

Pollen? Tests show Naples soot isn't jet fuel

By Kristine Gill
kmgill@naplesnews.com
239-403-6174

Pollen, not jet fuel, is to blame for the black soot some Naples residents find on their lanais and cars, according to testing conducted by a Fort Myers geology firm commissioned by the city.

City staff spent \$2,400 for Environmental Risk Management Inc. to conduct the test on the substance, which ranged in color from yellow to brown, in three areas of town where planes fly overhead on their way to the Naples

Municipal Airport.

"I've always thought it was something dropping off trees," said Mike Bauer, natural resources manager for the city. "It's little black specs. It's not real hard to remove. You rub it and it comes off. ... I figured it was a naturally occurring materials."

Officials from Environmental Risk Management could not be reached Monday, but according to their report, the pollen is consistent with that of palm trees and was not petroleum-based.

Two "samples were collected

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For the environmental sampling and analysis report

using sterile swabs and pads" from each of three areas in the city this month.

Airport staff paid for testing in the past, and, through the same company, determined the soot was pollen and not petroleum-based.

"We've done testing a number of times over the 18 years I've been here in different locations around the community to prove it wasn't from us or from our airplanes," Executive

Director Ted Soliday said.

Residents in areas where testing occurred — Royal Harbor, Aqualane Shores and Village Green Condominiums downtown — remain skeptical.

"You'd think (the soot) would be all over the city," said John Tobin, president of the Village Green Condominium Association on 12th Avenue South. "It seems to be concentrated in areas of the flight paths."

Tobin said he applauds the city for taking steps toward identifying the substance but wonders whether the test was sophisticated or thorough

enough to get to the root of the issue.

"And the bigger thing of course is whether it's a health issue," he said.

Don Kirkwood, former president of the Bayfront Inn Association, said parts of the city where planes don't fly should have been included in the study.

Mayor John Sorey realizes the results won't satisfy critics.

"Oh, I'm sure the anti-airport folks won't be encumbered by the facts," Sorey said, "but as far as I'm concerned, we've done what we're going to do from the city's standpoint."