

Jean-Michel Cousteau visits West Oakland's South Prescott Neighborhood; gets briefing on Lead Remediation Project

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On Wednesday, July 13, 2011, Jean-Michel Cousteau and his videographer Matt Ferraro, visited the area and spent the day at the South Prescott Community Field Office and the nearby community. The purpose of the visit was for Mr. Cousteau to learn more about the lead remediation project currently underway, and to record some video footage for potential future use by both his team, and also for the use and benefit of all those involved in this project.

Maggie O'Donnell and Tony Diamantidis of Chemical Safety briefed Mr. Cousteau on the project and the day's planned activities.

The first meeting of the day took place at the Field Office conference room. Present in the room were Barbara Lee, Bill Robberson, Janice Witul and Rusty Harris-Bishop from the EPA, Maggie O'Donnell and Tony Diamantidis of Chemical Safety, and Vic Johnson of CEC. Maggie O'Donnell gave a synopsis of the project and its three main objectives, and a lively discussion ensued. Jean-Michel was an active participant with ideas, questions and positive comments.



Following this meeting, the group walked to the nearby Kiwani grows project, where founder Eric Maundu described his Urban Aquaponic Gardening system. It was difficult to pull Mr. Cousteau away from the Kiwani site, as he was fascinated by the project and told Eric that he would help him promote it in schools.





The next meeting was a visit to the home of local community activist and renowned sculptor Bruce Beasley. Mr. Cousteau and Mr. Beasley had plenty to talk about, and the meeting strengthened the relationship between Mr. Beasley and the project that EPA is undertaking.



Lunch was then taken at nearby Scott's restaurant in Jack London Square. Scott's is a well-known seafood restaurant and a good choice for the group. The service was excellent, and the food even better. In addition to individuals previously mentioned, Jim Marshall, community coordinator and Reza Fakurnejad, subcontractor to the project, joined the lunch.



Following lunch, the team visited the project's first remediation site at 533 Henry Street. Mr. Cousteau was introduced to the field team that is working the site, and was encouraging and complimentary to the team, which included the workers hired from Cypress-Mandela. Mr. Beasley was also present and witnessed firsthand the odor of the Apatite treatment, which he found to be tolerable and "a small price to pay for the benefit that is being derived".





The group then moved on to the Cypress-Mandela Training Center where Executive Director Art Shanks introduced his class to Mr. Cousteau and the visiting EPA members. Cypress-Mandela is a first class organization and their presentation was extraordinary.



The team then returned to the Field Office where Mr. Cousteau met with Brent Bucknam and was given an explanation of urban gardens and the bamboo screens that have been placed on the site. Mr. Cousteau was also given a tour of the site and got to see, touch and smell the sacks of Apatite that are stored at the adjacent site.



The last activity at the field office was a meeting in which everyone exchanged ideas and Mr. Cousteau seemed impressed with what he saw and learned.



Tony Diamantidis and Mr. Cousteau then met with Michael Isip, Vice President of KQED. Mr. Isip was already familiar with the project and was pleased to learn more. He promised to follow up as the project progresses.

Mr. Cousteau's visit was productive and inspirational. He not only brought his vast experience and love for our environment, our world, and our community into context, but he repeatedly complimented all involved for their innovative and committed approach to solving the problem of lead contamination in the community while helping the local economy and doing it all in a carbon neutral way. He promised to pursue this story because, as he said, "this is a good news story that the world needs to hear."