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**U.S. Department of Energy Secretly Funding Front Group to Help it Evade Nuclear Cleanup at Santa Susana Field Laboratory**

*Controversial grant made at the same time department reneged on*

*financial commitment to national independently administered community fund*

Community members living near the contaminated Santa Susana Field Laboratory were outraged to learn that the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has secretly been funding a front group that is lobbying for the breach of DOE’s cleanup agreement for the Santa Susana Field Laboratory (SSFL) - and that the agency's request for secrecy may have been made to avoid attention from Senator Barbara Boxer, a longtime supporter of full cleanup.

SSFL is heavily contaminated with nuclear and chemical contamination resulting from decades of nuclear activities and rocket engine testing, In 2010, agreements (Administrative Orders on Consent or AOCs) were signed between the state Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) and DOE and NASA to cleanup all detectable contamination at their respective portions of the property. The AOC was first proposed by former DOE Secretary Dr. Steven Chu and Assistant Secretary for Environmental Management (DOE-EM) Dr. Inez Triay. Boeing, which owns most of the site, refused to sign the agreement and is pushing for a much weaker cleanup.

In 2011, under the Brown Administration, the DTSC's commitment to full cleanup began to erode, and along with it, those of NASA and DOE. Over objections from [community members](http://petitions.moveon.org/sign/bring-back-the-santa%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) and [elected officials](http://www.rocketdynecleanupcoalition.org/files/Julia_Brownley_Linda_Adams_March_9_of_2009.pdf%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), the DTSC replaced the longstanding public participation vehicle, the SSFL Work Group, with the SSFL Community Advisory Group (SSFL CAG). The CAG's leadership is composed of individuals with ties to the parties responsible for the contamination at SSFL, and the group actively lobbies against the AOCs. One CAG flyer reads, "Why the AOC Cleanup at SSFL is Bad for Our Community" ([here](http://ssflcag.net/resources/SSFL%20CAG%20Reasons%20Why%20Flyer%202%20Nov2014.pdf%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank).) and states that the AOC will harm the environment and Native American artifacts, which are in fact protected by the AOC. The CAG also denies SSFL's health impacts. One CAG member, a former SSFL official and current DOE contractor, maligned previous health studies so badly that their authors felt compelled to [write an op-ed](http://archive.vcstar.com/opinion/columnists/dr-yoram-cohen-and-dr-hal-morgenstern-face-the-truth-on-santa-susana-field-lab-impacts-ep-1302285046-351071331.html%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) in the *Ventura County Star* in defense*.*

The public has been demanding to know for a long time how the CAG was funded, and neither the CAG nor  DTSC have disclosed that information. In [December 2015](https://www.dtsc.ca.gov/GetInvolved/ReviewPanel/upload/IRP_SSFL-Presentation_12-18.pdf%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) and in [May 2016](https://www.dtsc.ca.gov/GetInvolved/ReviewPanel/upload/Approved-Minutes__5_12_16_.pdf%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), cleanup advocates complained to the DTSC Independent Review Panel (IRP), established by the California legislature to investigate DTSC's many failings, about the CAG's anonymous funding and conduct. No action was taken on the matter.

The complaints were instigated by the CAG's announcement, at it's August 19, 2015 meeting, that it would be receiving a $32,000 - $35,000 donation from a donor who wished to be anonymous. A video from the meeting shows CAG member Alec Uzemeck claiming the donation had "no strings," and that it was anonymous "Because everything we do is politically charged. We have people out there who make phone calls. And if you're the executive of a corporation and you get a call from Barbara Boxer, I'm quite sure that that's going to have an impact on it. But, we don't want that. We wanna have the money in hand when we announce who the donors are." (See video [here](https://youtu.be/h3XlYNdVPIo%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank).) The CAG’s August 2015 minutes ([here](http://ssflcag.net/resources/Agendas_%26_Minutes/2015_agendas_and_minutes/2015_08_19%20CAG%20Minutes.pdf%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)) make it clear that the anonymity was at the donor’s request, and so secret that the CAG leadership would not reveal the donor to the full CAG membership, causing one CAG member to resign.

At it's August 17, 2016 meeting, a full year after having announced its anonymous gift, the CAG revealed that the donor was the Department of Energy. Uzemeck said, "DOE will be coming out with a quarterly report, probably in two or three weeks. And it will have a list of grants on the last page. And DOE is the one that made the grant for us. They are the one who supplied the funding. So, the question's been answered." Uzemeck's statement can be viewed [here](https://youtu.be/h3XlYNdVPIo?t=1m35s" \t "_blank). The CAG's [tax returns](http://990s.foundationcenter.org/990_pdf_archive/472/472219588/472219588_201512_990EZ.pdf?_ga=1.15985982.902911301.1472188828" \t "_blank) show that the organization received $38,600 in 2015.

The DOE refuses to answer questions about the arrangement, what the grant funds are expended on, explain why the funding was kept secret for a full year, or provide a copy of the grant application and contract. "For one of the Responsible Parties, DOE, to be funding a group that is trying to help DOE avoid its cleanup obligations, and asking for DOE’s identity as the source of the funds to be long kept secret, would be nothing short of scandalous." said Denise Duffield, Associate Director of Physicians for Social Responsibiiity-Los Angeles in an August 30 email to Dr. Monica Regalbuto, Assistant Secretary for the DOE's Office of Environmental Management.

Community members are also deeply troubled that DOE funded the CAG during the same month that it broke its commitment and revoked funding for the final year of a five-year commitment to the New Mexico Community Foundation (NMCF)-administered Community Involvement Fund (CIF), which funds independent groups in impacted communities near contaminated DOE sites throughout the country. Reneging on its contract and failing to disperse a final $300,000 payment to NMCF caused over a dozen community groups to lose key funding.

"DOE broke its commitment to provide its funding for community groups near contaminated sites through an independent mechanism and hands-off procedures that assured DOE would not do precisely what it has now done—fund a front group to lobby on DOE’s behalf to get out of its cleanup obligations." said Duffield in the email to Regalbuto.

Community members are dismayed and angered by the revelations. Simi Valley resident Marie Mason, who has led community cleanup efforts for 28 years, said, "I find it more than shocking that the DOE would fund this group and ask to conceal they are the funding source and especially to not have Senator Boxer find out. I am more than disgusted and filled with sadness. DOE and DTSC are part of the problem with too many close ties to the polluters and total disregard for the communities they are supposed to protect."

Bonnie Klea, a former worker at SSFL and cancer survivor, said, "I am appalled that DOE funded the CAG so that members can go out and lobby against the AOC and deny the cancer risks from the past, present and future exposure from the site. This is disgusting. " Klea and others note that the CAG does not represent the views of the community, which overwhelming supports the AOCs. All but 14 of the 3,700 comments submitted on the AOC were in favor of the agreement, and over 1,600 signed a petition last year urging that the cleanup agreements be upheld. (See petition [here](http://www.rocketdynecleanupcoalition.org/sign-the-ssfl-cleanup-petition/%22%20%5Cl%20%22signatures%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank).)

Duffield's email to DOE, sent also to local and state officials, implored the agency for answers and noted that no local elected officials had been consulted with or informed of the funding. "The community has the right to know about the intent, character, and tactics of the agency that holds their potential health and well being in its hands. And elected officials, many of whom have been lobbied by the CAG to weaken the cleanup, must be informed about financial contributions that DOE is making to this group to influence them and help it break out the cleanup agreements."

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*The Rocketdyne Cleanup Coalition, or RCC, is a community-based alliance dedicated to the cleanup of the Santa Susana Field Laboratory (SSFL), commonly known as Rocketdyne.*