

Riverbank air quality program lets colors fly

Flags above Myers Park tell if the breathing is easy

By EVE HIGHTOWER

Modesto Bee, Thursday, June 28, 2007

RIVERBANK - The green flags flying high above Jacob Myers Park and the city's welcome signs on Patterson Road are good signals, especially for asthma sufferers.

A green flag indicates a good air quality day.

Riverbank is the first city to partner with the American Lung Association to fly air quality flags.

It's not a new concept. Fresno, San Joaquin, Kings and Madera counties already fly flags.

Before the group joined the effort to inform people about daily air quality, asthma associations flew flags over schools, said Susie Rico, an American Lung Association spokeswoman. Many schools in Stanislaus County participate.

"I think awareness is essential for all of us living in the valley. I hope that by flying the flags, our citizens will have a better understanding of what they can do that day to protect themselves and our air quality," Councilwoman Virginia Madueño said Saturday at the program's kickoff.

On bad air days, air quality control districts suggest:

Sharing rides, taking public transportation, walking or biking instead of driving.

Linking trips by doing all errands at one time.

Postponing use of gas-powered lawn equipment.

Using an electric briquette igniter instead of lighter fluid.

Using water-based paints and solvents instead of oil-based products.

Irritating air has been a 7-year itch

The San Joaquin Valley has flunked the American Lung Association's air quality report card for the past seven years. Residents worry about tiny particles of dust, soot and chemicals that are trapped along with high levels of ozone between the Coast Range and the Sierra.

Valley residents ranked air quality and pollution ahead of crime in importance in a Public Policy Institute of California survey released last year.

Asthma is becoming increasingly problematic in the valley, where one child in six has the disease. That's twice the state's rate. Asthma is linked to a variety of other health issues, including lung damage, heart attacks and premature death.

Those health issues inspired Riverbank officials to participate in the association's program, City Manager Richard Holmer said.

Tire recycling plant eyeing Kings County

By Eiji Yamashita

Hanford Sentinel, Wednesday, June 27, 2007

Plans have resurfaced for a tire crumb processing plant that died down last year amid mounting controversy.

This time around, construction is being proposed outside city limits.

Modular Rubber Drain of Goshen now has approval from the county to build its business on rural property on Hanford-Armona Road, just east of Highway 43.

According to county records, the plan was approved on March 6. It does not require a public hearing, an environmental impact report or approval from county supervisors.

"If it's listed as a permitted use, we can process it as a ministerial permit," said Kings County Planner Mark Sherman.

The proposal is similar to what was proposed last year at the Industrial Park.

The company will build a plant that would turn scrap tires and farm plastic waste into rubber sidewalks and drains using a process that the company claims, and experts assure, is "emission-free."

What is new in the plan, according to county documents, is that the company will eventually make its own tire crumbs, although it will buy the crumbs from suppliers at the initial phase.

It appears the company is wasting no time in building the project.

On Thursday, company owner John Koster picked up a building permit application for a pole barn, one of three buildings to be built at the site. That's where plans call for installing the tire-grinding machine.

Later phases will build the 9,000-square-foot processing plant as well as storage with a capacity to stockpile 30,000 pounds of tire crumb at any time.

So far, the Modular Rubber Drain project is clear of neighborhood concerns, Sherman said.

The project appears to be smooth sailing for now. But the company kept its silence this week.

"We're not making any comments to you guys right now," Greg Graham, one of the principals of the company, said Friday. Graham declined to offer reasons for the company's no-comment stance.

The company does have a permit exemption from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to build the project. The county gave it automatic approval for the plant.

Although the project seems to be taking off smoothly, its previous proposal filed with the city last year was met with a series of hindrances thrown into its path.

First, it drew a growing amount of concern after its approval in October, largely because it was proposed next to a yogurt and whey product manufacturer in Kings Industrial Park.

Opposition reached its height in November with local environmental advocates, backed by a San Francisco environmental justice group, calling for more involved governmental scrutiny on the project.

Amid the controversy, the city rescinded the conditional use permit, although it wasn't because of the oppositions, but because neighbors had not been properly notified of the project.

Apparently burned out by dealing with the city, the company in January said it had begun looking elsewhere to locate. The company has since been tight-lipped to the media about its plans.

Bikepath may connect Taft to Bakersfield

By Victor Garcia, Midway Driller Staff Writer
Taft Midway Driller, Thursday, June 28, 2007

The Kern River Parkway bikepath in Bakersfield could be extended all the way to Taft.

The bike path, currently 22 miles, extends from the mouth of the Kern River Canyon to Interstate 5.

Some want to see the path extended farther. KernCOG at their meeting last month brought up the idea for discussion.

If those plans come to fruition, Taft's Rails to Trails would run all the way to the Kern Canyon northeast of Bakersfield.

KernCOG, at the request of Bakersfield councilman David Couch, has completed a feasibility study.

KernCOG Executive Director Ron Brummett said the main obstacle for the extension is negotiating with entities within the route, such as oil companies and canal companies.

Brummett said if it does happen, it will be a two-phase process, first extending the path to the Buena Vista Recreational area and then to Taft.

"It's a matter of working through the issues," said Brummett.

He said that Bakersfield and Taft, as well as the County, need to be involved in the process for it to work.

Brummett said as yet he has not heard from anyone regarding the study.

He added that if approved, negotiations with entities along the path could start immediately.

"It depends what the cities and the county wants to do," he said.

Brummett said "engineering wise, it's not that difficult."

"It can be built in pieces over time."

Look for more on the proposed bike path in Friday's Midway Driller.

The Driller will be interviewing Taft councilmen, Bakersfield councilmen, as well as Supervisor Ray Watson, to see what they think about the proposed bike path.

Learning to fight fire without fire

By Doug Keeler, Midway Driller Editor

Taft Midway Driller, Thursday, June 28, 2007

A local business is using an innovative new fire extinguisher training system that takes a lot of the dust, smoke and hassle out of mandatory OSHA instruction.

Excellent Fire Protection is the first firm in California using the new simulator, the firm's owners say.

Instead of using five gallons or more of flammable liquids to start a fire, an electronic training device to train people in the correct use of fire extinguishers.

The Hands-On Fire Extinguisher Training simulator is carried around on a trailer and is working well.

"We think it's a pretty neat deal. It's taken out a whole lot of problems," said Dale White of Excellent Fire Protection, who, with his partner Sahib Mujahid, operates the firm.

The owners are not the only ones who like it.

They have demonstrated it for both Kern County and Bakersfield City fire department officials and they have been impressed.

"The fire departments we've showed it to think its great," White said.

The new system shows a fire display on a screen and people have to aim the extinguisher at the display and hit it to pass the required instruction.

It's proving pretty popular.

Excellent Fire Protection obtained the system on May 15 and has done a lot of work with it.

The main advantage is the convenience and the lack of a mess. Instead of pouring five gallons or more of flammable liquid into a trough and igniting it before utilizing the fire extinguisher, only the contents of the extinguisher are used.

"We bought this so we could use this in the middle of town with out all the smoke, dust and everything else," White said.

Curiously, the one group he thought would be most supportive of it isn't impressed at all.

"We called the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District and they said its 'small potatoes.'"

LA judge won't block bus and rail fare hikes

In the S.F. Chronicle, Wednesday, June 27, 2007, and Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, June 28, 2007

Los Angeles (AP) -- A judge denied a request Wednesday to stop fare hikes for hundreds of thousands of public transit users.

The decision by Los Angeles Superior Court Judge James C. Chalfant came a day after a coalition of bus riders and environmentalists filed a lawsuit against the Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

The suit brought by the Natural Resources Defense Council, the Bus Riders Union and the think tank Labor/Community Strategy Center claimed pollution levels would surge because the estimated 100,000 bus riders - many of them working poor - would be priced out of public transportation and forced into cars.

The coalition asked the court to order the MTA to produce an environmental impact report and sought an injunction to hold off on the fare increase.

Despite the judge's ruling, the coalition will move forward with other parts of the lawsuit, said David Pettit, director of the NRDC's Southern California Air Program.

"Sure, I'm disappointed but the case isn't over," Pettit said.

Starting Sunday, the day pass for buses and trains increases from \$3 to \$5, the monthly pass climbs from \$52 to \$62, and the monthly pass for seniors rises from \$12 to \$14. The single-fare ride will remain at \$1.25 until July 2008, when it will go up by a quarter.

Gloria Molina, a Los Angeles County Supervisor and MTA board chairwoman, said the fare increase is "modest."

"The additional revenue will help stabilize Metro's finances and allow the agency to maintain and incrementally expand our quality service," Molina said in a statement.

Facing a \$1.8 billion deficit over the next decade, MTA directors authorized the fare hike May 24.

Taking a message to the streets

A planned caravan of 100 big rigs with a clean-air message falls short, and few commuters notice.

By Tiffany Hsu and Rong-Gong Lin II, Times Staff Writers

L.A. Times, Thursday, June 28, 2007

Los Angeles has seen demonstrations on streets, in parks, on hilltops and even in trees.

But civil disobedience on an L.A. freeway is tough, as truckers learned Wednesday.

Their effort to have an intimidating convoy roll down the 110 Freeway from downtown Los Angeles to the Port of Long Beach didn't seem to faze motorists used to bad traffic.

Officials and traffic reporters had warned that the protest by truckers could cause a traffic headache, with organizers promising a caravan of 100 big rigs.

The truckers, part of the Coalition for Clean and Safe Ports, were supporting a draft plan by the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach to slash diesel pollution from trucks by 80% in five years. The plan would require replacement or renovation of the oldest and dirtiest trucks with trucking companies, not the drivers, facing higher costs.

But at the Exposition Park staging area for the protest, it quickly became clear something was wrong: Only 27 big rigs showed up.

They merged onto the southbound 110 Freeway, driving single file.

On the freeway, it wasn't clear that the trucks even made up a convoy.

With traffic flowing relatively quickly and truckers moving between 30 and 40 mph, cars unaffiliated with the protest wove in and out of the convoy.

Polite truckers allowed them in, diluting the convoy's visual effect.

"They behaved themselves," said Officer Patrick Kimball of the California Highway Patrol, which had patrol officers lined up along the route from Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard to the port.

And from the fleet of news helicopters monitoring the drive, airborne reporters soon were reassuring commuters that they had little to worry about. One reporter even noted that many of the truckers had showed up for the protest with only their cabs, not their cargo containers.

Trucker Raul Rolando Agamenon, 56, said he decided to take part in the protest because two of his three children have asthma.

"We don't want to be here to block traffic, but we're all interested in this cause," Agamenon said.

Organizers wanted to make a statement, but it appeared few commuters noticed.

"I didn't hear about anything," said Carlos Herrera, an employee at a gas station on Vermont Avenue not far from the intersection of the 105 and 110 freeways.

Once at their destination, some trucks looped around the port building at least twice to get an extra pass at the cameras.

And somehow, the convoy parked at the port with eight fewer cabs than it started with. Organizers took pains to say that they believed more drivers participated in the rally, including some who were there for only part of it.

"I don't know why we lost trucks, although some drivers showed up initially without trucks, and then we picked up some trucks along the way," said Rafael Pizarro, senior campaign associate for the Coalition for Clean Air.

Other organizers said some truckers may have had to leave the convoy earlier for work.

"I'm not disheartened at all," said the Rev. William Smart, senior community organizer with the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy, who took part in the convoy. "I think it was there. We had enough."

PG&E lets customers buy carbon offsets

By Jane Kay

S.F. Chronicle, Thursday, June 28, 2007

Pacific Gas and Electric Co. is holding an event today to launch a program that lets customers offset their household energy use by voluntarily paying extra for environmentally beneficial projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Customers can enroll in the utility's ClimateSmart program, which helps figure the annual tonnage of carbon dioxide emissions related to the electricity use of a household or business. That carbon footprint can be offset, or neutralized, by paying a few dollars a month, PG&E says.

An average household's use produces 4.8 tons of carbon dioxide a year, which would come to \$4.31 a month under the program.

The utility will spend the money on such projects as managing mature forests that absorb carbon dioxide or controlling greenhouse gas emissions from livestock manure, PG&E spokesman Keely Wachs said.

Only projects that have been approved by the state's California Climate Action Registry, a public-private entity that oversees voluntary carbon reductions, will be supported with customers' funds, he said.

PG&E intends to monitor projects and report to the state Public Utilities Commission, which must approve its payments to carbon-cutting projects.

"We want to be as transparent as possible," said Wachs.

At 10 a.m. today, a panel will discuss the benefits and drawbacks of carbon offsets at the Golden Gate Club in the Presidio, 135 Fisher Loop.

Participants include Peter Liu, initial founder and vice chairman of New Resource Bank, and Dan Kammen, professor in the Energy and Resources Group at UC Berkeley.

The trend of becoming carbon neutral to combat global warming has been controversial. Some see it as a way to establish a voluntary carbon market aimed at putting a price on greenhouse gas pollution while others view it as a way for people to keep up wasteful energy use with less guilt.

Tahoe blaze long predicted, but prevention too late

By AMANDA FEHD - THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

In the Modesto Bee, Wednesday, June 27, 4:21 P.M.

SOUTH LAKE TAHOE - Environmentalists and authorities have long agreed that 150 years of logging, development and forest mismanagement in the Lake Tahoe Basin could spawn catastrophic wildfires like the one raging near the lake's south shore.

As black soot settled on the lake's surface Monday and threatened to permanently cloud its famously clear waters, they took no pleasure in the fact that their predictions had come to pass.

"This is really a disaster," said Coe Swobe, a former Nevada state senator who in 1969 sponsored legislation creating the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, a bi-state agency that regulates the region's development. "The cinders and the smoke are polluting the air, which in turn pollute the waters. It will take many years to recover if this continues."

All parties have long agreed that the amount of fuel in Tahoe's forests had reached critical levels, but little was done to address the problem during years of wrangling among environmentalists and government agencies over a plan to thin the forests and reduce the fire threat.

Environmental groups were wary of causing air pollution through controlled burns or jeopardizing the health of the forests by logging. And public officials argued among themselves over how best to address the wildfire threat without harming fragile forest ecosystems.

Even homeowners wanting to cut trees on their land were hamstrung by strict local planning rules regarding care of the forest.

In April, the U.S. Forest Service finally settled on a 10-year plan to thin and burn 38,000 acres of forest to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires.

Too little, too late, local leaders say.

'Fire didn't wait'

"This fire didn't wait 10 years," said South Lake Tahoe City Manager David Jinkens.

Ironically, the failure to thin the forests and reduce the fire threat is likely to have a more serious environmental impact than controlled burns or logging, environmentalists and public officials agreed.

"The time has come to make some tough decisions to avoid more catastrophic fires," Swobe said. "I don't know what it's going to take to wake up some of these people that are against moving fast. This may be the awakening."

Extensive logging during the late 19th century clouded Tahoe's crystal blue waters, and rampant development in the mountain resort area during the 1960s caused soil erosion and algae growth that furthered its demise. Visibility dropped from more than 100 feet to an average of a little more than 70 feet today.

A catastrophic blaze such as the An-gora fire can damage the watershed for years, said Rochelle Nason, executive director of the League to Save Lake Tahoe.

"This is that event we've all dreaded," agreed California state Sen. Dave Cox, who represents the area.

Lt. Gov. John Garamendi, acting as governor in Gov. Schwarzenegger's absence, called the wildfire a "devastating situation, one that's going to go for some while because not just the fire, but then the recovery and the potential environmental problems that will result from this fire."

[Stockton Record, Editorial, Thursday, June 28, 2007:](#)

Fuming about funding

Central Valley must get its fair share of state bond funds to reduce air pollution

Some of the dirtiest air in the United States is trapped in the San Joaquin Valley, much of it spewed out by heavy-duty diesel trucks.

When Californians passed Proposition 1B in November, they did so believing part of the \$19.9 billion would be spent to improve air quality. The initiative designated \$1 billion to "reduce emissions from goods movement activities."

Common sense and ample environmental evidence make it clear a hefty chunk of that funding should be spent in the Valley, fouled by all those 18-wheelers grinding up and down Interstate 5 and Highway 99.

Whether that will happen or not remains as unclear as the air between Stockton and Bakersfield.

In the often unjust realm of state politics, Southern California lawmakers are attempting to seize most of the bond's funds for their districts.

Bond allocations are part of 2007-08 state budget negotiations this week in Sacramento. The measure's language left many of the details for lawmakers to decide.

Unfortunately, Valley representatives aren't united on the issue. An internal dispute has diluted the region's impact.

State Sen. Michael Machado, D-Linden, is heavily involved in negotiations on the budget, which is supposed to be ready for Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger by Sunday.

Machado is sponsoring a bill (SB719) that would restructure membership of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control Board.

At the same time, a bill by state Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, would link attempts by Valley leaders to obtain a fair share of funding with reconstitution of the board's membership.

In an interview with the Fresno Bee, Florez made it clear that the funds would be better spent elsewhere if the air pollution control group isn't reformed.

However troubled the 11-member board might be, it's counterproductive to hold such vital and beneficial funding hostage. Machado agrees.

Virtually every other Valley lawmaker - and members of Schwarzenegger's California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley - is trying to obtain the much-needed funding.

It's simple. The issues - justified financial assistance for replacing aging diesel trucks vs. reconstituted air board membership - must be separated.

Members of the state Air Resources Board, reviewing every region with "major goods movement," said the Valley - with its combination of heat, topography and smog-producing vehicles - has worse air than the Los Angeles area.

Reducing nitrogen oxide, the primary source of smog, is a critical factor in cleaning up the air. Forty percent of nitrogen oxide comes from diesel trucks.

The critical bond funds would be used for retrofitting and replacing the worst offenders.

Many regions of the state are responsible for producing unhealthy air, including the Central Valley. A fair portion of these vital bond measure funds must be used where they are needed most: to dispel diesel fumes trapped in the Valley.

[Fresno Bee commentary, Thursday, June 28, 2007:](#)

DEAN FLOREZ: Air board displays arrogance

After appearing before the governing board of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District on June 21, it became apparent that board members have fallen into the trap of believing in their own self-importance. They have developed the notion that somehow they are the experts when it comes to cleaning the air by the mere fact they were "appointed" to sit on the air board.

In debating whether to support Senate Bill 719, which would add to the board public members with expertise in public health, board member after board member said such an individual would not be accountable to the public because they had not been elected to the board. But neither was anyone who made that argument.

Air board members are never elected by the public to sit on the board; they are appointed. In fact, the public never even voted to create the air board. The air board's structure was created by state government to clean the air in the interest of public health. If any one body is ultimately responsible for the board's actions, it is the state.

As with all agency appointees, air board members are answerable to the body or individual who appointed them. That is the case under the current system in which members are appointed by their board of supervisors and would be no less true of an individual appointed by the governor and ratified by the Legislature, as with SB 719.

It was almost comical to hear some board members malign the medical profession out of one side of their mouths, implying doctors do a poor job of diagnosing patients and would do no better for the board, and at the same time claim that the board has access to the best medical advice available.

Are board members honestly saying that doctors are less qualified than they are to sit on the air board and make informed decisions on matters of public health? And with that attitude about medical professionals, would board members really seek out their advice?

Give me a break.

There is a certain arrogance that develops among politicians who believe that they somehow hold special knowledge that no one else has or can master -- that only they are qualified to make decisions.

This kind of attitude is the height of arrogance, especially when it comes to the appointment -- not election -- to a board that was created by state government for the benefit of the California public.

I do not buy board members' argument that critics believe this is a "do-nothing" board. What critics have pointed out is that the SJVAPCD board does not have the stomach or will to make the tough decisions needed to get us to the finish line, which is clean air for the Valley.

In fact, they seem to be losing speed at a critical time -- just when we need them to take the last steps toward winning cleaner air for the thousands of children who can't breathe, let alone run in the playground and just be kids.

A change in perspective is needed if we expect a change in results.

[Bakersfield Californian, Commentary, Thursday, June 28, 2007:](#)

Valley air board close minded

By Sen. Dean Florez

After appearing before the governing board of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District on June 21, it became readily apparent that board members have fallen into the trap of believing in their own self-importance.

They have developed the notion that somehow they are the experts when it comes to cleaning the air by the mere fact they were appointed to sit on the air board.

In debating whether or not to support SB719 that would add to the board public members with expertise in public health, board member after board member said such an individual would not be accountable to the public because they had not been elected to the board -- but neither was anyone who made that argument.

Air board members are never elected by the public to sit on the board -- they are appointed. In fact, the public never even voted to create the air board. The air board's structure was created by state government to clean the air in the interest of public health. If any one body is ultimately responsible for the board's actions, it is the state.

As with all agency appointees, air board members are answerable to the body or individual who appointed them. That is the case under the current system in which members are appointed by their Boards of Supervisors and would be no less true of an individual appointed by the governor and ratified by the Legislature, as with SB719.

It was almost comical to hear some board members malign the medical profession out of one side of their mouths, implying doctors do a poor job of diagnosing patients and would do no better for the board, and at the same time claim that the board has access to the best medical advice available.

Are board members honestly saying that doctors are less qualified than they are to sit on the air board and make informed decisions on matters of public health? And with that attitude about medical professionals, would board members really seek out their advice?

Give me a break.

There is a certain arrogance that develops among politicians who believe that they somehow hold special knowledge that no one else has or can master -- that only they are qualified to make decisions. This kind of attitude is the height of arrogance, especially when it comes to the appointment -- not election -- to a board that was created by state government for the benefit of the public.

I do not buy board members' argument that critics believe this is a "do nothing" board. What critics have pointed out is that the SJVAPCD board does not have the stomach or will to make the tough decisions needed to get us to the finish line, which is clean air for the valley.

In fact, they seem to be losing speed at a critical time -- just when we need them to take the last steps toward winning cleaner air for the thousands of children who can't breathe, let alone run in the playground and just be kids.

A change in perspective is needed if we expect a change in results.

Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, represents portions of Kern County.