



Editorial: Frisco takes courageous stance on Exide plant

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It is never easy for a city to balance economic development and public health when the two goals come into conflict. To their credit, Frisco city officials have appropriately done so in the Exide case, giving the priority to public health.

In a 5-0 vote this week, the Frisco City Council took a major step that could lead to the closing of Exide Technologies, a battery recycling plant in the heart of Frisco, which is an area out of compliance with national air-quality standards for lead emissions. The city's move is controversial because Exide has promised to invest in new clean technologies to meet air-quality standards and has argued that it should be allowed to continue to operate under land-use laws that were in place when the plant opened in 1964.

Indeed, cities clearly should be careful about pushing out businesses they don't like. Companies make economic investments in cities with the expectation that they will remain in operation. The plant employs about 135 workers and pays taxes to Collin County and the Frisco Independent School District. Its economic impact is not insignificant.

There's nothing capricious about Frisco's decision. Times change and science has taught us about new dangers to public health from lead that weren't known years earlier, such as learning problems in children, and high blood pressure and heart disease in adults. It is only sensible that plants follow new guidelines for both emissions and land use or face the prospect that cities and federal regulators will rightly put public safety concerns ahead of the concerns of a specific business.

For example, the 1.3-mile area around the Exide facility is one of just 21 areas in the nation that exceed U.S. Environmental Protection Agency air-quality standards for lead. That might not have been considered a problem in 1964 when Frisco was a smaller, rural community. Today, the plant is surrounded by homes, schools and businesses that didn't exist when the battery plant was built. The plant is a problem now because it is in the middle of a densely populated region that already has its share of environmental challenges.

The EPA is not the only agency that has had problems with the Frisco recycler. Last year, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, which we've chided for laxity in other environmental cases, took the unusual step of citing the firm for the unauthorized discharge of hazardous wastes, problems with the plant's on-site landfills and lapses in paperwork and employee training. Based on such a troubling pattern, Frisco is right to take a tough stance, even in the face of legal challenges from Exide.

Frisco's City Council made the right call to stand up for the environmental health of its residents. That's what elected officials are supposed to do.



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