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### Contra Costa supervisors want tighter control on meteorological towers

#### By Roman Gokhman **Contra Costa Times**

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Spurred by a fatal airplane crash earlier this year, Contra Costa County supervisors this week asked for the creation of an ordinance that will, among things, more closely monitor the permitting process for meteorological towers.

County building department planners began reviewing the permitting policy for the towers, which evaluate the potential of wind turbines in a given location, following the death of an agricultural pilot who crashed into one on a Delta island in January.

"We want to make sure we never have another incident like that one." Contra Costa Supervisor Federal Glover said. "We want to have the safeguard to prevent it."

Meteorological towers will be one component of a new communications facility ordinance, which will also encompass cell towers and structures that track and measure earthquake movements, air quality and pollution.

While the county has a policy that handles the building of these structures, an ordinance will give administrators more control over what is and is not allowed, said Aruna Bhat, deputy director of the county's community development department.

"Our policy is old, and a policy does not have as much teeth as an ordinance," she said.

On Jan. 10, pilot Stephen Allen, 58, of Courtland, was killed on Webb Tract after his airplane struck a 198-foot-tall tower that he likely did not see, according to a National Transportation Safety Board report.

#### The Federal Aviation Administration

requires that towers 200 feet and taller be painted in bright aviation colors and lit. Towers shorter than 200 feet fall under the purview of local governments.

Building a meteorological tower requires a common land-use permit in Contra Costa. The zoning administrator approves or denies the application.

In June, the FAA made several recommendations for meteorological towers to avoid future tragedies. It recommended that shorter towers be painted from top to bottom with alternating bands of orange and white and have eight orange marker balls, as well as brightly painted sleeves or flags, attached to the wires that hold them upright.

The recommendations do not require firms that build towers to change their practices.

The county Department of Conservation and Development began reviewing its regulations following a story in this newspaper highlighting concerns by agricultural pilots about unmarked towers, Bhat said.

Planners researched the policies of other counties and asked for input from the FAA, NTSB, the California Agricultural Aircraft Association -- which licenses agricultural pilots in the state -- and others.

"It's great they are moving in that direction," said Terry Gage, president of the aircraft association.



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"About five counties have contacted me about (developing) their own ordinances."

Contra Costa principal project planner Telma Moreira said she discovered that meteorological t ower permitting varies from county to county.

While some counties have lax policies, Yolo County requires that developers paint towers under 200 feet and work with local agricultural pilots.

Moreira said county planners are also paying careful attention to a proposed law that would require all towers in California from 50 to 200 feet tall to be marked and lit.

Assemblywoman Mariko Yamada, D-Davis, introduced the bill, currently before the state Senate transportation and housing committee, in response to Allen's death. Gage said the state bill would create the easiest set of rules to follow. Moreira said the Contra Costa ordinance will be consistent with state and federal laws but also address the concerns of pilots and others.

"Our goal is to go as fast as we can with this," she said.

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