

MARG WMAT

Merced Alliance for Responsible Growth Wal-Mart Action Team

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: November 16, 2006

CONTACT: Kyle Stockard, (209)722-0620

Distribution Center Would Impact Public Health and Local Economy

White paper on air quality finds that negative impacts of the proposed Wal-Mart distribution center outweigh local benefits

Asthma will go up and agricultural production will go down if the proposed Wal-Mart distribution center is built, says a new white paper released by the Merced Alliance for Responsible Growth's Wal-Mart Action Team. The white paper compiles scientific research on the impacts of diesel emissions and provides a look into the future of Merced's public and economic health if the distribution center is approved. The proposed center would generate an estimated 900 truck trips per day that would dump about 5.2 extra tons of particulates and 66 extra tons of nitrogen oxides (the major precursor to ozone) into Merced's air every year.

According to the white paper, diesel pollution causes respiratory cancers, decreased lung function, onset and aggravation of asthma and other health problems. Estimates from the California Air Resources Board indicate that diesel pollution causes about 2,900 early deaths, 3,600 hospital admissions, and 240,000 asthma attacks and other acute respiratory problems each year in California alone. "The distribution center will create a serious health risk," said Marilynne Pereira Co-Chair of the MARG Wal-Mart Action Team and a teacher at one of the three schools directly impacted by the Center. "We need to know exactly how many early deaths, hospital admissions and asthma attacks Merced can expect as a result of the distribution center before any decision can be made by the City Council."

Many Merced teachers are concerned about the distribution center due to its close proximity to three schools (Weaver Elementary, Pioneer Elementary and Golden Valley High School). "The distribution center would be too close to schools. The trucks would be dumping diesel exhaust directly into our schoolyards and classrooms," said Gorette Griego a teacher at Pioneer Elementary School. "We need to prioritize the health of our children."

A new issue introduced by the white paper is the economic impact of poor air quality. Proponents of the distribution center rely on the argument that the distribution center will create jobs. The white paper finds, however, that the diesel emissions from distribution center operations will actually *hurt* the local economy. Agriculture, an important source of jobs in Merced County and throughout the valley, will be negatively affected. Some crops could lose as much as 23% of their yield as a result of ozone pollution. "The success of our crops determines how many people we can employ and how much we can afford to pay," notes Cindy Lashbrook, a Livingston farmer growing fruit, nuts and hay. "When local farmers do well, the income circulates within the community many times. It's more complex than Wal-Mart providing 'x' number of jobs."

The white paper also reports that other economic sectors will be impacted by a reduction in productivity and lost work days as a result of pollution-related health conditions.

The Merced Alliance for Responsible Growth Wal-Mart Action Team plans to continue their research independent of the City's process. "The more information, the better," said Pereira. "We can't rely solely on the findings of an environmental consultant that is funded by Wal-Mart – it's our community at risk, not theirs."