

Washington County Land Use Authority Commissioners
c/o Washington County Planning Department
197 East Tabernacle St.
St. George, UT 84770

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Subject: Good Earth Minerals Application for Conditional Use Permit to Mine the GEM
Gypsum Mine located near SunRiver and Bloomington

Dear Commissioner:

This letter registers our objections to permitting the proposed Good Earth Minerals Company gypsum mine located five miles west of SunRiver St. George. Our views are shared by many of the residents of SunRiver.

This mining operation will be in close proximity, less than five miles from two major suburbs of St. George City: the senior community of SunRiver; and Bloomington. Mining will create objectionable and dangerous dust and noise that nearby residents will have to endure for at least the 20-year projected life of the operation. SunRiver is already burdened by blasting noise and dust created by the nearby gypsum mine in the Arizona Strip. We do not want our community and our health to be further compromised by the addition of another mine that would be not only closer to SunRiver, but upwind as well.

As evidenced by the existing gypsum mine in the Arizona Strip about eight miles south of SunRiver Saint George, gypsum mining operations create immense quantities of fine dust. GEM claims in their environmental assessment that dust will be controlled, but this claim is questionable. And, what an incredible waste of water in this arid region!

Particularly in the case of blasting, there is no way to control dust. The applicant's proposed use of water trucks may be of value in reducing dust from excavation and transportation. Even then, it will take immense quantities of water and a focused effort to prevent significant quantities of dust from being released.

Who will monitor the mine and the haul road on a regular basis to insure that dust is being controlled properly by the applicant? Lacking any firm commitment it seems obvious that neither the County nor the BLM (nor any other agency) would be willing to enforce proper dust control, which would constitute virtually a full time job whenever the mine is operating.

Common in this region is soil contaminated with the spores of a fungus called *Coccidioides Immitis*. When contaminated soil is disturbed, the fungi spores can be stirred into the air and carried by the wind for miles. There are frequent winds that blow out of the southwest directly towards Bloomington and SunRiver from the vicinity of the proposed mine. If the spores are breathed, *Coccidioidomycosis* disease (commonly called Valley Fever) may result. It begins as a respiratory illness and may progress to a persistent infection. Disseminated *Coccidioidomycosis* is the most severe form of the disease and can be fatal. We personally are aware of neighbors in SunRiver who have been infected by Valley Fever. One required surgery to remove associated tumors. The proposed mine would increase the exposure of the older, less resistant residents of the area to this dangerous fungal disease.

Noise from the heavy equipment used in mining and from the trucks used to transport the mined materials will be loud and continual during weekdays. Much of SunRiver is already subject to high noise levels associated with heavy truck traffic on Interstate 15, as well as from frequent blasting at the Arizona Strip gypsum mine. Any noise from the proposed mine will be extremely objectionable.

We are not against mining, per se. However, it would be unacceptable to expose the residents of any community, particularly a senior community, to mining operations conducted within the immediate environs of these established communities. The proposed GEM mine would endanger the health of the residents of both Bloomington and SunRiver, would degrade their quality of life, and would reduce property values. Profits must not override the well-being of citizens.

Further, permitting one mine to operate so close to a densely populated and growing urban area sets an extremely poor precedent. There are many mining claims in the immediate vicinity of the proposed mine. Once one operation has been permitted it will be impossible to deny other applications. A future SunRiver blanketed by noise, dust and disease spread by extensive nearby mining operations can easily be envisioned as a result of this mine being permitted.

Another important concern is the proposed transportation route for the mined gypsum. The applicant's plan calls for trucking the gypsum from the mine to highway 91, then through the middle of Santa Clara, east on Sunset Blvd. to Bluff Street (or possibly Dixie Drive), then south to Interstate 15, and south on I-15 through the port of entry into Arizona. Heavy haul diesel trucks do not belong on this already slow and congested urban route. They will exacerbate the congestion, make driving more hazardous, and will increase both air pollution and noise. These issues in themselves are sufficient reason to refuse a conditional use permit.

Lastly, over and over again we have seen taxpayers burdened with the huge costs of cleanup and reclamation of mines. The reclamation bond amount proposed for this mine is ridiculously low. If the mine is permitted, bonding should be required to be sufficient to cover all reclamation (including the haul road) and cleanup costs such that taxpayers will not be the ones left holding the bag after the mine owners have disappeared over the horizon with their profits. Too, rather than waiting 20 years to accomplish it, reclamation should be carried out continuously while gypsum is being removed.

Sincerely,

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