

Reid-Hillview Airport Fact Checking



Special interest advocates for Reid-Hillview Airport have resorted to making misleading and false claims.

Let's check the facts.

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Claim: Reid-Hillview is needed to fight wildfires¹.

FALSE

- Reid-Hillview is not used by **any** fixed-wing firefighting aircraft and has only been used once for helicopter firefighting.
 - While Reid-Hillview was used to refill 2 CAL FIRE helicopters for 3 days in the 2020 fires, the helicopters could have been refilled on any flat 8-acre site in the County. These helicopters used less than 5% of Reid-Hillview's 180 acres.
 - Before this isolated episode in 2020, Reid-Hillview had never been use in firefighting, including the Summit Fire of 2008.
 - CAL FIRE bases its firefighting aviation at Livermore and Hollister airports, which houses the specialized firefighting equipment.
 - A November 17, 2020 report to the Board of Supervisor confirmed that the San Jose Fire Department does not use Reid-Hillview.
 - Read it yourself: November 17, 2020 on disaster capacity

¹ [Melissa McCaffrey, Aircraft Owners Association, at Board of Supervisors meeting, November 17, 2020.](#)

Claim: Reid-Hillview is needed to respond to major disasters².

FALSE

- Reid-Hillview does not have the capacity for large scale delivery of emergency supplies or personnel or for evacuation. Reid-Hillview is not used by law enforcement or search and rescue.
 - Reid-Hillview was not used in the response to the Coyote Creek Flood of 2017, the Loma Prieta Earthquake of 1989 or the COVID-19 emergency of 2020.
 - Reid-Hillview's runways could not accommodate the landings of cargo aircraft fully loaded with emergency supplies nor does it have the equipment for unloading large cargo aircraft.
 - No law enforcement aircraft is based at Reid-Hillview.
 - Civilian search and rescue is conducted by the Sheriff's helicopters based at Moffett Field. Military search and rescue and civilian at sea search and rescue is conducted by the 129th Rescue Wing California Air National Guard based at Moffett Field.

² [Our Mission – CAAPSO](#)

- While there have been no large-scale air evacuations from Northern California, the runways at Reid-Hillview cannot accommodate the large passenger aircraft that would be required.
- Read it yourself: November 17, 2020 on disaster capacity

Claim: Reid-Hillview is an important, busy airport³.

MISLEADING

- There are no commercial airlines at Reid-Hillview.
- Reid-Hillview advocates exaggerate the airport's activity with inflated statistics. In aviation jargon, each takeoff and each landing constitute an "operation". That means that, when a student pilot practices with five "touch-and-goes" at Reid-Hillview, it is counted as ten operations, just like ten commercial airliners landing at Mineta San Jose International.
- 60% of the aviation activity at Reid-Hillview comes from its private, for-profit flight training schools.

³ [Our Mission – CAAPSO](#)

Claim: Reid-Hillview is important as a Reliever Airport⁴.

MISLEADING

- Because Reid-Hillview does NOT relieve congestion at SJC but is called a “reliever airport” because it provides general aviation.
- Mineta San Jose would not absorb the aviation services and activity that would be displaced by closure of Reid-Hillview.
- Mineta San Jose does not benefit from – and would not miss - the current aviation capacity at Reid-Hillview.

⁴ [Our Mission – CAAPSO](#)

Claim: Closing Reid-Hillview would impact Mineta San Jose International Airport.

FALSE

- 75% of RHV revenue is from aircraft storage.⁵
 - Were RHV to close, SJC would not absorb any aircraft storage. There are already waiting lists at SJC for hangars, tail-in tie down and taxi-in tie down.⁶
- Most RHV operations are training flights.⁷
 - Were RHV to close, SJC would not absorb flight training, because SJC generally does not accommodate the propeller aircraft used for flight training.
- In the past few decades, SJC has successfully dis-accommodated the aviation that now occurs at RHV.
 - The small runway along Coleman was displaced by rebuilding of the large runways and never revived.
 - SJC no longer has services for small planes.
 - SJC made space unavailable to the SJSU Aviation program.

⁵ [*Airports Business Plan – Reid-Hillview and San Martin Airports*](#), May 2018; Santa Clara County Airports.

⁶ [*General Aviation Waiting Lists Current as of July 16, 2021*](#); Norman Y. Mineta San Jose International Airport.

⁷ [*Airports Business Plan – Reid-Hillview and San Martin Airports*](#), May 2018; Santa Clara County Airports.

Claim: The San Jose State Aviation Department needs Reid-Hillview to survive⁸.

FALSE

- SJSU Aviation could relocate to San Martin Airport.
 - The County has engaged with SJSU regarding the needs of the Aviation Department.
 - SJSU Aviation's primary use of Reid-Hillview is that many of its students train with flight schools based there; those students could use flight training schools located at San Martin, Livermore, Hayward, Palo Alto, San Carlos, Watsonville or Tracy airports.
 - The fixed-base operator lease at San Martin Airport requires operation of a flight school with the certification level required for SJSU Aviation students.
 - At San Martin, SJSU Aviation would complement the existing Gavilan College Aviation Maintenance Technology Program.

⁸ [Our Mission – CAAPSO](#)

Claim: Aviation at Reid-Hillview is safe.

FALSE

Aviation crashes from Reid-Hillview endanger the community – a tragedy waiting to happen.

- Among the incidents:
 - In 2020, a Reid-Hillview plane crashed into San Jose’s Hillview Park across the street from the runway.
 - In 2018, a Reid-Hillview plane crashed into a neighboring house in which as many as 13 people live.
 - In 2007, a 77-year-old Reid-Hillview pilot crashed his plane into the Eastridge Mall parking lot across the street from the runway.
 - There are six schools and three public parks within 1200 feet of Reid-Hillview Airport.

Claim: The Airport was there first.

MISLEADING

- The County substantially expanded the airport and increased its activity in the mid-1960s, after the nearby housing and schools were built.
- In the 1960s, the harmful effects of lead emissions from aviation fuel were not widely understood.
- Whosever mistake it was to co-locate a residential community with an airport, it is not too late to correct the mistake.

Claim: Children near Reid Hillview are susceptible to lead from non-aviation sources (freeway traffic, pipes, and paint in old housing, etc.)⁹.

MISLEADING

- Dr Sammy Zahran’s study controls for non-aviation sources. We now know that the higher blood levels of children living near Reid-Hillview are caused by leaded-fuel aviation.
- Note: This argument “blames the victims” for poisoning themselves. Ironically, this argument also ignores the fact that the same systemic racism has forced these families to live in older housing as to live near the airport.

⁹ [speaker Vikas Kapur at Board of Supervisors meeting, November 17, 2020](#)

Claim: The lead levels near Reid-Hillview are below the EPA's "action level".

MISLEADING

- The EPA's "action level" for lead is 15 ppb, which is the level that triggers enforcement activity. It is not a safe level.
- The maximum contaminant level goal (MCLG) is zero. This is the level determined to be safe according to toxicological and biomedical considerations, independent of feasibility.

Claim: Blood levels in children near Reid-Hillview are too low to be dangerous.

FALSE

- The only safe lead level in blood is zero.
- The Centers for Disease Control’s official position is: “No safe blood lead level in children has been identified. Even low levels of lead in blood have been shown to affect IQ, ability to pay attention, and academic achievement.”.
- Read it yourself: [Centers for Disease Control](#)

Claim: Dr. Sammy Zahran is just “an economist”¹⁰.

MISLEADING

Dr. Zahran is Professor in the Department of Epidemiology in the Colorado School of Public Health. He is also Professor of Demography in the Department of Economics, Colorado State University.

¹⁰ Michael McDonald at [Mothers Out Front](#) meeting, [May 12, 2021](#)

Claim: Dr. Zahran's previous study indicates that high residual levels of lead in ground and air affect children's blood lead levels¹¹.

MISLEADING

Dr. Zahran's 2013 study did indicate that high residual levels of lead in ground and air affect children's' blood lead levels. But Dr. Zahran's current study 1) controls for non-aviation sources of blood lead in children and 2) documents that blood lead levels in children near Reid-Hillview mirror the level of aviation activity. Dr. Zahran's current study documents that **much higher blood lead levels in children result from lead-fueled aviation.**

¹¹ McDonald, [May 12, 2021 meeting](#)

Claim: Reid-Hillview enables local business, personal and charitable flights that can't relocate to other airports¹².

FALSE

All local business, personal and charitable flights could originate from other airports, including San Martin, Palo Alto, San Carlos, Hayward, Livermore and Hollister. Most local business flights already originate from Mineta San Jose International. Pilots might have to drive 20 minutes or more and/or pay higher rates at other airports.

¹² [Our Mission – CAAPSO](#)

Claim: Reid-Hillview is a benefit to East San Jose and the greater community.

FALSE

- Reid-Hillview is a mistake from past generations, with an airport built up to the fences of a residential community and its schools and parks.
- The 180 acres at Reid-Hillview could be used instead for critically needed housing or jobs or even recreation space.
- The 180 acres at Reid-Hillview could be used instead to spark economic revitalization of Eastside San Jose.
 - The area is twice the size of Santana Row/Valley Fair combined.
 - The area is twice the size of the San Jose State University campus.
 - The area is four times the size of Levi's Stadium/Santa Clara Convention Center combined.
 - The area is four times the size of the Google Village.
- In the 2019-2020 Visioning process, the Eastside community embraced replacing Reid-Hillview with other uses.
- Besides being a wasteful use of the 180 acres at Reid-Hillview, the airport also stunts economic

development at the 100 acres next door at Eastridge Center.

- The transit center at Eastridge, soon to connect to BART with its own light rail line, is made for density.
- A transit-oriented mixed-use development, including badly needed affordable housing, would share Silicon Valley prosperity with the Eastside.
- But the existence of the airport restricts the height of a redeveloped Eastridge to two stories, making density impossible.
- And the airport's presence rules out housing at Eastridge altogether.

Documentation of these false claims from the CAPSO website:

**Reid-Hillview Airport Association, dba CAPSO
(Community and Airport Partnership for Safe
Operation)**

- Reid-Hillview is a “designated reliever” for San Jose Mineta Airport. 160,000 annual takeoffs & landings at Reid-Hillview offload airspace and runways at San Jose Mineta, enabling commercial airline growth.
- Reid-Hillview provides critical capacity for emergency services and disaster recovery operations.
- San Jose State’s Aviation Department enables multiple aviation-industry career options and would shut down without the airport.
- Reid-Hillview enables local business, personal and charitable flights that can’t relocate to other airports.