

Woman shares concern of Hyperion's future benzene emissions

By Julie Ann Madden

A mother whose daughter has leukemia is concerned about air pollutant emissions listed in Hyperion Resources Inc.'s air permit.

According to Hyperion's air permit application, their "green" Hyperion Energy Center will emit 7,160 tons of air pollutants annually. These pollutants include carbon monoxide, hydrogen sulfide and benzene, a known carcinogen.

Virginia Knutson of rural Vermillion, S.D., told the Union County Commissioners that when her daughter was diagnosed with leukemia, the chief oncologist at Mayo Clinics asked Knutson if her daughter had been exposed to benzene.

"I am concerned (about Hyperion) from a health standpoint," said Knutson, adding she had testified at the South Dakota State Legislature on Feb. 11 in support of Senate Bill 196, which would establish environmental standards for refineries in South Dakota similar to California's standards.

"California was the state chosen for Senate Bill 196 in part because of Hyperion's pledge," she explained.

"On Jan. 11 (Hyperion Project Executive) Preston Philips pledged and I quote: 'the emissions into the air will be one-thirtieth that of the typical Midwest coal plant and 80 percent less than any refinery in California,'" said Knutson. "I thought it would be reasonable to

assume the environmental standards set forth in Senate Bill 196 would not concern Mr. Philips because in his own words, they would be setting their emissions standards 80 percent higher than proposed by the senate bill."

"There was one opponent of the senate bill – the secretary of the Department of (Environment and) Natural Resources," she told the commissioners. "During his testimony, he indicated that Hyperion was against the bill. When legislator Ben Nesselhuf, sponsor of the bill, asked: 'Are you saying that Hyperion is against this bill?' The DENR secretary stated: 'Yes.'"

"Philips pledged less than one month ago that their refinery would be 80 percent cleaner than any refinery in California," she said. "So I was wondering with whom are we dealing? Do we know?"

"One would think Hyperion executives would be eager to reassure Union County residents that their pledge was sincere by enthusiastically supporting Senate Bill 196," said Knutson.

Commissioner Ross Jordan asked where Knutson was from. She explained that she lives four miles east of Vermillion – just two miles west of the Union County line.

"(Union County's) economic gain – at what cost does it need to be?" she asked the commissioners. "I've learned in the last couple of years that our health is most important. Benzene is definitely going to be in our air."