”

Garcia recently introduced a bill in the House of Representatives that “ensures that current and future payments will not be considered taxable income, providing much-needed relief to families impacted by this disaster,” according to a release from Garcia’s office.

## **Tyler Wainfeld**

Tyler Wainfeld is a San Fernando Valley native and covers education, sports and whatever else the Santa Clarita Valley has to offer. He was previously the sports editor at The Daily Sundial, CSUN's student newspaper, and The Record-Argus in Greenville, Pennsylvania. He can be reached via phone at 661-287-5539, via email at [twainfeld@signalscv.com](mailto:twainfeld@signalscv.com), or on X (formerly known as Twitter) at [@TylerWainfeld](https://twitter.com/TylerWainfeld).

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