

For Immediate Release:

Lawsuit filed Against Fairgrounds

A community group, CAFA (Community Alliance for Fairgrounds Accountability), filed a lawsuit today naming the 14th DAA (Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds) as the primary defendant in an attempt to protect the rights of the community from uncontrolled expansion of the Fairgrounds.

Santa Cruz County, CA, June 29, 2011. For more than a year, community members have been approaching the Fairgrounds staff and Board of Directors trying to get them to address concerns about excessive noise, as well as increasing traffic, air, and water pollution as a result of the Fairgrounds recent attempts to increase the number of events they hold. After solutions were proposed by the newly formed community group, CAFA, the Fairgrounds Board of Directors voted to ignore CAFA and claim a categorical exemption from environmental review for the first of many new events. This left CAFA no option but to file suit within the mandated 35 days to avoid the unfortunate precedent the exemption would set.

CAFA is not opposed to any type of existing or proposed event. CAFA simply expects, and the lawsuit asks that, the Fairgrounds operate transparently as required by State law and also act as a good neighbor.

CAFA is made up of a diverse group of residents who, contrary to what you might have heard, are PRO-Fairgrounds. Virtually all CAFA members enjoy various fairgrounds events throughout the year, especially the Santa Cruz County Fair. Some members live close to the Fairgrounds, some live miles away; some are relative newcomers, while the families of others have been here more than a century. We believe the Fairgrounds adds immeasurable value to our community and we want it to succeed. But that success must include cooperation with the Fairgrounds' neighbors and the community, and compliance with the law. The fairgrounds must be a good neighbor.

Two Neighborhood meetings were held (August and October, 2010) by Fairgrounds staff to inform the public what they intended to do and give the community a chance to provide input. Though the meetings were not widely announced, dozens of people showed up and informed Fairgrounds staff of disappointment with the increase in speedway noise and the introduction of highly amplified music every Sunday. Concern was expressed over plans to add more races and other events without an adequate noise policy and additional environmental controls in place. The Fairgrounds staff promised to address these concerns, but has not to date. Three subsequent neighborhood meetings were scheduled, only to be cancelled at the last minute by the Fairgrounds. As frustrations grew and concerns were brought to the attention of the Fairgrounds Board of Directors, CAFA sought legal counsel. Wittwer & Parkin, LLP, a local and highly respected Land Use and Environmental law firm offered their assistance.

In this challenging economy, the Fairgrounds is focused on becoming sustainable in light of reduced state funding. This focus, however, will only heighten the noise problem unless reasonable limits are set and enforced. To this end CAFA gave the Board a proposal for a good-neighbor noise policy but has received no satisfactory response. CAFA requested that the Fairgrounds address manure runoff directly into the Salsipuedes Creek; the response was a claim for exemption from CEQA.

The Fairgrounds current piecemeal approach to approving intensified uses and new events is illegal under CEQA (the California Environmental Quality Act). It's quite simply time for the Fairgrounds leadership to address, once and for all, policies and laws governing noise, environment, as well as legal requirements for

transparency. Fairgrounds leadership must complete a Master Growth Plan to manage expansion of the Fairgrounds and must implement a good-neighbor noise policy.

Additional information and FAQ are available on CAFA's website: www.FairgroundsAccountability.org.

Email questions to: info@fairgroundsaccountability.org