

As crisis brews in landfill, no easy answers

Calls grow to close Chiquita Canyon, but experts say that won't stop the smoldering.

By TONY BRISCOE

Federal regulators say it's an imminent danger, a Los Angeles County supervisor says she has "lost faith" in its management and aggrieved neighbors have filed two lawsuits demanding an end to its operations. Some residents recently complained that its odors are so pungent they have been made to gag or vomit.

As owners of the troubled Chiquita Canyon Landfill struggle to contain noxious fumes and contaminated runoff caused by an underground garbage fire, residents and public officials increasingly are calling for the Castaic facility's closure.

Yet even as efforts to shut down the facility gather strength, some officials and environmental advocates are skeptical such a move will help. They say that not only would closing the landfill fail to solve the crisis, it would strain the region's system of waste collection, raise fees and increase truck traffic and pollution.

"It's not going to do anything to help with the existing problem," said Jane Williams, executive director of California Communities Against Toxics. "If you decide you want to close the landfill because it's a god-awful mess, then you should do that. But that's not going to help the potential endangerment problem."

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, a heat-producing chemical reaction likely started deep within a closed portion of the landfill in May 2022. Since then, increasing heat and pressure have created volcano-like conditions, triggering eruptions of benzene-contaminated water and the release of noxious gases. The agency, which is overseeing efforts to [See **Landfill**, A7]



SUKHWINDER Singh Sidhu, in a suit, celebrates a Sikh spiritual leader's birthday at Gurdwara Sahib, a Sikh temple in Stockton.

A locus of Sikhs' secession drive

This farming city in the Central Valley has made headlines for its financial struggles and its annual asparagus festival. But thousands of miles away in India, Stockton is a symbol of terrorism.

To hear the Hindu-dominated media and government tell it, militants funded by the Sikh diaspora will stop at nothing to take over Punjab — the only Indian state where Sikhs are a majority — and turn it into a country of their own called Khalistan.

At the center of the separatist movement is the oldest Sikh house of worship in America: the Gurdwara Sahib, a collection of modest brick buildings located near a rail yard just south of downtown Stockton.

Congregants acknowledge that some Sikh groups advocate violence in the push to create a breakaway republic where members of their faith can live without discrimination or fears that the Indian government will seize their farmland. But they say their own efforts are limited to peaceful protest and referendums to demonstrate support for Khalistan among the diaspora.

"We fight with the ballot not the bullet," says Sukhwinder Singh Sidhu, who lives in Stock-

A diaspora push to create a nation called Khalistan in India's Punjab state finds support at a temple in Stockton

Story by Jaweed Kaleem | Photographs by Irfan Khan
REPORTING FROM STOCKTON



BANNERS at the temple, the oldest Sikh house of worship in the United States, underscore the campaign for self-determination.

ton and owns a trucking company. "We want our own nation where we can control our destiny. We want to show that the majority of Sikhs want Khalistan, not India."

The conflict exploded into public view in September when Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau publicly accused the Indian government of orchestrating the assassination of a Sikh activist who three months earlier was shot dead outside his temple in suburban Vancouver.

India denied the claim, but accused Canada of giving "shelter" to extremists and said the activist was the leader of an underground militant group.

Then in a federal indictment in November, the U.S. government said an Indian spy paid a hit man — an undercover law enforcement agent, it turned out — to kill a Sikh activist in New York.

At the Stockton temple, these developments have only fueled the drive for secession.

On a Sunday in the fall, hymnals blared as hundreds of men and women — farmers, gas station owners, truckers, tech workers and physicians — paraded around the temple grounds, singing, banging on drums and [See **Sikhs**, A5]

COLUMN ONE

Do vegetarians smell different from meat-eaters?

Memory of her father's long-ago experiment in deer-hunting leads a runner on a quest to find out about scent, prey and predators

By SUSANNE RUST

Running along the trails that whipsaw through the oak forests of the Palo Alto hills, I was hit with a musky, skunky smell that made the hair on my neck stand up.

I don't know if it was a mountain lion, but something in the deep recesses of my brain told me to stop running, move slowly and keep my wits about me — all the while ruing the day I had become a vegetarian.

Suddenly and surprisingly, I found myself recalling an experiment my dad conducted in the 1980s when he tested the idea that animals — i.e., deer — could discriminate between the odors of meat-eaters and vegetarians.

Forty years later, I was taking my dad's question in a new, situation-specific direction: Can a mountain lion, by scent, detect a vegetarian? And though mountain lions occasionally consume carnivores and omnivores, did I smell more like easy prey — i.e., [See **Scent**, A10]



MICHAEL BLACKSHIRE Los Angeles Times

A HARMONIOUS RESCUE

Dirk Braun, left, and Kyril Kasimoff hold parts of an 1875 piano damaged in a recent mudslide. The piano is on display in Malibu. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

Gold Cup victory stokes U.S. hopes

Women's national team knocks off Brazil and feels good heading into Olympics. **SPORTS, B10**

Good time for all at upbeat Oscars

Jimmy Kimmel kept it light in a predictable yet never boring show. **CALENDAR, E1**

Weather

Low clouds clearing. L.A. Basin: 66/51. **B6**

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Doctored photo is a major royal oops

Princess of Wales is sorry for 'confusion' over pic with kids, but it's a credibility blow for a family in crisis.

By NARDINE SAAD

Catherine, Princess of Wales, issued an apology Monday for distributing an image that had been manipulated, only heightening speculation about her health and whereabouts since she had surgery in January.

Kensington Palace had released the image of the former Kate Middleton and her children the day before, apparently hoping to ease questions that have fueled worry as well as online sleuthing and conspiracy theories.

But her admission that the image had been doc-

tored has only heightened controversy and raised serious questions about the way the royal family has handled the princess' health.

"The palace clearly messed up. Full stop. You don't release a manipulated image with the world watching," said Mike Ananny, co-director of the Center for Generative AI and Society and co-director of the Artificial Intelligence for Media & Storytelling initiative at USC.

It breaks "this myth that royals are showing us genuine trusted images," he added. "This historically is a moment of 'Can we trust images and public institutions?' being blown up."

Kensington Palace on Sunday released the Princess of Wales' first photo since her hospitalization for abdominal surgery nearly two months ago, but the Associated Press and other news agencies retracted the [See **Princess**, A7]



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