

The Bakersfield Californian

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Form letter e-mails flood county supervisors' boxes

James Burger; October 2, 2009

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Oct. 2--Kern County Supervisors' electronic mail accounts exploded with more 1,200 form e-mails Thursday as a [nationwide](#) digital campaign launched its opposition to the Tejon Mountain Village project.

County computer technicians scrambled to lock down the source of the e-mails, which they characterized as an assault, and divert them away from supervisors' flooded accounts.

By noon Friday an estimated 12,300 duplicate letters of opposition had hit the county's system.

"Mailboxes were being inundated by a flood of spam e-mails," said Bill Fawns of the county Information Technology Services Division.

County Clerk Kathleen Krause said the technicians narrowed the source to two e-mail account addresses and clamped down on the flow of e-mail.

"They have blacklisted two (Internet protocol) addresses that are continuing to send spam," Krause said. "All the e-mails are the same except for the 'from' field, (which) is populated with valid e-mail addresses but it isn't actually (from) that person,"

Two related companies -- DemocracyInAction and Wired for Change -- were apparently sending the e-mails through their automated system on behalf of the Center for Biological Diversity, the largest environmental group challenging the wisdom of the 5,082-acre development on 26,417 acres of the historic Tejon Ranch near Frazier Park.

Center attorney Adam Keats, who has led the group's challenge to the Tejon projects, said the Center alerted its members about the project's 9 a.m. Monday public hearing before the board.

"They could click on a link and edit a letter and send it to supervisors," Keats said.

The fact that so many members did so, he said, is a sign of just how concerned the public is about the project's impacts on the environment.

"We have nothing to do with any spam attack," Keats said. "If 1,200 people have written letters -- that's democracy."

The e-mail campaign drew nationwide support.

Judy Hyatt, assistant to Supervisor Jon McQuiston, said she opened a dozen or so of the missives and saw names and addresses from Colorado, Virginia and Florida.

Handling the flood was challenging, she said, but staff made it through.

No county systems were crashed by the e-mails, Fawns said.

But, Krause said, "it's had a negative impact. It's slowing Internet traffic for many county departments."