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Suits slap Supercenter

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YUCCA VALLEY - Two environmental groups have filed lawsuits against this town and Wal-Mart Stores Inc., challenging a planned Wal-Mart Supercenter.

In separate lawsuits filed Wednesday in San Bernardino County Superior Court, the Center for Biological Diversity and the Morongo Basin Conservation Association allege that bringing the big-box retailer to the low desert community would increase greenhouse emissions and spur "economic degradation" and "urban decay."

Yucca Valley Town Manager Andy Takat was out of the office Thursday and unavailable for comment.

Town Clerk Janet Anderson said she had not yet received the lawsuits and therefore could not comment.

The nonprofit Center for Biological Diversity alleges Wal-Mart isn't living up to its goal of supplying 100 percent renewable energy to

its stores by refusing to incorporate cost-effective features like solar panels.

"It's time for Wal-Mart to put its money where its mouth is and promote renewable energy for every new store, as it's committed to," said Jonathan Evans, a spokesman for the center. "It can't reach the goal of 100 percent renewable energy by ignoring solar panels in the desert."

The Morongo Basin Conservation Association alleges that a market analysis included in the environmental impact report was flawed. The analysis projected steady residential and economic growth in Yucca Valley that would support the Supercenter, but current data shows that such growth has stalled, the association says.

"There are over 600 empty homes in Yucca Valley alone, and the water district reports over 900 inactive connections," according to a news release issued by the group Thursday.

The group also said there is more than 119,000 square feet of empty retail space.

John Mendez, spokesman for Southern California Wal-Mart Stores Inc., said Thursday he had not yet reviewed the lawsuits and therefore could not address specific allegations.

He did say, however, that the pending litigation will only stall the development of something that would provide a valuable resource for Yucca Valley's citizens and economy.

"It will needlessly delay a sound decision made by the Yucca Valley (Town) Council, and more importantly, hurt the pocketbooks of thousands of Yucca Valley and Morongo Basin working-class families," Mendez said.

The Yucca Valley Town Council gave the Supercenter the green light about a month ago. It will neighbor the Home Depot on Twentynine Palms Highway, west of Hermosa Avenue, Mendez said.