

When wood you be able to burn? Meeting tonight

By Alex Breitler - Record Staff Writer
Stockton Record, Tuesday, August 19, 2008

It seems an odd subject for late August, but let's talk about your fireplace.

San Joaquin Valley air cops will visit Stockton tonight to share their latest plan to improve the region's notoriously dirty air.

They want to toughen an existing rule that outlaws burning wood when air pollution is at its worst. The likely result would be additional days each winter on which you may not legally burn.

While the idea is to spare neighbors who might be sensitive to smoke spewing from your chimney, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District admits that some folks don't like being told they can't light a fire in their own fireplace, or use their own wood stove.

"We're hearing some impassioned arguments from both sides of the issue, including some people who want to keep using their fireplaces for economic reasons," said Jessica Hafer, a senior air specialist with the district.

To this point, under a more lenient rule, San Joaquin County has seen wood burning banned just two days in the past five years.

That's because the air here is generally cleaner than points south.

Lowering the pollution threshold, however, means more no-burn days in the northern San Joaquin Valley -- anywhere from nine to a dozen each year, officials roughly estimate.

Don Harding, a 36-year resident of Lodi, prefers wood heating because he says it warms his home evenly, and there's no fussing with a thermostat. He said he even heats soups and stews over a wood fire.

He always calls the district before he burns.

"I want to do my part," said Harding, who has asthma. "I think some of their burn restriction days are kind of crazy, but I don't make the rules here."

The district's justifications for the stricter rule are many. Among them:

- Officials cite a study that wood smoke containing tiny particulate matter, or PM2.5, was 12 times more likely to cause cancer than cigarette smoke.
- Wood smoke can seep into your home even if the doors and windows are closed; it can aggravate breathing problems and contribute to premature death in those with heart or lung disease.
- Failing to meet federal PM2.5 standards costs the Valley about \$3.2 billion per year in lost productivity, missed school days and health costs.

Neighboring air districts have passed similar burning rules. While no such rule exists in Calaveras County, residents there can file smoke complaints with air quality officials, a spokesman said.

If the Valley air district's rule passes, the end result in San Joaquin County would be roughly 24 tons of PM2.5 kept out of the air, regulators say. Those who have no gas or electricity in their homes would be exempt from the rule.

Even on days when burning is allowed, officials will ask you to abstain, Hafer said.

"We want to make sure people know wood burning is always discouraged in the Valley," she said.

GOT A BURNING QUESTION?

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District will discuss its proposed wood-burning rule at 6:30 tonight at the San Joaquin Council of Governments' board room, 555 E. Weber Ave. in Stockton. Public comments are welcome.

To read more about the rule, visit www.valleyair.org.

Air board seeks tighter fireplace emission rules

The Associated Press

In the SF Chronicle, Tri-Valley Herald, Modesto Bee and other papers, Tuesday August 19, 2008

MODESTO, Calif.-San Joaquin Valley residents who hope to enjoy warming themselves in front of the fireplace this winter may have fewer days to do it.

The Valley Air Pollution Control District is taking public comments on its plan to tighten regulations in place since 2003 that ban wood burning on days when air pollution is particularly bad.

The district predicts that Fresno County would have 48 no-burn days under the new regulations, compared to six last winter.

Stanislaus and Merced county residents would likely each have 12 and San Joaquin County nine. Stanislaus had one no-burn day last winter, while San Joaquin and Merced counties had none.

Residents can be fined \$50 for violations, though the policy exempts homes in rural areas that lack natural gas hookups.

Officials reveal more about Bakersfield Christian player's death

By MAGGIE CREAMER, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Aug. 19, 2008

More details emerged Monday about the death of a Bakersfield Christian High School football player who collapsed at home after practicing in 100-plus degree heat.

And on what otherwise should have been a joyful first day of school, students and faculty began mourning for would-be junior Patrick Allen.

"You are stunned," school President Daniel Cole said. "There is no other way to say it. You are just absolutely stunned. It's as tragic as things get for kids."

Allen died Sunday, said Sandy Doucette, spokeswoman for Mercy Hospitals of Bakersfield. Bakersfield Christian officials had reported Allen's death Friday.

Cole collapsed after football practice Thursday. While he wasn't sure of the exact details, Cole said he has spoken to Allen's family about what happened.

Allen mentioned feeling cramps at practice, which started at 4 p.m., Cole said he had heard. Two students who were with Allen after practice, Cole said, reported the cramps intensified on the way home so the three stopped for water.

Allen's dad might have come and gotten him at that point, Cole said.

At home, Allen rehydrated while watching the Olympics and ate something, Cole said. Paramedics were called after Allen threw up and passed out.

Cole said Allen's illness may have been heat-related.

"That's what we believe, but certainly, I'm not a physician, and no one has told me that either," he said.

The high temperature Thursday was 104 degrees and the average humidity was 25 percent, according to the National Weather Service.

The California Interscholastic Federation recommends that in those types of conditions, practices not start until after 6:30 p.m., said Jim Crichlow, central section commissioner.

They are just recommendations; schools and school districts set their own policies, he said. He hesitated to judge what happened in Allen's case because he wasn't there and he doesn't know about the teen's underlying health condition.

And, Crichlow said, Bakersfield Christian's athletics director and football coach is cautious.

Crichlow said CIF recommends coaches and athletes check the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's daily air forecast and not practice when it hits "red."

"Everybody's instructed to be cautious," Crichlow said. "These are kids we're dealing with."

Taft High School football coach Steve Sprague said he hopes "there's no finger-pointing."

"It's no reflection on the athlete, because it could be anyone. It's no reflection on the school, because it could be anywhere and it's no reflection on the coaches, because it's just a numbers game," he said.

"It's not 100 percent safe, what we do. So the 99 and 98, sometimes something happens."

He said kids sometimes push themselves too hard and coaches have to make sure they're eating right and staying hydrated.

Sprague said BCHS coach Doug Barnett watches out for his players.

BCHS football practice continued at 3 p.m. Monday, but Cole said he did not know if it would be a full practice or a team meeting.

The school has a certified trainer on campus every day, Cole said. He said the school offers athletes water breaks about every 10 minutes and has a canopy football players can stand under.

During high temperatures, the team has longer and more breaks, uses minimal equipment, provides access to cold tubs and reduces practice time and workout intensity, according to the school's football practice guidelines.

Cole said he believes the school has good policies in place.

He said coaches will and constantly are reviewing workout policies to protect athletes.

"You beat yourself up trying to figure out how to do it," he said. "But that's why you have protocols in place. That's why you think these things out ahead of time, and you do the best job you can."

At the beginning of each season, Cole said coaches have a mandatory meeting with parents to warn them about the dangers of participating in athletics, especially football.

The St. Luke's Anglican Church will have a private memorial service for family and friends at 9 a.m. Thursday at the parish. Another service will be held at 2 p.m. at BCHS.

Cole said the family has shown tremendous strength and courage. He said Allen's dad addressed the football team at the hospital on Friday.

The family hopes the team will win the state championship this season because that was Allen's goal, Cole said.

"It is that mentality, it's that type of attitude that characterizes certainly the parent's courage," he said. "We need to honor them and their son by moving on, and being as courage as they are."

SAFE SPORTING IN THE HEAT

On Thursday, the high temperature was 104 degrees and the average humidity was 25 percent, according to the National Weather Service.

In those conditions, the National Athletic Trainers' Association recommends children receive a five- to 10-minute rest and fluid break every 15 to 20 minutes of activity.

Children should be in shorts and T-shirts only, with all protective equipment removed.

The association has these tips:

- Before your child starts playing a sport, he or she should have a physical examination that includes specific questions about any history of heat illness.
- Tell your child's coach about any history of heat illness.
- Make sure your child is properly hydrated before he or she heads out the door to a practice or game. Give your children their own water bottles.

- Make sure your child's coach has your emergency contact numbers, and the coach should have these readily available.
- Be aware of temperature and humidity levels. Change practice length, intensity and equipment use as the levels rise.
- It should be easy for children to drink fluids during practice, and you should remind them to drink regularly. Fluid breaks should be scheduled for all practices and become more frequent as the heat and humidity levels rise.
- Every athletic organization should have an emergency action plan for obtaining emergency medical services if needed.

Report rough on golf course

But Trinitas' owner says environmental impact review is good starting point for talks

By Dana M. Nichols - Record Staff Writer

Stockton Record, Tuesday, August 18, 2008

WALLACE - The Trinitas golf course resort -- built in an agricultural preserve just east of the San Joaquin County line -- will worsen air pollution, disturb American Indian archeological sites and require wider roads and a pipeline to bring water service to the area, according to a revised draft environmental impact report released Monday.

The Calaveras County golf course is controversial because it was built between 2001 and 2005 on agricultural preserve land despite repeated protests by neighbors.

Normally, environmental impact reports are done before developments are built. But it was not until Trinitas owner Mike Nemee sought to also build a resort lodge and 13 luxury houses that officials drafted an environmental impact report for the 280-acre project.

That initial report, completed in 2007, treated the golf course as a "pre-existing condition." It did not consider possible damage caused by its construction, such as the loss of wetlands habitat when creek beds were lined with cobblestones and concrete.

In an unusual move, Calaveras supervisors ordered a revised environmental impact report to consider impacts created by construction of the golf course. The revised report also greatly expanded the analysis of issues such as whether the resort's wells would lower the local water table and harm the production of neighboring wells.

On Monday, Nemee said he is pleased with the thoroughness of the report.

"It is certainly a great starting point for open dialogue -- how to balance economic development opportunities with reasonable mitigation," he said.

Nemee said he was not yet ready to discuss whether he can afford all the proposed mitigations. Among those proposals are a requirement that municipal surface-water be piped to the site -- possibly from Wallace four miles to the north or from Jenny Lind several miles to the east. Connection to a public water system would be required before Nemee could obtain a permit to build the golf resort lodge.

Other proposals would require improvements, including left turn lanes on nearby highways 12 and 26, widening part of Ospital Road, abandoning use of one of the resort's wells and finding 200 acres of farm land nearby to place in a conservation easement in exchange for the farm land lost to the resort.

Critics of Trinitas agree with Nemee that the report is much more thorough than the original environmental review.

"We think it is much more objective than last year's was," said Kathy Mayhew, a Trinitas neighbor who with her husband, Lew, and some other neighbors formed a group known as Keep It Rural Calaveras to oppose the development.

Kathy Mayhew said she was particularly struck by a statement that said golf courses are not legal in agricultural preserves in Calaveras County and that county staff disagrees with the previous report that said county staff had determined that a golf course was legal.

"That kind of feels like vindication, that it was not done according to the rule book," Mayhew said.

But the question of the golf course's zoning likely is to be hotly debated.

The executive summary cites a footnote in the county General Plan as justification for creating golf course-friendly recreation zoning within an agricultural preserve. Yet the General Plan says the exception that allows recreation developments in natural lands including preserves is intended for uses such as ski resorts and marinas "to accommodate the location of commercial development which is truly tied to a specific recreation resource, as opposed to all recreation-oriented businesses."

Susan Larson, a former Calaveras County planning official who now serves as a consultant to Nemeo, said she is confident that a golf course is the kind of use envisioned by the General Plan for a recreation zone, and that a recreation zone is just fine in an agricultural preserve.

"And it still allows the agricultural endeavors which are taking place on the property and being expanded to continue," Larson said, referring to the Trinitas olive orchards.

Mark Connolly, a Tracy lawyer and land-use expert who is working for Keep It Rural Calaveras, disagreed. "They are really reaching," Connolly said of Larson's interpretation of the General Plan rules on agricultural preserves.

"This isn't just a golf course. It is a 30-room lodge. It is the snack shop. It is the other special feature," Connolly said. "And the 13 houses as well. You can't just take one part of it and say we are going to designate it as recreational."

Publication of the revised draft environmental impact report launches a 45-day public comment period, after which county staff will respond to the comments and schedule project review before the Planning Commission and the county Board of Supervisors.

THE RIDGE AT TRINITAS

See the revised draft environmental impact report for the golf course resort online by going to ccwstor.co.calaveras.ca.us. A 45-day public comment period will expire at the beginning of October. Send comments by email to trinitas@co.calaveras.ca.us or by mail to Robert Sellman, planning director, Calaveras County Community Development Agency, 891 Mountain Ranch Road, San Andreas, CA 95249

SoCal regional air district sued over emission credits

By NOAKI SCHWARTZ - Associated Press Writer

In the SF Chronicle, Tri-Valley Herald and Modesto Bee, Tuesday, August 19, 2008

LOS ANGELES-A coalition of environmental groups filed a federal lawsuit Monday against Southern California's anti-smog agency accusing it of unlawfully allowing companies to pollute by selling them invalid emission credits.

The lawsuit accuses the South Coast Air Quality Management District of selling the bogus credits "to countless polluting facilities" for nearly two decades.

The credits are required by state and federal law for companies seeking to expand operations and emit more pollution. The conservationists charge that the air district's cache of emission credits was used up long ago, but that it sold companies bogus credits allotted for public service projects.

The agency covers Orange County and parts of Los Angeles, San Bernardino and Riverside counties.

"Why is the agency created to protect the air so actively trying to pollute it?" said Tim Grabel, a staff attorney for the Natural Resources Defense Council, among the groups that filed the lawsuit.

The coalition accuses the agency of violating the federal Clean Air Act, which requires credits to be enforceable, quantifiable and permanent. The group wants a court to declare that the district violated the act and wants an injunction prohibiting the district from distributing invalid credits.

Several calls for comment to the district were not returned Monday afternoon because the organization's media office was closed.

Others groups that filed the lawsuit include the Coalition for a Safe Environment, Desert Citizens Against Pollution and Communities for a Better Environment.

On July 28, the same group won a related court victory regarding how the agency developed its air credits. A Los Angeles Superior Court judge found that local officials had not done an adequate environmental and health analysis before deciding to sell credits to energy companies for far below market value. The decision threw a wrench into plans for more than a dozen new power plants in Southern California.

The credits in question were part of a special supply of pollution credits that were supposed to be used for public services such as the construction of schools or hospitals even if they add to the region's pollution. Instead, the district sold the credits to energy companies for \$420 million.

Angela Johnson Meszaros, an attorney for Desert Citizens Against Pollution, compared the regional agency's activities to a bank giving out counterfeit dollars.

"We say you can't give money to power plants," she said. "Then we start looking at it and start to realize the money they want to give out to the power plants is money they don't have."

Newly Discovered Air Pollutants May Cause Lung Problems

By Steven Reinberg

Washington Post, Monday, August 18, 2008

Recently discovered so-called free radicals that are attached to small particles of air pollution could cause lung damage and perhaps even lung cancer, researchers report.

If confirmed through further research, the finding could help to explain why nonsmokers develop tobacco-related diseases like lung cancer, said lead researcher H. Barry Dellinger, the Patrick F. Taylor Chair of environmental chemistry at Louisiana State University.

It has been known for years that free radicals exist in the atmosphere, and these atoms, molecules and fragments of molecules can damage cells. It had been thought that these particles, which can be produced by combustion, exist for less than a second and then disappear.

"What I found out is that combustion-generated particles contain environmentally persistent free radicals," said Dellinger. "When the radicals are associated with particles, they can apparently exist indefinitely."

These free radicals are remarkably similar to the free radicals found in cigarette tar, Dellinger said. "The implication is you can have the same environmentally related diseases by exposure to airborne fine particles that you can get from cigarettes," he said.

Dellinger noted, however, that one would have to smoke about 300 cigarettes a day to be exposed to the same level of environmental free radicals found in moderately polluted air.

The findings were to be presented Monday at the American Chemical Society annual meeting, in Philadelphia.

The persistent free radicals (PFRs) discovered by Dellinger's team attach themselves to small particles of air pollution as they leave smokestacks, car exhaust pipes and household chimneys, and continue to exist as free radicals. Particles of air pollution containing metals, such as copper and iron, are more likely to remain in the atmosphere and can carry these PFRs great distances, Dellinger said.

As PFRs are inhaled, they're absorbed by the lungs and other tissues and cause cell damage that can lead to problems such as asthma, emphysema and lung cancer. However, there's still no direct evidence linking PFRs to any of these diseases, he said.

Dr. Neil Schachter, a professor of pulmonary medicine at Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York City, thinks it's premature to blame persistent free radicals for the adverse effects of air pollution.

"These airborne free radicals are of interest, but I am not sure we are at a point where our scalpel is sharp enough to dissect the individual components of air pollution that cause problems for people," he said.

It's possible that persistent free radicals are responsible for the respiratory damage caused by pollution, Schachter acknowledged. "There are studies that show that modifying free radicals can alter the course of disease," he said. "But the implications of this -- what it means to clinics, what it means to doctors, what it means to regulators -- I think we are a long way from pulling that together."

Idling Con Ed Trucks Set a Bad Example

By Ken Belson

N.Y. Times, Tuesday, Aug. 19, 2008

Every so often, a City Room reader writes us to complain about idling Con Edison service trucks. Last week, Steven M. described a utility truck on Ninth Avenue "with engine running, window open, and driver eating breakfast."

Steven M. and others says they are particularly annoyed because Con Edison often reminds customers to save energy, yet seems to waste energy in full view of those customers.

Chris Olert, a Con Edison spokesman, said that sometimes trucks need to keep their engines running when they are making repairs, but that the utility is aware that other work crews occasionally idle their engines unnecessarily.

"We have for decades discouraged our crews from idling their vehicles," he said. "Within the last month, Con Edison's Environment Health and Safety group has been holding meetings throughout the company to remind field crews of our idling policies."

At the beginning of July, Con Edison sent the following note to supervisors in the Environment Health and Safety group:

We recently received some feedback that not all employees are complying with the restrictions on vehicle idling. It is important that you take every opportunity to reinforce within your organization the need to turn off our vehicles. Given the high price of fuel and summer air quality issues, any idling of our vehicles is being closely scrutinized by the general public. Our employees need to both understand and follow the above rules so they can properly address any inquiries they may receive during the course of their work.

Mr. Olert, though, said there are no penalties for drivers who are caught idling their engines.

"We have an extremely responsible workforce," he said. "Sometimes rules get broken. We have to remind them not to break them."

Not to excuse the behavior of its idling drivers, Con Edison said in June that its 1,700 diesel trucks are using B-20 biodiesel fuel, which is made partly from soybeans. The utility is also replacing 50 smaller vehicles with hybrids.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Tuesday, Aug. 19, 2008:](#)

Driving less would do more for state than urging 'efficient driving'

With California attempting to lead the states in reducing carbon emissions, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger is pushing solutions not only through policy but also individual action.

The governor is making a push to get individuals to take responsibility for their own fuel use -- saving money at the gas pump and contributing in their own small way to reducing global warming.

Schwarzenegger is the spokesman for a new education initiative called EcoDriving USA, with support from automakers, auto dealers and the Environmental Defense Fund.

In that role, he makes a powerful pitch: "We hear a lot of ideas from politicians about lowering the gas prices and fighting global warming, whether it's biofuels, offshore drilling or nuclear power. But none of those will affect the gas prices right now. Only you can do that."

He gives specifics on how to reduce fuel costs by more than 15%: "I'm talking about simple things like proper tire pressure, avoiding rapid starts and stops, and keeping your engine tuned."

He concludes that "we don't have to wait for the politicians to take action. Each of us has the power to make a difference, right now." Schwarzenegger also encourages people to "buy a hybrid car that gets 50 miles to the gallon."

What's disappointing, however, is how minimalist Schwarzenegger's approach is -- limited to promoting more efficient use of gasoline. He could instead use his star power to encourage real conservation -- using other modes of transportation (walking, biking, carpooling or riding transit) and planning ahead to combine car trips ("trip chaining"). Such practices not only save gas but also reduce air pollution and traffic congestion.

We'd like to see Schwarzenegger issue a conservation challenge. Why not ask Californians to eliminate two (or more) car trips a week?

A "drive less" campaign would be a more effective way to jump-start alternatives than a "drive efficiently" campaign.