

City to Conduct Pollution Study at Santa Monica Airport

Jorge Casuso, Santa Monica Lookout | NOV 16, 2017

The City of Santa Monica plans to conduct an air quality study that would begin before the airport is temporarily shut down for ten days next month to shorten the runway, City officials told the Lookout.

The contract to conduct the study would gauge pollution levels before, during and after construction, which will shut down the airport between December 13 and 23, said Suja Lowenthal, senior advisor to the City Manager on airport issues.

City officials are reviewing bids for proposals, and a contract could be awarded as early as this week, Lowenthal said.

"We received the proposals, and we are on track to get (the study) started," she said. "We just want to be sure the contract is in place" before making an announcement.

"Our plan is to have the study go forward," Lowenthal said.

City Manager Rick Cole used his authority to approve the contract, which does not require City Council approval, she said.

Work on the shortening the runway from 4,973 feet to 3,500 feet, started October 23 and is ongoing until December 13, 2017, Airport Director Stelios Makrides said in a notice issued this week.

Phase 2 of the work -- which requires shutting down the airport for 10 consecutive days, 24 hours per day -- will begin on December 13, he said.

The air quality study was proposed by former Airport Commissioner Suzanne Paulson, a UCLA scientist who specializes in analysis of pollutants in urban areas ("Special Pollution Study Proposed for Santa Monica Airport," September 19, 2017).

The goal of the study is to assess "real-world emissions of pollutants, including ultrafine particles and black carbon" for "business jets and other aircraft using Santa Monica airport," Paulson said.

Paulson resigned after some argued that having her lead the study was a conflict of interest.

Supporters of the special study say its findings could be critical in heading off the arguments of those fighting a pact between the City and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to close SMO by the end of 2028 ("City, FAA Agree to Close Santa Monica Airport in 2028," January 28, 2017).

Leaders of the movement to shut down the airport greeted news of the study with cautious optimism.

"I reserve judgment until I see the protocols of the study and how thorough the study will be," said Martin Rubin, who heads Concerned Residents Against Airport Pollution (CRAAP).

"You have to see who's doing the study," he said. "If it's Dr. Paulson, it's a good thing."

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