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Serious Medical Consequences of Lithium-ion BESS Fires

Lithium-Iron-Phosphate (LFP) batteries, the type that would be used in the proposed BESS at 90 Minto Road, Watsonville, have alarming potential medical effects if they catch fire & explode.

Simple, common things, such as overcharge, over-discharge, puncture, a cracked casing, improper installation, external heat, short circuit, failure of cooling system, etc., can cause thermal runaway (fire) and immediate explosion.

These fires burn at temperatures in the 1000s of degrees. Firefightersâ€”anyoneâ€”in proximity suffer severe burns or death. Lithium-ion BESS fires generate intense amounts of gas and smoke, containing toxic gases, heavy metal particulates and metal nanoparticles, which can be grave threats to human health and surrounding environments.

These fires emit highly toxic Hydrogen Fluoride (HF) gas, which causes skin burns, burns to the eyes, and inhalation injury to the lungs and respiratory tract.

Heavy metal particulates and nanoparticles exposures can lead to lung cancer, bronchial interstitial fibrosis and other devastating lung diseases. Of particular concern is the cobalt content in the gases and smoke, exposure to which causes cancer.

This information comes from Dr. David Gelmont M.D. Associated Professor of Medicine (emeritus) University of Southern California Keck School of Medicine / March 19, 2025 Literature Review of the National Library of Medicine.

Dr. Gelmontâ€™s recommendations, based on this literature review, include:

- Pause all construction of electric battery storage systems based on Lithium-ion battery storage systems until further information regarding potential short and long-term health effects are investigated.
- Develop state standards for construction and safety measures of energy storage systems.
- Develop new energy storage technologies which have minimal risks to the environment and population.