

Atherton Police emergency generator isn't up to code

Installed before Air Resources Board codes, device needs repair or replacement



The Atherton Police Department emergency generator, seen on Wednesday, Oct. 26, 2016. The device is meant to turn on automatically in the event of an emergency power loss, but is not set up to do so at this time because of complaints about the way it smells during testing. It sits behind a screen on the porch of the police and administration building. (John Orr / Daily News)

By **JOHN ORR** | jorr@bayareanewsgroup.com

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Like many other aspects of Atherton's Civic Center, the town's emergency power generator is not up to code and cannot be operated without violating state regulations.

The device, which sits behind a lattice screen on the Police Department porch, is meant to be used during power outages. It would keep the town's police dispatch center and 911 capability operating.

But the 100-watt generator, which Public Works Director Steve Tyler said he thinks was installed in 1998, before the emergence of California Air Resource Board regulations, has drawn complaints from police officers when it was tested each week.

“Air conditioning” for that part of the Police Department consists of opening windows. When the stinky, smoky diesel engine fired up, nobody nearby was happy about it, so its automatic turn-on device was disabled.

Tyler said he will register the generator with the Air Resources Board, and will also get a diesel mechanic to work on it to clean its injectors and get it running as cleanly as possible.

Town managers don't want to buy a new, code-compliant generator because they don't know yet what the power needs of the planned new police and administration buildings will be. A new generator is expected to be included in the new construction.

In the meantime, if the town experiences a power outage, someone will just have to go out and turn on the old generator.

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John Orr John Orr edits and writes for Daily News feature pages, including arts and entertainment. He also reports on the Town of Atherton and some other cities, Previously, he was mysteries and thrillers books columnist for the