

Air board fines county for missing low-emissions bus upgrade deadline State officials also find violations in truck fleet and Bookmobile

By Valerie Gibbons

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Wednesday, March 18, 2009

California's Air Resources Board has fined Tulare County after officials missed a deadline to upgrade the county's bus fleet with low-emissions vehicles.

The county has been fined \$5,250. Part of that fine includes emissions violations involving the county's smaller truck fleet.

The air board also found emissions violations with the county's Bookmobile.

"We missed a deadline," said Dan Fox, Tulare County's transit director. "We've been trying to get our fleet upgraded to natural gas. We have one [natural gas bus] that should arrive any day, and we have another seven on order."

Others also fined

Tulare County is far from the only agency cited, however. The board recently levied fines against Kings County and Fresno County and, in October 2007, fined the city of Visalia \$11,000.

As part of the Tulare County settlement, Tulare County Area Transit is required to:

- Guarantee that employees responsible for conducting inspections attend a training class on diesel-emissions compliance testing and provide certificates of completion within one year.
- Provide documentation to ARB that the inspections are being carried out for the next four years.
- Ensure all heavy-duty diesel vehicles have their software updated with the latest emissions technology.
- Instruct vehicle operators to comply with the state's idling regulations.
- Comply with requirements of the fleet rule for transit agencies.
- Ensure all diesel trucks are up to federal emissions standards for the vehicle model year.

Fox said the board has no appeals process.

Out of the \$5,250 in penalties, \$3,937.50 will go to the California Air Pollution Control Fund. The Peralta Community College District will receive \$656.25 for emissions education classes and the California Pollution Control Financing Authority will receive the remaining \$656.25 for low-interest loans for owners of off-road diesel-powered construction vehicles.

Smog: Tulare transit fined over diesel inspections

By Mark Grossi, FresnoBee.com, Tuesday, March 17, 2009

The state this month fined Tulare County Area Transit more than \$5,000 for failing to inspect its diesel bus fleet for smoke emissions in 2006 and 2007.

Enforcement teams found that the transit agency both failed to meet the transit fleet vehicle rule requirements and inspect their buses for excess emissions.

"There is no excuse for violating the clean truck and bus laws," said Mary Nichols, chairwoman of the California Air Resources Board. "ARB enforcement personnel offer training around the state to public transportation authorities to meet inspection, operating and recordkeeping requirements."

Annual smoke tests are required for diesel bus and truck fleets and the law ensures that all vehicles are properly maintained, tamper-free and free from excessive smoke.

Panel approves plans for UC Merced campus growth

Environmental report also gets a green light; board of regents to vote on it today.

By Danielle Gaines

Merced Sun-Star, Wednesday, March 18, 2009

The UC Merced long-range development plan and final environmental impact report received support from a key University of California Regents committee Tuesday.

The committee on grounds and buildings certified the findings of the university's environmental impact report and approved the 2009 long-range development plan.

The committee also adopted a mitigation monitoring program to address environmental concerns at the growing campus.

"I want to commend you for actually revising the campus plan to mitigate the impact on the wetlands," said regent Bonnie Reiss.

UC Merced planners decreased the size of the campus to 815 acres, from 910 acres.

Buildings have also been relocated farther south and east to create the "environmentally least-damaging alternative," according to paperwork filed with the Army Corps of Engineers.

The environmental impact report, also called an environmental impact statement, identifies potential significant environmental impacts associated with the development and operation of the planned 25,000-student campus in Merced County.

The Army Corps must review the final environmental impact report and will issue a record of decision within approximately 60 to 90 days, according to an estimated timeline on its Web site.

After the record of decision, the corps will issue permits that allow the university to build on lands protected by the U.S. Clean Water Act.

The university has worked with the Army Corps since 2002 on environmental impact plans.

In November 2008, the university released a draft of the final report to solicit community comments. Twenty-four comment letters were received by various public agencies and citizens, according to the resolution passed by the regents.

Among the environmental concerns submitted were decreased scenic views of the Sierra Nevada because of construction, increased air toxins, and various other issues related to the increase in population.

UC Merced laid out in detail what actions it would take to lessen each of those impacts.

In the construction phase, builders will use techniques to reduce dust particles in the air by watering down soil before it is removed or driven on.

Community leaders and citizens worried that the increased student population would increase car traffic on area roads and cause deterioration.

UC Merced agreed this was a possibility and will pitch in for road repairs when needed.

As for the vistas, UC Merced said it will plant tall trees along the western boundary of campus to screen views of the campus facilities from Lake Yosemite. Roads and walkways will be located in areas that will provide views of the mountainside to travelers.

Thomas Lollini, associate vice chancellor for design and construction, said the university is committed to reducing any strain on local utilities.

The first building to break ground after Army Corps land permits are issued will be a solar photovoltaic facility, Lollini said.

The power generated from the building is expected to produce about 20 percent of the campus' yearly electrical need.

Lollini said photovoltaic cells may also be installed on the rooftops of future buildings and that one planned building may include a photovoltaic skin.

Lollini said the university was also undertaking a water neutrality goal to reduce strain on the regional groundwater aquifer.

The committee's decision will be presented to the full board for final approval on Thursday afternoon. A public comment period will be held at 8:30 a.m. in the commons area at the UC Riverside campus where the board is meeting.

UC Regents committee approves energy overhaul

The Associated Press

Modesto Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Tuesday, March 17, 2009

RIVERSIDE, Calif. -- A University of California Regents' committee has approved a program to work with the state's utilities to boost energy efficiency at UC campuses and medical schools over the next three years.

The plan to reduce energy costs and greenhouse gas emissions was approved Tuesday by the UC Regents' grounds and buildings committee. Approval by the full board is expected Thursday.

The program will fund about 900 energy-efficiency projects at nine of UC's 10 campuses and four medical schools. When complete, it's expected to reduce UC's annual utility costs by \$36 million, or almost 10 percent.

The utilities will provide about \$61 million for the \$247 million program, while most of the remaining \$186 million will be financed through by revenue bonds.

SMUD offers chance to swap gas mowers for electric

By Niesha Lofing

Sacramento Bee, Tuesday, March 17, 2009

The grass might not be greener, but one organization thinks caring for it can be cleaner.

Sacramento Municipal Utilities District is acting on that belief with a program whereby people can swap old gas-powered lawn mowers for new electric machines at a fraction of the cost.

Registration for the SMUD's Mow Down Air Pollution 2009 event begins Wednesday and is on a first-come, first-served basis, a SMUD news release states.

There are 900 electric mowers available.

Two sizes of cordless lawn mowers are being offered: a model with a 14-inch cut for \$189 and a 19-inch model for \$289. The cost is more than half off the usual retail prices, the release states.

The district has held the Mow Down Air Pollution program for 13 years and replaced more than 11,000 gas mowers with non-polluting, rechargeable electric mowers.

Electric mowers are cleaner, quieter and safer than gas mowers, SMUD states.

While electric mowers result in virtually no air pollution, one gas mower can produce as much pollution in one hour as driving a late-model car from Sacramento to Los Angeles, the release states.

Customers can register online for the event starting at 11 a.m. Wednesday at www.smud.org or by calling (888) 742-7683.

The trade-in event will be 7 a.m. to noon March 28 at California State University, Sacramento. Pre-registered customers are asked to drain gas and oil from their gas-powered mowers before the exchange.

Event staff will help customers load and unload mowers from their vehicles, and customers will be able to drive through the event, the release states.

For more information about the event, go to www.smud.org.

For more information about the mowers, go to www.myneutron.com.

Pleasant Hill to explore shuttle linking employers near BART station with shopping centers

By Lisa P. White

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Wednesday, March 18, 2009

PLEASANT HILL — When hundreds of employees move into the new California State Automobile Association headquarters on Buskirk Avenue, Pleasant Hill leaders hope they will visit one of the city's shopping centers for lunch.

To make lunchtime excursions faster and less stressful, the city is exploring the idea of a shuttle linking employers around the Pleasant Hill BART station with the downtown and Crossroads shopping center.

Kelly Calhoun, economic development manager for the city, said the idea arose when the city learned from AAA that many of its employees would commute on BART, leaving them without a car during the lunch hour and within walking distance of few eateries.

And as construction on the transit village at the Pleasant Hill BART station continues and eventually includes 270,000 square feet of office space, the number of workers in that area is expected to grow.

"We knew they would be looking for potential places to spend their money and have lunch," Calhoun said.

The City Council gave its staff the go-ahead Monday to apply for a Caltrans grant to study the feasibility of a shuttle.

Pleasant Hill is working with 511 Contra Costa, a group which advocates ditching the single-occupant vehicle for "green commutes" such as carpooling, walking, cycling and taking public transportation.

"In general, what we're interested in is finding feasible ways that employees can run midday errands — shopping errands, lunchtime errands — without a car," said Corrine Dutra-Roberts, a senior transportation analyst with 511 Contra Costa.

The environment benefits, she added — if people who drive to work stay parked until they leave at the end of the day — avoid another "cold start" which spews the most pollution into the air. And the availability of a shuttle could encourage more commuters to use BART, Dutra-Roberts said.

511 Contra Costa will cover the cost for a consultant to prepare an application for one of the annual grants Caltrans awards cities to draft community-based transportation plans.

If Caltrans awards the grant to Pleasant Hill, 511 Contra Costa will put up as much as \$10,000 to cover Pleasant Hill's 20 percent share of the cost of the planning study. The city anticipates paying less than \$50,000 for the study.

Calhoun said the planning study will look at a range of issues, including demand for a shuttle, capacity, cost and the demographics of downtown shoppers and diners. The study also will evaluate options for funding the shuttle which include employer sponsorship, a city subsidy and fares.

If Pleasant Hill gets a shuttle, it will join the popular "Free Ride" in Walnut Creek.

Walnut Creek spends about \$130,000 per year subsidizing the free downtown trolley which transports shoppers from the Walnut Creek BART station to Broadway Plaza. County Connection operates the shuttle.

Linn County mulls limiting wood-burning furnaces

USA TODAY, Wednesday, March 18, 2009

MOUNT VERNON, Iowa (AP) — Linn County officials may outlaw most smoky wood-burning furnaces out of concern they could pose health hazards.

A county ordinance still being developed by the county health department would ban the outdoor wood furnaces from homes with nearby neighbors.

County health officials said pollution produced by the furnaces cause respiratory and heart problems.

The county has been close to Environmental Protection Agency limits on particulate matter in the air. If they eclipse those limits, residents could face tougher emissions regulations.

"If these wood boilers close down that ceiling, it shuts down growth and development," said Curtis Dickson, the county's public health director.

The devices have become popular as a cheap way to heat and more than 2,700 have been sold in Iowa between 1990 and 2005.

As few as five of the furnaces in a quarter-mile radius produces the same particulate pollution as coal-fired boilers at large energy plants, according to the county public health department.

Mike Snyder, who owns a wood-fired boiler and sells them, was skeptical of that claim.

"I think if you've got five really good stoves, it wouldn't come close to that coal burner," he said.

Only boilers certified by the EPA would be allowed, a standard that few of the furnaces meet.

If approved, owners would likely have three to five years to replace or upgrade the boilers.

The ordinance is expected to go before the county board of supervisors in April.

Europe, US to work together on global warming

By Dina Cappiello - Associated Press Writer
Modesto Bee, Tuesday, March 17, 2009

WASHINGTON -- Top environmental officials from Europe say they are encouraged by the United States' new stance on climate change.

After spending years encouraging the Bush administration to take action, three European environmental ministers said Tuesday that the U.S. appears ready to work with them on a new international agreement to curb the emissions blamed for global warming.

The officials were in Washington to meet with members of the Obama administration and Congress in preparation for negotiations on a new global treaty, which are scheduled for Copenhagen, Denmark in December. The Europeans also offered to work closely with the U.S. on climate change matters.

"We've been waiting for eight years," said Martin Bursik, the Czech Republic's environment minister at a briefing Tuesday.

Andreas Carlgren, Sweden's environment minister, said Washington has definitely warmed to dealing with climate change.

"To come to Washington in these days is to really experience climate change," Carlgren said. "There is a completely different mental climate here today."

The last global accord, the Kyoto Protocol, is set to expire in 2012. The U.S. did not enter into that agreement, citing its impact on the economy and the lack of participation by developing countries such as India and China.

Now, the U.S. is poised with a Democratic-controlled Congress and Democratic President to take action on global warming by passing legislation that would limit carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases. The legislation would establish a market for carbon dioxide by selling credits to companies that emit greenhouse gases. The companies could then invest in technologies to

reduce emissions to reach a certain target or buy credits from other companies that exceed emission reduction goals.

The European Union has had such a cap-and-trade system in place since 2005. It is the world's largest carbon market.

The ministers on Tuesday said that while the U.S. did not have to adopt an identical system, a compatible program would allow the markets to be eventually linked and then expanded globally.

They also said U.S. leadership is vital if developing countries are to participate in a new agreement. The U.S. is the world's second-largest emitter of greenhouse gases.

"The more the United States can deliver before Copenhagen, the more credibility the United States will have," Carlgren said.

Fire still burning at Calif. recycling center

The Associated Press

Sacramento Bee, Tuesday, March 17, 2009

ONTARIO, Calif. -- Firefighters called in bulldozers Tuesday to rip apart burning bales of plastic that burst into flames at a recycling center a day earlier, sending a huge plume of black smoke into the air.

The fire was contained to the 5-acre recycling center's storage yard, said fire Capt. John Sitar. It was burning in bales of bundled plastic that had been stacked 20 feet high across an area 100 yards wide and 200 yards long.

A fire dispatcher said the blaze was still smoldering late Tuesday and could burn into Thursday.

The South Coast Air Quality Management District issued a health advisory Tuesday because of the smoke, Sitar said. He said some schools in the area canceled outdoor activities because of the advisory.

The fire broke out about 5 p.m. Monday. Its cause was unknown.

The bales contain plastic soft drink bottles, plastic trash bags and "any other kind of plastic you can think of," Sitar said. They are compressed into large bales and stored at the center for shipment overseas to be recycled.

The nearest homes were a half-mile from the site, and authorities said none were threatened. Neither were any nearby businesses, and no one was reported injured.

Chino games postponed due to fire

Pete Marshall, Staff Writer

L.A. Daily News, Tuesday, March 17, 2009

CHINO - Poor air quality as a result of a fire in the Chino area forced the postponement of the third-place and championship games of the Chino Baseball Tournament on Tuesday.

Damien was scheduled to play Corona at 3:15 p.m., followed by Yucaipa vs. Chino at 6:30, both at Chino High School.

Chino coach Bob Sheehan said the Chino Valley Unified School District consulted with the Air Quality Management District and made the decision about noon that no outdoor athletic events would be held.

"You could tell it was pretty bad out there," Sheehan said. "It was about safety first for the kids. It's disappointing, but unavoidable."

Sheehan hopes to reschedule the games as part of another doubleheader, possibly on March 27.

[Sacramento Bee Commentary, Wednesday, March 18, 2009:](#)

Capital leads in transit-oriented planning

By Christopher B. Leinberger

It is hard to find good news these days, especially coming from Sacramento, the capital of one of the most hard-pressed states in the country. Yet an evolving model of development is emanating from the metropolitan area that is being watched carefully around the country.

This model could inspire sweeping national transportation, energy and climate change legislation and future infrastructure investment and real estate development.

The model started with the much-admired Blueprint Project, led by the Sacramento Area Council of Governments. Next came Senate Bill 375, calling for regional transportation and development plans that minimize auto dependency, reduce climate change gas emissions and encourage walkable urban development. The next steps are the Sacramento Regional Transit Master Plan and Transit-Oriented Guidelines, to be released in May. Taken together, they offer a bold effort to give the market what it wants: the choice of the well-known drivable suburban or walkable urban development, the basis of the next American Dream.

For the past half-century, American households demanded and got only one way of living and working, the suburban way that meant driving. Basically, California invented this way of life and exported it across the country and around the world. We all reveled in it. The songs of the Beach Boys and Jan and Dean still echo through my mind, reminding me of a way of life and a way of developing our communities that was seductive at the time.

Little did we know of the unintended consequences of drivable suburban development pattern, including:

- Land consumption eight to 12 times that of population growth.
- Significant increase in car-miles driven and foreign oil consumed, mostly from hostile countries.
- The onset of the obesity, diabetes and asthma epidemics related to a car-dependent lifestyle, especially among our children who cannot even walk to school anymore.
- Household income diverted from wealth building to paying for a fleet of depreciating cars, taking at least 25 percent of income vs. less than 5 percent a century ago.
- The quality of life for the community goes down when more drivable suburban development occurs, such as the next strip mall. This leads to not-in-my-backyard opposition. According to a soon-to-be-released Brookings Institution study, car-dependent households emit three times the climate change gases, such as carbon dioxide, as a walkable urban household.

Yet these consequences, which evoke much hand-wringing, do not tend to motivate behavioral change. That change comes when consumers vote with their pocketbooks; this they have done. There is pent-up demand for walkable urban development, with evidence everywhere you look. This includes research of consumer preferences and market research showing that walkable urban housing has held its value during this recession while the bulk of price declines occurred in fringe suburban housing.

Unfortunately, many metropolitan areas enforce zoning laws that prohibit building higher-density, walkable urban development. There is great NIMBY opposition to it. And the necessary infrastructure for a choice of transportation options from walking and biking to riding transit, along with cars, is generally not available.

Yet Sacramento is showing the rest of the state and nation how to do it. The Blueprint is widely regarded as a state and national model of regional development planning. The proposed Regional Transit Master Plan, along with the Transit-Oriented Development Guidelines, will provide the extension of the transit system while helping to make walkable urban development acceptable around the stations.

Another step is to provide management to each of these walkable urban, Transit-Oriented Development places, such as Station 65, a proposed 500,000-square-foot mixed-used project to include residential units, office and retail space, and a hotel and restaurants. These management organizations would be modeled on the Downtown Sacramento Partnership. In fact, many of these Transit-Oriented Development places can subcontract with the partnership to provide services in the early years.

Finally, these walkable urban, transit-oriented places need to develop a conscious affordable housing strategy. The current affordable housing strategy in Sacramento is "drive until you qualify" – which is obviously bankrupt. It is crucial to have a conscious strategy since it is going to take a generation to catch up with the pent-up demand for walkable urban housing and commercial development.

According to Brookings Institution research, there should be eight to 12 regionally significant, walkable urban, transit-oriented places in the region. Today there are only three: downtown, midtown and Old Sacramento. The opportunity for locating and building five to nine additional walkable urban, transit-oriented places and building far more development in the existing three would be worth billions of dollars and would represent a more sustainable way of living.

Sacramento can provide a model for the country, one that we certainly need.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the level of ozone pollution continues to grow in Ciudad Juárez; in the last couple of days it has registered 56 on the Imeca scale, while carbon monoxide is low. For more information on this Spanish clip, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Crece nivel de contaminantes en el ambiente

Pedro Sánchez Briones

El Diario, Tuesday, March 17, 2009

Con el cambio de la temperatura, la contaminación por ozono se incrementó en Ciudad Juárez; en los últimos días se han registrado hasta 56 puntos Imeca, mientras que el monóxido de carbono bajó, reportó el Departamento de Calidad del Aire.

Ayer se observó una densa nube de contaminación que cubrió gran parte de la mancha urbana, que incluso impidió en algunas zonas la visibilidad, lo cual se debió al fenómeno de inversión térmica que se da por el "choque" del calor y el frío.

El pasado lunes, en las estación de monitoreo denominada SEC, ubicada en las avenidas Tomás Fernández y Antonio J. Bermúdez, se registraron 56 puntos del índice Metropolitano de la Calidad del Aire (Imceca) de ozono, mientras que de monóxido de Carbono ese mismo día hubo sólo 11.

Héctor Sandoval Quesney, director de Normatividad Ambiental, explicó que la concentración de ambos contaminantes en la atmósfera se debe principalmente a fuentes fijas y a los automóviles en malas condiciones mecánicas, así como a la quema de llantas y basura.

Pero también las partículas PM10 (polvo), provoca alergias y otros problemas respiratorios en personas con asma.

Sandoval Quesney agregó que durante el año pasado se registraron 37 excedencias de PM 10.

"Esto quiere decir que durante un mes al año tenemos una calidad del aire cuestionable, antes no lo sabíamos, pero ya ahora tenemos las herramientas para ello", anotó.

De acuerdo con las autoridades de Salud, el límite para contar con una calidad de aire satisfactoria es de 100 puntos Imeca, los cuales en este año sólo han sido superados por las PM10 (partículas menores a 10 micras) en 10 ocasiones.

Sin embargo, en el 2008 se registraron cuatro excedencias de ozono y una de monóxido de carbono.