

## SURFSIDE

# Cost for beach sand removal is baffling

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Surfside has been stuck in the sand — or at least it's how many residents feel.

In March, a developer, Fort Capital, dug up sand from underneath the construction site on 9011 Collins Ave., the site of a hotel and condominium called the Surf Club. Florida law says excavated sand must be placed near the site from which it came. As such, the developer spread the sand over Surfside's public beach.

But many residents said the sand was completely different, even calling it dirt. To them, the beach was no longer the same. Florida law also says the sand must be compatible with the existing sand.

Residents grew more concerned when toxicology reports indicated levels of arsenic higher than state residential guidelines. Experts hired by town staff and Miami-Dade County Health Department, however, said the sand posed a low risk to human or pet health.

Unconvinced, the residents hired an independent toxicologist who found levels of lead in the sand.

"They are putting public health at stake," said Dr. Sharon Goldberg, a Surfside resident.

"There are no safe levels of lead, even if it's below the allowable limit," said Goldberg, an assistant professor of clinical medicine at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine. "In scientific studies, there's learning issues, neurological problems, neuropsychiatric problems. It correlates as the amount of lead in the body rises, you have more and more medical problems."

Town officials convened a committee in June to address the residents' concerns. After four months of meetings, the



PHOTOS BY MATIAS J. OCHNER/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

**SPEAKING OUT:** Residents hold signs during Surfside's commission meeting on Jan. 13 during the debate of the town's sand issue. Recently, toxicology reports show that beach sand might have high levels of arsenic. Below, attorney Donald J. Kahn explains why he is against a proposed moratorium in Surfside's business district.

## Resources

For more information, visit the sand issue page on the town's website [townofsurfsidefl.gov](http://townofsurfsidefl.gov) and for further information, call the town manager Guillermo Olmedillo at 305-993-1052.



committee recommended to the town commission that the sand be removed and placed in the dunes. The commission approved the measure unanimously in September.

But with turtle season approaching in April and the sand still sitting on the beach, residents are concerned that commissioners have changed their mind.

"I've worked very diligently with experts, residents and the commissioners," said Jeffrey Platt, Surfside resident and chairman of the sand committee. "Evidently the town has seen fit to ignore the situation on the beach and I wonder if the town has other

agendas in mind, such as doing everything the developers want."

Platt and other residents filled the commission chambers during last week's meeting with documents, signs and bags of sand samples to show their disdain.

Among those in attendance: former commissioner Michelle Kligman.

"I realized that everybody is tired because I was on the commission at one point and I realize that this is a very grueling and tiring process. It's emotionally draining. It's a lot of things to consider," Kligman said. "But this process has been very poorly man-

aged from the beginning. You do not ask residents to take up their personal time, their personal money, commit to them that you're going to take action and then pull the rug from under them in the manner that has occurred."

Commissioner Michael Karukin agreed that the town has handled the situation poorly, but said the resolution to remove the sand was based upon a set of information that is no longer valid — including the price of the sand removal.

"I don't know whether we were given wrong information or incomplete information, but when they told me



**SHOWING CONCERN:** Surfside resident Deborah Cimadevilla asks town officials to help with removing the sand on after reports showed it contains high levels of arsenic and lead. Below, Jeffrey Platt holds a 10-pound concrete block he found in the sand near the construction site at the Surf Club.



that it was going to cost close to a million dollars to remove the sand to the dunes, I said, 'That's not what I voted for,'" Karukin said.

The original estimate for the sand removal was about \$158,000, according to town commissioners. Gordon Thomson, director of CB&I Planning and Engineering, made the estimate a few months ago.

At the commission meeting Jan. 13, Karukin noted how the initial estimate had ballooned to more than \$1 million. When he asked town manager Guillermo Olmedillo about the higher costs, the manager said he didn't know

and would have to report back to the commission. It was the manager's first commission meeting; he was hired in December.

"Clearly, this has got to be revisited somehow because I am not going to commit a million dollars to move the sand to the dunes," Karukin said. "Especially absence of, what I believe, is a health risk issue."

Residents, meanwhile, were miffed and confused as to how the new figure of a million dollars came about.

The commission will schedule a special meeting in late February to continue discussing the sand issue.