

WRITTEN TESTIMONY BY

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OVERSIGHT HEARING ON

DDT DUMPING OFF THE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA COAST: ECOLOGICAL IMPACTS,
SCIENTIFIC NEEDS, AND NEXT STEPS
BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER, OCEANS, AND WILDLIFE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member Bentz, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding the DDT dumping off the Southern California Coast at Disposal Site No. 2 (“Disposal Site #2”). On behalf of the City of Avalon (“City”), I would like to express our strong support for all necessary measures to prevent further damage as a result of the DDT waste dump site, the protection and preservation of our vulnerable natural resources, and the protection of the public’s health and safety.

Avalon is an island coastal community in the westernmost portion of Los Angeles County, located on Santa Catalina Island (“Island”) approximately twenty-six (26) miles from the mainland of Southern California. The City is 2.8 square miles in size and home to approximately four-thousand¹ (4,000) people year-round, with over one-million (1M) visitors annually². Avalon is the only incorporated municipality on the Island, of which, seventy-six (76) square miles is protected natural conservation land. With over sixty-two (62) miles of publicly accessible undeveloped coastline, nine (9) federally designated Marine Protected Areas³ (covering approximately sixty (60) square kilometers), and four (4) Areas of Special Biological Significance⁴ (covering approximately seventy-four (74) square kilometers), the Island is home to more than sixty (60) endemic plant, animal, and insect species found nowhere else in the world⁵, and many protected species of marine life.

The City and Catalina Island have a vibrant, tourist and recreation-based economy that plays a major role in Southern California’s \$160 million dollar ocean tourist economy. The daily City population can increase between two-hundred percent (200%) to five-hundred percent (500%) in the peak of the summer season (June through September). Avalon’s economy, and the welfare of its residents, is dependent on

¹ United States Census, 2010

² Catalina Island Visitor Counts, Catalina Island Chamber of Commerce & Visitors Bureau

³ National Marine Protected Areas,

<https://marineprotectedareas.noaa.gov/dataanalysis/mpainventory/mpaviewer/>, accessed June 2, 2021; California Department of Fish and Wildlife,

<https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Marine/MPAs/Network/Southern-California>, accessed June 2, 2021

⁴ California Environmental Protection Agency State Water Resources Control Board,

https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/ocean/asbs_map.shtml, accessed June 2, 2021

⁵ Catalina Island Conservancy, https://www.catalinaconservancy.org/index.php?s=about&p=about_cic, accessed June 2, 2021

tourism and robust policies and environmental stewardship that protect its natural resources and the public health and safety of its residents. Avalon and the Island also have a strong environmental protection philosophy, an inherent mission of protecting coastal resources, and unique state and federal safeguards that help protect the environment from pollution and preserve water quality.

As an island physically isolated from the California mainland by the Pacific Ocean, water quality and ocean conservation is critical to the physical and economic well-being of our community. However, the rediscovery of DDT and other toxic chemical waste dumping at Disposal Site #2 (one (1) of fourteen (14)) off the California coast in the San Pedro Basin poses a significant threat to the island's marine life, our resident's and visitor's health, and our future economic viability. While the full ecological and health impacts from the DDT and other chemical waste dumping are still being assessed decades later, critical federal and state support is needed to clean up the site.

The significance of the amount of DDT dumped in the Basin cannot be overstated. While not as visible as the 17-mile Superfund site⁶ (designated in 1996) that addressed DDT and PCBs released from where sewage emptied directly into the ocean, the scale and scope of DDT and other toxic chemical waste dumping further out into the San Pedro Basin amounts to gross criminal negligence at best (though a previous settlement amounted to no sides admitting fault⁷) and potentially one of the most abhorrent environmental tragedies at worse.

More appalling, is the decades of neglect to fully investigate the DDT and other toxic chemical waste dump site, seek reparations, and initiate an expedient and thorough clean-up strategy. Significant funding and resources are needed; however, it is extremely disconcerting that, twenty-five (25) years later, no viable strategy to clean up the existing 17-mile Superfund site has been implemented.

Avalon, as with many communities across the nation, continues to grapple with the devastating human and economic impacts the COVID-19 pandemic has left in its wake. As our community begins to rebuild its fragile economy, the looming DDT issue threatens to have a perverse impact on our economy as many potential visitors feel unsure and unsafe about visiting the Island and its surrounding waters⁸. Without visitors returning to Avalon, the City's economic recovery will be severely prolonged, leaving the City vulnerable to endogenous and exogenous shocks, and further eroding quality of life.

Recent efforts from the Montrose Settlements Restoration Program fund have provided education and restored habitats and wildlife in areas close to the Superfund contamination site. However, no funding has been allocated to addressing the San Pedro Basin dump site (Disposal Site #2). Further complicating the issue, the Catalina Island Conservancy, as a privately owned, publicly accessible conservation, is ineligible for state and federal assistance despite protecting eighty-eight percent (88%) of the Island.

Conclusion

The City of Avalon values the opportunity to work with this Committee and applauds the Committee for taking action to address this issue. Thank you and your staff for your work to support all necessary measures to prevent further damage, protect and preserve our vulnerable natural resources, and protect the public's health and safety.

⁶ United States Environmental Protection Agency, https://cumulis.epa.gov/supercpad/SiteProfiles/index.cfm?fuseaction=second.Cleanup&id=0900993#bkgr_ound, Accessed June 2, 2021

⁷ The United States Department of Justice, U.S. v. Montrose Chem. Corp., <https://www.justice.gov/enrd/us-v-montrose-chem-corp>, accessed June 2, 2021

⁸ The State of California has banned commercial fishing of certain species of fish in the area due to excessive contamination levels