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## Merced on eve of Wal-Mart report's issue

**Citizens can get a copy of the hefty document and have 60 days to weigh in on its findings.**

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The much-anticipated and long-delayed report chronicling the proposed Wal-Mart distribution center's impact on Merced will be released Wednesday.

Once slated to be issued in November 2006, the report kicks off formal debate about whether the controversial project should be built.

Printed copies and digital versions on CD will be available in the lobby of City Hall beginning at 11 a.m. The city printed 85 copies and made 200 CDs. It will also be on the city's Web site.

City staff will hold a question-and-answer session to explain how the public can be involved.

Though the release isn't meant to be political, it's likely that the project's supporters and opponents may make a strong showing of support to send a message about their causes.

To some, it'll provide an unbiased account of how the project would forever change the landscape and should persuade leaders to think long and hard about the warehouse.

And for others, it means the city would be one step closer to giving the go-ahead to the nation's leading employer, which pledges that there'll be 600 full-time jobs on the first day of operation; that figure would grow to 900 by year-end, according to the global retailer.

Wal-Mart wants to build the center on 230 acres between Childs and Gerard avenues. At capacity, more than 450 trucks would come and go each day.

The review analyzes how building the 1.2 million-square-foot warehouse would affect the city's roads, water and air quality. It also suggests ways to lessen problems created by the development.

Wal-Mart first proposed building a distribution center in 2005. The report was initially slated for release in November 2006, but it continued to get bumped back.

Given the controversy surrounding the project, Wal-Mart and the city opted to have another set of eyes critique the report for any holes or mistakes. The company will reimburse the city for the costs.

An environmental impact report is required for big projects under state law.

The public will be able to read the draft report and offer their comments by sending letters to City Hall or by sending an e-mail to [espinosak@cityofmerced.org](mailto:espinosak@cityofmerced.org).

The city is unveiling an extended, 60-day timeline so people can digest the inch-and-a-half-thick report with double-sided pages. The last chance to comment will be 5 p.m. April 27.

EDAW, the nonpartisan firm writing the report, must respond to each question and comment before releasing the final version that goes before the City Council.

The number of letters will determine how long it takes before the final report is released.

In the case of Riverside Motorsports Park, the last controversial project in the county, it took 10 months before the final report was released because there were more than 1,000 postcards and hundreds of letters.

It's hard to gauge the amount of public input that the distribution center will receive, city planner Kim Espinosa said.

"Most (reports) get 10 or 12 letters," she said. "I think we'll get quite a few more."

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### For a copy

**Merced will release the environmental impact report about the proposed Wal-Mart distribution center at 11 a.m. Wednesday in City Hall's lobby.**

**A printed copy of the report costs \$45 and technical appendices are an additional \$45. A free copy of the CD with both volumes is available to the public. Additional copies of the CD are available for \$5 each. The report will also be on the city's Web site, [www.cityofmerced.org](http://www.cityofmerced.org). For more information, call the Planning Department at (209) 385-6858.**



### Merced Sun-Star

SunStar photo by George MacDonald Merced city planner Kim Espinosa puts copies the Wal-Mart distribution center environmental reports back in boxes at the Merced Civic Center Monday afternoon. The draft report will be released Wednesday for residents to read and offer their opinion about the 1.2 million-square-foot warehouse proposed for the eastern edge of the city.