

Local Official Wants to Close Richmond Auto Yard Involved in Fire



A fire blazed out of control at a Richmond auto salvage yard early Friday. (*KRON via Twitter*)

By **Ted Goldberg** DECEMBER 22, 2016

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A Contra Costa County supervisor wants to find a way to close the Richmond auto-wrecking yard where some 200 vehicles burned in a smoky, attention-getting fire last week.

The [blaze](#) sent up a huge plume of black smoke for several hours, leading to a shelter-in-place order for local residents and schools. The smoke also prompted an investigation by local air regulators.

Supervisor John Gioia, who represents the unincorporated area where the fire broke out, was among those caught in the smoke and had to stay indoors at one of the nearly 30 schools under the temporary shelter order. The property is located at Gertrude Avenue and Richmond Parkway, close to Chevron's Richmond refinery.

He wants county building officials to investigate the property and the business, Deal Auto Wrecking, with the hope that it would be shut down.

"It's been here a while and it would be better for the community for this facility not to be here," Gioia said in an interview. "This fire could form the

basis of establishing that this facility is a nuisance in many ways. Frankly, it's a land use that we would like to see go away."

Robert Marshall, fire marshal with the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District, said the site was inspected last March.

Inspectors found violations of regulations that govern how oil should be stored and noted that access to the cars through the lot's aisles was partially blocked, Marshall said in an email.

In a follow-up inspection two months later, the violations had been corrected, Marshall said.

County health officials inspected the site in April 2015, according to Randy Sawyer, the chief environmental health and hazardous materials officer for the county's health service department.

The inspection found that the business was not reporting all of its hazardous materials, it was behind on employee training and there were problems with the labeling on some of its containers. All of those violations were corrected by the time a follow-up inspection took place three months later, Sawyer said in an email.

Sawyer also said his agency got several complaints associated with the business in the spring of 2015. The complaints alleged cars on the lot were leaking and spilling oil and gasoline onto the ground. But inspectors could not confirm those problems.

Sawyer added that on another inspection, officials found that some of the soil on the site was contaminated with oil. It had been removed and cleaned up, but water from storm runoff in the area had exceeded levels of copper and zinc. Deal Auto Wrecking implemented a plan to correct those problems, Sawyer said.

The owner of the land that burned is Chen Long Inc., according to property records. The site is licensed with the state as a metal recycling business. Efforts to reach Jian Song, the longtime owner of the business that operates the yard, were unsuccessful.

Fire officials have not released the official cause of last week's blaze but it appears to be accidental, according to Marshall. The fire seems to have started in one car and spread to many others, thanks in part to strong winds, he said.