

Refinery to Florez: We take safety seriously

By Stacey Shepard, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Friday, June 13, 2008

For the most part, Thursday night's public hearing led by state Sen. Dean Florez on Big West of California's response to an ammonia leak at its refinery last month was a rehash of events at a similar hearing held by the Board of Supervisors two weeks ago. Big West thought the less than one cup of anhydrous ammonia that leaked just after midnight on May 18 was too small to warrant notifying authorities.

Local authorities disagreed and demanded to be notified of any future incidents, no matter how small.

Big West officials pledged to do so.

But the night's most interesting testimony came during a public comment period at the end the meeting, when nearly a dozen refinery employees, contractors, suppliers and supporters took to the podium to passionately defend Big West's emphasis on safety - an image that had been tarnished in the wake of the ammonia incident.

Their message: say what you want about the refinery but they take safety seriously.

Tami Chapman, who owns a local steel company, said she recently dropped off a quote at the refinery while on her way to a business meeting. Chapman said she was dressed properly for her meeting but apparently not for the brief stop she made at the refinery, where she was bluntly told that "open-toed shoes" weren't allowed and next time she should ditch the skirt and wear pants.

Julie Fleming said she never worries about her husband when he's working at the refinery. Her biggest concern is the drive up and down Rosedale Highway.

"(Refinery employees) aren't in their positions because they were popular," she said, in an apparent jab at the senator. "They're in those positions because they were educated and they know what they're doing."

Florez declined to respond.

Earlier in the meeting, Big West's Health, Safety and Environment Director Bill Chadick detailed company's safety manuals and emergency protocols.

He also described a weeks-long training program for all refinery workers. He claimed the refinery has seen a 78 percent reduction in worker injuries. Chadick did concede that Big West should have notified local authorities of the ammonia leak. But he stressed that the company puts the safety of its workers and the community first.

The meeting was officially a hearing of the State Senate committees on air quality and governmental organization, which oversees emergency preparedness. However, Florez was the lone member of both committees present. While at times he took a critical tone toward Big West, he said the company appears to have recognized its error in not reporting the ammonia leak.

"I appreciate that you recognize that mistakes were made and we look forward to working with you to make this a facility with world-class safety," he said.

Bay Area Air Quality Management District issues air advisory

The Associated Press
Sacramento Bee and Modesto Bee, Thursday, June 12, 2008

SAN FRANCISCO -- It's a "Spare the Air Day" in the Bay Area, but there are no free rides on public transit for the day.

Officials at the Bay Area Air Quality Management District issued the advisory because of forecasts of unhealthy air for the day.

Though smoke from wildfires is sending smoke into the air in Santa Cruz and Monterey counties, air district officials say the wildfires were not a factor in the advisory.

Because of rising costs and cutbacks in federal money officials have pulled the plug on providing free rides on Bay Area transit systems on hot, smoggy days.

Though there is no free transit today, officials do have one more day of free rides set for June 19.

State continues to set the standard for energy savings

By Rosario Marin

Modesto Bee, Friday, June 13, 2008

If you could make everyone in California build energy-efficient buildings, how would you do it? Would you enact new standards city by city and jurisdiction by jurisdiction, creating a jumble of regulations? Or would you enact a new set of building codes and enforce the same energy efficient standards across the state?

Gov. Schwarzenegger believes the right answer is to change the building codes and make sure everyone who builds in California will be held to the same strict environmental standards.

That is exactly what we are doing at the California Building Standards Commission, where we set the building standards and codes for every commercial building constructed in this state.

We just concluded the public comment period for proposed codes in 2009. We call it California's Green Building Codes, and I am proud to say that, when adopted, it will give our state the most advanced building standards in the United States.

The new 2009 codes will require significant improvements in water usage for plumbing fixtures, specify household and landscape water conservation reductions of 20 percent for homes, and set 15 percent stronger requirements for energy savings than we currently enforce. We will find these energy savings through more efficient appliances, better insulation and more efficient windows. This code will also encourage using recycled materials in carpets and building materials, identifying improvements to air quality, and suggest various site improvements, including parking for hybrid vehicles and better storm-water plans.

Our partners in developing these standards are the Department of General Services, Department of Housing and Community Development, the Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development, and the state's building industry.

As the state's real estate arm, the Department of General Services has been constructing energy-efficient buildings for years, and already meets Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design standards for all new projects. This on-the-ground knowledge has helped us create an advanced energy-efficient and sustainable code that is practical today. The Department of Housing and Community Development has provided residential expertise, and Health Planning and Development contributed health care facilities know-how. We are also proud the state's builders - the commission's greatest asset -- have provided valuable input.

Together we created new standards that go well beyond the energy standards California adopted a few years ago -- which put us on the map as environmental trailblazers -- and which the California Energy Commission has recently strengthened.

Those standards have contributed to our state keeping energy consumption nearly flat while the population has grown. These standards have become the model for many other states. Once again California is ready to lead. It is time to go further. Our proposed 2009 code is the right next step. I encourage anyone interested in the "greening" of our state to look at the proposed codes on our Web site (www.bsc.ca.gov) and comment.

Working together now, we can make California a better place for generations to come.

Marin is the secretary of the State Consumer Services Agency and chairwoman of the California Building Standards Commission.

US urges support for global warming fund

By Yuri Kageyama , Associated Press Writer
Modesto Bee, Friday, June 13, 2008

OSAKA, Japan — U.S. Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson urged other Group of Eight industrialized nations Friday to back a special fund of up to \$10 billion to help developing countries fight global warming.

Paulson appeared with his counterparts from Japan and Britain, and World Bank Group President Robert Zoellick, to encourage G-8 nations to back the Climate Investment Funds.

"None of us in the world are going to solve this problem unless we deal with it here," Paulson told reporters at the two-day finance ministers' meeting, which opened Friday and will also address soaring oil and food prices.

Paulson said the U.S. will host a pledging event prior to the first meeting of the trust fund committee later this year.

The fund, administered by the World Bank, will go partly for help with developing technology to boost energy efficiency and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, he said.

The G-8 session - bringing together finance ministers from the U.S., Japan, Russia, Germany, France, Britain, Italy and Canada - is one of several ministerial meetings leading up to the July 7-9 leaders' summit on the northern island of Hokkaido.

Zoellick said the developing world is being hit by climate change, including droughts, floods, poverty and hunger.

"These funds offer an opportunity to take action on change now," he said. "The Climate Investment Funds are a concrete step forward toward meeting the challenge of global climate change."

G-8 finance ministers are having dinner with their counterparts and other officials from Australia, Brazil, China, South Korea, South Africa and Thailand to weigh the impact of surging oil and food prices on the global economy, the Japanese Ministry of Finance said.

Oil spiked to nearly \$140 a barrel last week, and several Asian countries, including India, Indonesia and Malaysia, have cut fuel subsidies, raising retail prices for millions of consumers.

Speaking on the sidelines of the gathering, International Monetary Fund Managing Director Dominique Strauss-Kahn said a slowdown in the global economy over the next few quarters will likely tame the price of oil.

G-8 ministers are expected to push the IMF to study how much speculative money is behind soaring oil prices. At the February gathering of the Group of Seven leading industrialized nations, which excludes Russia, ministers asked the Washington-based organization to check on such speculative flows.

The world is also grappling with an emerging food crisis as prices of corn, wheat, rice, soybeans and other agriculture products have been spiraling higher. The gains are due to a mixture of factors including high oil prices, changing diets, urbanization, expanding populations, extreme weather, growth in biofuel production and speculation.

The food price hikes have set off riots and protests from Africa to Asia and raised fears about a global food crisis that could cause millions more people to suffer malnutrition.

Japanese Finance Minister Fukushiro Nukaga, playing G-8 host, vowed to work closely with the U.S., Japan's most important ally, to tackle the threat of rising oil and food prices and other economic woes.

"We need to coordinate our actions closely because of the many risk factors," he told reporters after a bilateral meeting with Paulson.

But Nukaga declined to comment on what he discussed with Paulson regarding currency rates - another worrisome topic for the G-8. Nukaga said the issue came up in his talks with Paulson but said it was unclear whether the fuller G-8 will address it.

The dollar has recently staged a modest recovery to about 108 yen. But that came only after Paulson warned this week that he isn't ruling out intervention to stabilize the currency, and U.S. Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke suggested the Fed is prepared to raise rates to fight inflation.

Dollar weakness has in part pushed up oil prices as some traders invest in oil as a hedge against inflation and a slumping greenback.

Nukaga also expressed concern over the U.S. economy, where a credit crunch has hit since the emergence of the subprime mortgage crisis last year.

Green tip

S.F. Chronicle, Friday, June 13, 2008

Trying to decide where to spend your summer vacation? Traveling abroad can produce more carbon dioxide emissions per passenger than the average U.S. driver does in a year.

- Planning a road trip? Just remember that each gallon of gas burned emits between 24 and 28 pounds of carbon dioxide.
- A computer screen saver may use more energy than not using one at all. Try shutting off the monitor instead if you don't plan on using your computer for 20 minutes.
- Taking an eight-minute shower instead of a 10-minute shower can save 300 gallons of water a month.
- Every time you open the oven, 25 percent of the heat escapes. If every U.S. oven owner peeked in on their meal one less time a year, that could keep almost 7,000 tons of carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere.
- A degree makes all the difference. When it comes to finding the right temperature for your pool, making the water 1 degree warmer can increase energy costs by 10 to 30 percent.
- The U.S. Department of Energy reports that air conditioners use about 5 percent of all the electricity produced in the United States, releasing roughly 100 million tons of carbon dioxide into the air each year.
- The average tree stores 13 pounds of carbon per year; mature trees can absorb more than four times that, and 300 trees can counterbalance the greenhouse gas pollution that one person produces in a lifetime.
- How clean is the air you breathe? Find out at www.airnow.gov.
- Headed to the wilderness? Store your food and trash in bear-proof canisters or at drive-in camps, in metal food lockers.
- If you're camping, remember that even biodegradable detergent and soaps can be bad for fish downstream, so wash items away from the water source
- Mosquitoes surface in the summer. Instead of using a repellent, try to keep them from your home by planting rosemary.

Piedmont Ave. dry cleaner goes green

By Maya Mirsky, Correspondent

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Friday, June 13, 2008

Chris Lee has been in the dry cleaning business more than 20 years.

But with the opening of her store French Dry Cleaners on Piedmont Avenue, she's venturing into a whole new area, becoming Oakland's first "eco-friendly" dry cleaner.

With consumers increasingly interested in avoiding harsh chemicals, and new regulations on the books that favor "green" cleaning, Lee is ahead of the curve.

"Consumers are seeking out the truly green things," said Peter Sinsheimer, director of the Pollution Prevention Center at Occidental College, who advised Lee on the new technology.

Lee's shop opened in January with new computer-controlled Swedish machines that use biodegradable detergents and softeners and a small amount of water to precisely clean clothes. With what's known in the industry as "wet cleaning," there are no harmful fumes and the runoff can be safely and easily disposed.

The results, Lee said, are as good as traditional dry cleaning. With no fumes in her store and no residue on the clothing, it's better for both workers and customers.

Picking up her clothes, local resident Mimi Frusha said she hadn't known French Dry Cleaners was using a non-toxic method the first time she came, but it's made her a repeat customer.

"You can feel and smell the difference," she said.

Time will soon be up for the old, more toxic methods of dry cleaning.

The most common method of dry cleaning uses a solvent called perc, which is both an air contaminant and a potential human carcinogen.

A state law signed in 2003 mandated the gradual phase-out of perc by 2023. Cleaners that switch to wet cleaning or another method, known as CO2, can get a grant of \$10,000.

But even that help isn't enough for many cleaners, many of which are small businesses run by first-generation immigrants like Lee, who is Korean. She estimated that switching to the new technology can cost \$50,000 to \$80,000 and admitted the cost of cleaning is slightly more expensive and labor intensive.

But Lee said it's more than money that stops them from taking the next step, it's reluctance to adopt a new method.

"People, they're afraid of change," she said.

Sinsheimer agreed that the industry is holding back from adopting wet cleaning.

"Most cleaners see water as kind of the enemy," he said.

But Sinsheimer is trying to change that.

Under a mandate from the California Air Resources Board, Sinsheimer runs workshops for dry cleaners on how to convert to less toxic alternatives. Lee attended one, and now French Cleaners is a demonstration site to show other dry cleaners the benefits of wet cleaning.

Lee believes other local cleaners will follow her lead once they see that clothes can be cleaned as well with wet cleaning as they can with perc. And with easier disposal of waste, fewer permits to get and sponsorship from the state, Lee thinks "green" cleaning is the future of her industry.

"It's better for everybody," she said.

French Dry Cleaners is located at 4155 Piedmont Ave., between 41st Street and Linda Avenue, in Oakland. For more information, call 510-450-0225 or go to www.frenchdrycleaners.com.

[Bakersfield Californian, Commentary, Friday, June 13, 2008:](#)

Community Voices: L.A. mayor just talks 'big green'

Throughout 2005 and 2006, legislative Republicans warned their Democrat counterparts about the consequences of Assembly Bill 32, a measure by former Speaker Fabian Nunez of Los Angeles, to ostensibly reduce global warming through restrictions on carbon emissions.

The bill embraces left-wing global warming theory by instituting a mandatory cap on so-called "greenhouse gases" in California, aiming to limit emissions by the year 2020 to 1990 levels. The

law directs the Air Resource Board to establish a mandatory reporting system to track and monitor emissions levels and imposes fees on businesses to pay for this monitoring.

Ultimately all these new regulations and fees will drag down California's economic competitiveness. One of the greatest concerns raised by opponents of the scheme was the financial impact on electric utilities at a time when California is facing severe challenges keeping up with power demand.

Democrats wagged their fingers and cried that the consequences are just too serious to ignore, so we must unilaterally rein in our state's economy for the greater good. AB 32 passed with votes cast along strict party lines with Democrats voting for, and Republicans voting against.

Less than two years later however, Democrats from Los Angeles are complaining about the impacts that this complex "cap and trade" scheme will cause. The L.A. Department of Water and Power gets much of its power from coal-fired generators in order to serve the demands of upwards of 2-million power customers. Those kinds of generators will ultimately pay the most as so-called carbon credits are traded back and forth across the state.

At the confirmation hearing for Air Resources Board Chairwoman Mary Nichols, Democrats from Los Angeles demanded to know if Nichols would support AB 32 as it now stands or instead provide "special consideration" to the Los Angeles region.

Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa told the *Los Angeles Times*, "I am a big supporter of AB 32, but the PUC proposal to rip off L.A. taxpayers and redirect ratepayer money to private utilities is a power grab that we will not accept... ."

Wait a minute Antonio Villaraigosa, aren't you the man who promised to incorporate environmentalist priorities into every facet of city life? While the mayor wants to support feel-good environmentalism, now that the impacts are real and the enormous costs are imminent, he would prefer to tax and regulate someone else.

It's reminiscent of that old colonial saying, "Don't tax me and don't tax thee. Tax that man behind the tree."

I agree that it is unfair to heap these new taxes and regulatory burdens on the people of Los Angeles, but the answer is not to spread the misery around. The science behind the global warming hysteria is too weak and the health of California's economy is too important to sacrifice on the altar of a feel-good political movement.

It's time for Democrats in Sacramento to dump the hypocrisy and admit that the entire AB 32 scheme was a costly bad idea and scrap the entire mess.

Sen. Roy Ashburn, R-Bakersfield, represents the 18th Senate District.