

Illicit landfills are a growing problem in eastern Alameda County. Ranchers and farmers are being paid to accept huge amounts of soil dumped onto their properties, often from construction sites around the Bay Area and potentially contaminated with toxics. Since this soil is ostensibly to be used for agricultural purposes it is exempted from any county oversight or regulation. This dirt importing has reached massive proportions in Sunol, unincorporated Livermore, and Pleasanton, up to up to a million cubic yards on some properties. There is potential harm to groundwater, creeks, and drainage and concerns about dust and air pollution.

Because of multiple citizen complaints, Alameda County imposed a temporary moratorium on importing soil to agricultural lands, but the moratorium was ignored by many landowners. The moratorium will expire soon, and Alameda County has been working on a new [Soil Importing Ordinance](#) to manage imported soil.

Unfortunately the ordinance has been watered down and does not fully address the environmental problems caused by soil dumping. The County is trying to exempt the ordinance from environmental review, even though the policy would allow sensitive wildlife habitats to be buried by up to 3 to 5 feet of imported soil, and exempts ephemeral and intermittent creeks from the policy. The policy could result in pollution of creeks, and killing of native wildlife, especially animals that depend on underground burrows, such as burrowing owls, tiger salamanders and red-legged frogs.

Please send comments by Monday to the Alameda County Planning Department

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Or attend a public hearing on the soil importing ordinance next Monday, April 8 in Castro Valley, at 6 pm at the Castro Valley Library, Chabot Room, 3600 Norbridge Avenue, in Castro Valley

Please tell the Alameda County Planning Department to strengthen the new ordinance to adequately protect sensitive native wildlife and protect streams. The County should conduct an environmental review of the soil importing ordinance under the California Environmental Quality Act. Agricultural lands accepting soil imports should be required to pay for biological surveys of dumping areas for sensitive wildlife and plant species, and no permits should be issued for soil importing that would harm or cover habitat for protected or sensitive species. County approval of large soil fill projects should be subject to review by state and federal wildlife agencies. The ordinance needs to cover ephemeral and intermittent creeks and must provide landowners seeking a county permit clear guidance on the need to identify state and federal jurisdictional waters in consultation with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Regional Water Quality Control Board, and should provide appropriate contact information for those agencies. Landowners should be warned of the potential penalties for placing dirt fill in jurisdictional waters without federal and state permits.

For more information:

Inform Sunol web page: [Soil Importing into Unincorporated Alameda County](#)

Sierra Club web page: [Unregulated Landfills Are a Problem in Rural Alameda County](#)