

Wood burning prohibited through today at least

By Joe Johnson

Hanford Sentinel, Thursday, Nov. 5, 2009

The first no-burn fireplace ban of the season remains imposed on Kings County this week in response to deteriorating air quality in the area.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's annual "Check Before You Burn" campaign began Sunday, and wood burning has been banned for the first three days due to hazy conditions in the region exacerbated by no wind. Fresno County and the Valley portion of Kern County were also prohibited from fireplace use, while Tulare and Madera counties were allowing fireplace use with a no-burn advisory status from SJVAPCD.

Tuesday afternoon, the air pollution control district extended the fireplace ban in Kings County through today. The daily fireplace burning forecast for the following day is released at 4:30 p.m.

The district's fireplace-use ban prohibits the burning of wood, pellets and manufactured fire logs until the curtailment is lifted. Those who do not abide by the restrictions may be subject to a fine, which increases with each subsequent violation citation.

There are some exceptions, however.

Residents who do not have access to natural gas service, even if propane is available, will not be found in violation of the ban, according to the district's news release. Also, homes where burning solid fuel is considered the sole source of heat are also found to be exempt.

The bans are issued to help prevent dangerous particulate matter from spreading into the Valley skies. This matter, released by residential wood burning, has been shown to cause bronchial infections and can exacerbate the symptoms associated with respiratory and cardiac illness.

Check Before You Burn, a wood-burning curtailment program, runs each year from the beginning of November until the last day in February.

Study: Housing and transport costs burden SF area

By Evelyn Nieves - Associated Press Writer

In the Modesto Bee, Thursday, November 5, 2009

SAN FRANCISCO -- San Francisco Bay area households spend up to two-thirds of their income on transportation and housing costs, a severe burden that leaves workers with insufficient resources for other basic needs, according to a recently-released study.

The costs in the nine-county Bay area vary from 54 percent in Santa Clara to 66 percent in Sonoma County, the Urban Land Institute's Terwilliger Center for Workforce Housing said in the study released Wednesday.

The average household spends nearly 60 percent of their income on transportation and housing, the center said.

For one-fourth of all households in the Bay area, housing and transportation costs account for two-thirds or more of their income, leaving workers with insufficient resources for health care, education and food, according to the study.

The report blames "ever-sprawling" development resulting in a growing gap between where people work and where they live. The consequences are both economic and environmental - transportation accounts for 40.6 of greenhouse emissions in the Bay Area, compared to 33 percent nationally, the study said.

Less than one in 10 Bay Area workers use public transportation to get to work, compared with 26.5 in the New York metropolitan area and 11.1 percent in the Washington, D.C., region.

The report, called "Bay Area Burden," includes an online cost calculator for individuals to gauge the combined costs of their housing and transportation decisions. It also allows them to explore how to lower their costs by moving closer to where they work or to where there is public transit.

The report was released to coincide with The Urban Land Institute's annual fall meeting, which began in San Francisco on Tuesday and is scheduled to end Friday. The nonprofit institute, established in 1936, examines land use in sustaining and creating communities worldwide.

Negotiators scale back UN climate pact ambitions

By Katy Daigle and Arthur Max - Associated Press Writers

In the Modesto Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, November 5, 2009

BARCELONA, Spain -- Negotiators and diplomats were working Thursday on a scaled-back version of a global climate change treaty that could be agreed by next month's deadline, without firm U.S. commitments.

The idea of forging a political agreement, instead of a legally binding treaty, was becoming a more accepted possibility as negotiators acknowledged some nations, including the United States, would not be ready in time for the December U.N. climate conference in Copenhagen, Denmark.

"People are more and more talking about a framework, a framework that you clarify further in the following months," said Artur Runge-Metzger, chief delegate from the EU Commission.

erging from Copenhagen enshrining plans by developed countries to cut carbon emissions and by emerging economies to trim back the growth of their emissions. It also would include specific numbers on how much money wealthy countries would channel to the poor to combat the effects of climate change.

Such a political deal would not be legally binding, but would carry the authority of world leaders who would come to the Danish capital to sign off on it. Negotiations would continue for several months and possibly one year until a legally binding treaty was ready, the officials said on condition of anonymity, due to the sensitivity of the ongoing talks.

"We as the EU will certainly push and push and push to get a real legal outcome," Runge-Metzger said, adding that the Copenhagen agreement should "definitely ... have a timetable" for negotiating a full treaty.

Even an interim deal would clear the way to mobilize funds to help poor countries. The EU has said euro5 billion to euro7 billion (\$7.4 billion to \$10.4 billion) will be needed over the next three years for developing nations to begin planning their first steps toward controlling their emissions and protecting themselves against the effects of climate change.

Yvo de Boer, the top U.N. climate official who oversees the negotiations, said any decision emerging from Copenhagen that is accepted by all 192 countries would be "morally binding" even without formal legal status.

The United States - the only industrialized nation to reject previous climate deals - had pledged to be a leader in climate change policy after President Barack Obama took office. U.S. climate legislation was bogged down this week, however, as a group of conservative Republican senators demanded more cost-analysis of the bill, which calls for cutting greenhouse gas emissions from power plants and factories by 83 percent by 2050. On Thursday, Democrats on the panel approved the legislation with no Republicans present, and it will now be merged with bills being written by five other Senate panels for a vote by the full Senate. The House has already passed a climate bill.

"This cannot be an excuse for the world not to get an answer to the climate problem," said Swedish Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt, whose country holds the rotating EU presidency.

"We need a strong agreement that puts together all the efforts that all the countries - both developed and developing - are ready to put on the table," Reinfeldt said Thursday while visiting India. "I hope to see world leaders come to Copenhagen to make the handshake."

Nations had hoped to conclude a new climate treaty at Copenhagen to succeed the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which called on 37 industrial countries to reduce emissions of heat-raising gases by an average 5 percent below 1990 levels by 2012. The U.S. rejected it because it made no demands on major developing countries like India and China.

New fuel for debate

By Seth Nidever

Hanford Sentinel, Thursday, Nov. 5, 2009

To some, it's a great answer to global warming issues and the need for energy sources other than oil. To others, it's a waste of resources that could foul the environment and lead to increasing food scarcity.

At the center of all the debate is biofuel -- liquid or gas energy derived from plant products.

The idea is getting more attention and more funding dollars than ever before as the focus of the world turns increasingly to combating global warming and finding [less-polluting](#) alternatives to fossil fuels.

Defenders roll out a litany of arguments in favor of biofuels. Often, they cite the issue of national security. Why not grow biofuel crops like corn and soybeans in the vast fertile spaces of the U.S., they say, rather than rely on oil imports from countries like Venezuela and Saudi Arabia?

Supporters of ethanol in particular -- and they include Great Valley Ethanol, a company that still has plans on the books to bring an ethanol plant to Hanford -- say it's a cleaner-burning alternative to petroleum.

But obstacles to greater biofuel production abound.

For one, there is the practical problem. So far, only ethanol from corn has proven to be economically viable. Other potential biofuel crops are being heavily researched to find ways to extract the energy more efficiently.

Even corn ethanol has its problems. There's an ongoing argument over whether it takes more energy to make it than is produced from burning it. Recent advances show a modest net gain in energy output, according to the University of California.

But there are bigger problems confronting biofuels than just the scientific ones.

A major issue is the effect of giant biofuel crop plantings on the cost of foodstocks, both for livestock and humans.

Believers in biofuel point out that it might work on marginal lands on the Westside, where salt- and drought-tolerant crops like safflower might be grown for biofuel production. Such production has the advantage of not displacing food crops.

Others see a darker side to biofuel production. They use ethanol as an object lesson.

When petroleum prices soared in 2007, corn ethanol production rose along with it. The side effect was that the price of corn soared along with virtually every other foodstock for farm animals. Dairy farmers around Hanford weren't happy, because the price of virtually everything they rely on to feed their cows increased.

In fact, the soaring commodity prices helped kick-start dairy's slide into a severe, months-long depression it is beginning to climb out of. The ethanol issue has declined in significance because gas prices have dropped below the point at which ethanol production becomes profitable. So ethanol corn acreage has dropped, ethanol production has declined and commodity prices have also dipped to more manageable levels.

But with biofuels now the focus of enormous amounts of research and interest, the issue isn't going away.

Critics say that virtually any large-scale biofuel crop is going to displace food production and drive up food prices.

One of the biggest local skeptics is Mark Cartwright, an agricultural engineer in Hanford.

Cartwright predicted that large-scale biofuel plantings would lead to the destruction of rainforest as more land is pushed into production to meet world food demand.

He called it a "net negative" for the environment.

The issue of rainforest destruction is becoming a major factor in the biofuel debate.

Accounting rules in both the climate bill now in Congress and rules used in the European Union don't count emissions from biofuels as global warming contributors. They also give credit to biofuels no matter what the source. So, farmers in Brazil could just chop down trees in rainforests and sell them as credits for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

UC researchers say the research needs to be revised to close the loophole.

University of California experts say all the drawbacks, including possible destruction of rainforests, need to be factored into the equation.

So far, the only real impact locally of the move toward biofuels has been a few ethanol plant proposals in Kings County and the higher commodity costs bemoaned by dairy farmers.

Kings County is unlikely to see major biofuel crops because conditions aren't optimal for growing them here, according to Cartwright. Such crops are more likely to be grown in places like Brazil and Indonesia where water and power are cheaper, he said.

Again, the ethanol example crops up. Cartwright said some local producers of oil from cottonseed and safflower saw oil prices soar as more and more acreage of corn ethanol was planted.

The same thing happened to growers of corn silage for dairy cows. Prices soared along with the ethanol boom. That was good news for farmers that sold to dairies, but not so good for the dairies that had to rely on outside feed purchases (some dairies grow most of their own cow feed).

Cartwright predicted that a biofuel boom would create winners and losers in agriculture.

He noted "a lot of debate both ways" on the subject.

Amid all the controversy, there is one kind of biofuel that has everybody in ag cheering -- biofuel from waste products. Grasses, wood chips, ag waste, compost, even urban garbage have all been seen as promising biofuel sources that have the distinct advantage of not taking away from food production.

The California Farm Bureau Federation has long pushed for more research into such byproducts.

"Society and the environment are the biggest beneficiaries," Cartwright said.

With crops planted specifically for biofuels, the problem of competition with food production comes up.

With the world's population expected to hit 9 billion by 2050, the issue of food sustainability may loom even larger than the issue of energy sustainability.

Either planted food acreage has to increase or yield will have to rise, said Joel Karlin, product manager at Western Milling Co. in Tulare County.

Karlin said he believes the biggest hope resides in greater yields per acre, which he linked to increasingly sophisticated genetically modified crops and seeds.

Seed-making giants like Monsanto are now pouring more and more resources into developing genetically modified seeds for specific traits like drought resistance.

Meanwhile, the debate over biofuels has kicked into high gear. So has the research.

At least \$650 million is being spent in UC laboratories on biofuel research, a UC press release said this week.

Perhaps surprisingly, the biggest contributors are oil companies BP and Chevron.

As if to underscore the controversial nature of biofuels, UC policy experts warn that despite billions of dollars spent globally to support biofuels, they may have unintended but real adverse impacts.

"As the world emerges from the first global food crisis in three decades and controversy surrounds the greenhouse gas savings of biofuels, policymakers have begun to question the promotion of a technology that takes land away from two predominant uses -- food production and environmental preservation," wrote lead author Steven Sexton and UC Berkeley co-authors in the latest edition of "California Agriculture."

Plan for San Clemente Target store nears

City is reviewing the design; environmental 'scoping' meeting set for Nov. 16.

By Fred Swegles

O.C. Register, Wednesday, November 4, 2009

Architects for the national retailer Target are busy refining plans for a proposed 142,206-square-foot store in San Clemente, while local officials look to see about possible environmental impacts.

You can check out the plans and raise any questions or concerns about the store at a public meeting set for 6 to 8 p.m. Monday, Nov. 16, at the Talega Swim and Athletic Club, 100 Calle Altea.

It's what the California Environmental Quality Act calls a "public scoping meeting" to identify potential issues like traffic, noise, safety or air pollution. The city will hold the meeting in the Talega community because Target plans to build the store just outside Talega, on the corner of Avenida Vista Hermosa and Avenida La Pata.

The city has hired UltraSystems to handle the environmental review process. The cost – \$85,000 – is being borne by Target.

EXPECTED TIMELINE

Public comments on Nov. 16 will help UltraSystems evaluate whether to recommend a limited environmental review or a more extensive Environmental Impact Report. It will hinge on what level of impacts the store is apt to generate. Officials figure that if a full EIR is needed, the Target store should be ready for a public hearing before the City Council in July.

If a lesser review – known as a mitigated negative declaration – is used, the Target store could have its City Council hearing in April.

Associate City Planner Amber Gregg says an initial evaluation should be ready sometime this month. Meanwhile San Clemente's Design Review Subcommittee already has met with Target's design team and suggested what Gregg called minor revisions that Target is addressing.

STORE TO HELP FUND PARK

The store is to be built at the northwest corner of Avenida La Pata and Avenida Vista Hermosa, across the street from the future La Pata/Vista Hermosa Sports Park. The city is selling 14.8 acres to Target for \$13.8 million. The sale hinges upon approval of plans for the store.

The city is selling the land to close a funding gap to build \$33 million worth of park facilities. On Nov. 17, city staff will present the council with a completed park plan. Council members could direct staff to advertise for construction bids if they feel comfortable that the sale will go through and the park can be funded.

Tim Shaw, city landscape architect, said that if the council chooses to solicit bids, contractors' competitive offers could be considered in the spring.

The park site and the Target site were deeded to the city by former Forster Ranch developers who decided not to develop that portion of Forster Ranch. The Target site is zoned for residential use, so a rezoning will be necessary for the store to be built.

Blake, Pedrozo, Rawling backed in what amounts to overhaul of Merced City Council

By Scott Jason

Merced Sun-Star, Wednesday, November 4, 2009

Voters on Tuesday transformed the Merced City Council, electing a mix of leaders with wide-ranging opinions and backgrounds.

Election returns showed Merced County Undersheriff Bill Blake, high school teacher Josh Pedrozo and [clean-air advocate Mary-Michal Rawling](#) garnering the most votes and heading for office.

Blake earned the most support with 3,412 votes, Pedrozo received 2,646 votes and Rawling received 2,336 votes.

"It's very gratifying," Blake said. "It feels good coming in No. 1."

Richard Cervantes and Carl Pollard fell short, with 2,249 and 1,896 votes respectively.

The winners could change today when the county's elections office counts vote-by-mail ballots turned in late in the day. The office has roughly 400 ballots, though they're from across the county and not all of them will pertain to the council race.

Even if the winners change, Merced will have younger leaders on the council. Pedrozo is 26, Rawlings is 29 and Cervantes is 27.

As it stands, no one on the council is less than 40 years old. Councilmen Jim Sanders, Joe Cortez and Bill Spriggs are termed out, all serving two four-year terms. The new council members won't take office until the county certifies the results.

Blake said his first priority will be making sure there's a long-term solution to help the city's homeless people. It's a problem that's vexed the council all year and has grown in urgency as winter's chill arrives. "It's been festering so long," Blake said.

After that, he wants to focus on creating more jobs for the community. Blake spent the evening in Huntington Beach at his last undersheriff's conference. He'll be retiring this year.

Pedrozo's crowd -- which included his father, Supervisor John Pedrozo, and his aunt, Farm Bureau Executive Director Diana Westmoreland-Pedrozo -- was riled up at Toni's Courtyard Cafe as returns put him in second. He said he was confident he'd place high in the polls, probably following Blake, who he suspected would lead.

His campaign slogan -- "Communication, collaboration and common sense" -- resonated with voters who are ready to move the community forward, Pedrozo speculated. "I have a lot of energy," he said. "I'm doing this to give back to the community."

The mood at Rawling's camp at J&R Tacos downtown remained tense as a TV screen showed her maintaining a slight lead over Cervantes. She declined to deem herself the victor until every ballot was counted. "I'm not letting myself get there," she said. "I want to be sure."

Rawling chalked her strong showing to a cadre of friends who spent time going door-to-door, sending e-mails and talking to voters. "They boldly left their comfort zone," she noted.

Stunning fundraising turnouts -- both in number of people and dollars -- kept Rawling forging ahead day after day. "It reminded me why I did this, and it kept me going," she said.

Cervantes' party at D'Angelos was subdued as it appeared he wouldn't earn enough votes to land a seat on the council. He had spent every weekend since mid-September walking precincts and many evenings phone banking.

He said he wanted to help revitalize Merced and believed a council seat would help him guide its recovery. "I want to see Merced move forward," Cervantes said.

He believes his message of creating jobs and making the city business-friendly was what voters wanted. It's just that he didn't reach enough of them or make it clear enough.

Pollard watched returns at Bishop's On The Square and was disappointed. He said this, his seventh council campaign, would likely be his last for a while, possibly forever. "I don't know what happened," he said. "I thought I'd get one of those seats."

Still, he said he'd remain involved in the community and hopes he can make a difference, even if he's not on the dais.

[Tri-Valley Herald, Contra Costa Times and other newspapers, Media News Editorial, Thursday, November 5, 2009](#)

Editorial: Pay-as-you-drive insurance

PERSUADING MOTORISTS to voluntarily drive less and thereby reduce gasoline consumption, [air pollution](#), traffic congestion and motor vehicle accidents is a concept that deserves public and private support.

California Insurance Commissioner Steve Poizner agrees. To that end, he has released regulations allowing mileage verification for pay-as-you-drive green insurance policies.

Insurance premiums in California are currently based partly on miles driven as estimated by drivers. However, insurers do not have the authority to adequately verify motorists' estimates. As a result, insurers are not willing to substantially reduce premiums based on unverifiable mileage data.

The new regulations released by Poizner would give insurers several options for verifying odometer miles, including using their own agents, smog-check stations, Department of Motor Vehicle records, automotive repair shops or a technological device that could be placed on a policyholder's vehicle.

The idea is not new. A year ago, insurers in Texas began offering six-month policies based on distance driven, ranging from 1,000 to 6,000 miles.

Poizner did not mandate any insurance policy terms. Instead, he has left it up to insurance companies to fashion their own plans and submit them for approval. He believes that the best way to motivate change is through competition and innovation. We agree.

Insurers could, for example, offer policies based on a specific number of miles driven and then give rebates to motorists who drive less or additional fees to those who drive more.

With insurance savings for reduced driving being offered, there would be considerable incentive for people to use their cars less. Also, people who already drive few miles per year could save on their insurance.

A study last year by the Brookings Institution on pay-as-you-drive insurance policies concluded that driving would drop by 8 percent nationwide — and oil consumption by 4 percent — if all motorists participated.

Also, the study estimated that two-thirds of U.S. households would save money — averaging \$270 per car — under pay-as-you-drive insurance policies.

Unlike flawed schemes to tax motorists by the mile, pay-per-mile policies would be voluntary options. That means insurance companies would have to offer policies attractive to consumers. Besides, Poizner said his office would not approve policies that were not good for consumers.

With a weak economy, many Californians are looking for ways to cut expenses. Lowering insurance costs by driving less is likely to have significant appeal, helping consumers save money while they improve the environment.

Now it's up to insurers to devise attractive policies that accomplish those goals.

[Fresno Bee, Letter to the Editor, Thursday, Nov. 5, 2009:](#)

Must stop climate change

It's good to see Fresno joining the 'climate fight'

I was very pleased to read in Bill McEwen's column (Jan. 28) that according to our city manager, Mayor Alan Autry is "good to go" and will sign the U.S. Mayor's Climate Protection Agreement.

Props to Mayor Autry. This is no longer a partisan issue. In his State of the Union address, President Bush acknowledged "the serious challenge of global climate change," and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has been championing legislation to combat global warming. What's more, our mayor has supported several initiatives to clean up our city's air.

This Valley, already infamous for its hot weather, may wilt if our summers get much hotter. And the potential disappearance of the Sierra snow pack should give our farmers and skiers nightmares.

The 350.org climate-change actions recently showed that millions of people care about what we are doing to the atmosphere of our planet. Let us now find spokespeople who link the economic downturn to changing to a sustainable-energy-use economy. Let us not insist on hanging on longer and longer to an economy imploding from corrupt financial leadership. Let us demand that we stop paying a huge chunk of our gross domestic product to the Middle East nations for their oil, and another huge chunk for defense to protect it.

We will not attain 350 parts per million if we do not start working on it. So far our efforts are trivial.

The next thing President Obama should take on is stimulating a solar and wind economy. We can mobilize the political pressure our president needs to move us in the direction of survival.

The more of us who drag our feet on preventing climate change, the more likely it will be that the land will dry up that will be needed to grow the food for the expected 9 billion to 11 billion people on earth when the world's population size levels out, resulting in widespread famine, disease and death.

Ronald J. Martin, Fresno

[Merced Sun-Star, Letter to the Editor, Thursday, November 5, 2009](#)

Letter: A breath of fresh air

Editor: I have been made aware from various media and newspapers that our very generous President Obama has given Al Gore, the greatest environmentalist of our time, a gift of \$5.5 million to build an environmentally safe "green" car.

Now being an environmentalist, Gore will build this car in the Netherlands. After all, this way our factories will not pollute us any further, and our factory workers do not commute with pollution-laden cars! Hey, we will still be unemployed and starving, but we can breathe better!

Josephine Giampaoli, Le Grand