

Registration for lawnmower trade-in starts today

By Eric Carpenter

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ANAHEIM – Air-quality officials are hoping to take up to 9,380 carbon-belching gas lawn mowers out of yards across Southern California and replace them with zero-emission electric mowers in an exchange program that begins Wednesday.

Through the program sponsored by the Southern California Air Quality Management District, residents can exchange any working gas mower for one of four electric models at deeply discounted prices.

A 36-volt Black & Decker with a 19-inch motor that retails for \$450, for instance, will be \$165 when a working gas mower is turned in.

Online and phone registration for the program begins at 8 a.m. Wednesday for any of 11 locations.

The only Orange County event is scheduled for June 19 at Angel Stadium in Anaheim.

At previous events in Orange County, more than 1,300 mowers were traded in. Since the program began eight years ago, organizers estimate they have scrapped more than 30,000 gas mowers, removing about 80 tons of smog-forming pollutants.

"Individuals can make a healthy choice," said William Burke, AQMD's board chairman. "This exchange program offers a simple solution to improving air quality."

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, some 54 million Americans mow their lawns each weekend and use about 800 million gallons of gasoline each year.

Because most gas mowers have unregulated emissions, they are responsible for an estimated 5 percent of the country's air pollution. Each one produces the equivalent pollution in a year of a new car driving 20,000 miles, according to the EPA.

Proponents of the electric mowers say they have come a long way from their plug-in predecessors. The new varieties are cordless, don't require annual tune-ups like many gas mowers and typically only need the blade sharpened once a year.

The four available models – two from Neuton and two from Black & Decker – range in price from \$100 to \$165 with the discounts. They otherwise would go for \$350 to \$500.

SCAQMD officials are hoping to complete registration by the end of the week – though some slots may still be available after that.

Participants must live within the AQMD's four-county jurisdiction, which includes all of Orange County. Qualifying residents can sign up for any of the 11 events.

The Anaheim event is scheduled from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. June 19, a Saturday. The exchange typically takes about 15 minutes.

To register, visit aqmd.gov or call 888-425-6247.

[Tracy Press Commentary Wed., April 21, 2010](#)

Living Green: Time to take care of our planet

by Christina Frankel

It was 1970. Litter was rampant. Rivers had caught fire from pollutants. And Earth Day was born, 40 years ago tomorrow.

Earth Day brought national attention to the environment in the same way as grassroots "sit-ins" brought activism against the Vietnam War. Earth Day was started not by a beatnik, but instead, a senator from Wisconsin, Gaylord Nelson, who had tried for years to attract political attention to the decline of our environment.

Earth Day is April 22, a day to celebrate the precious gift we have in our great big, blue ball.

Many take our planet for granted, assuming that there will always be an inexhaustible supply of whatever we humans crave at the moment, and enough hidey-holes to bury that which we want disposed of. Many don't believe in global warming and the dire threat it embodies. I have seen bumper stickers at my daughter's school announcing "Gorebull Warming," as if Al Gore were the author of the catastrophe instead of just the vocal spokesman.

One has only to see the worldwide disruption that a volcano in Iceland has caused to air travel to see the interconnectivity of our climate. To those skeptics out there, you probably have already felt the impact of changes to the environment, just not recognized it as such.

Water shortage

Despite the wet, average year of rainfall we have had this year, we are still way behind making up for three years of drought. Our aquifer is dangerously low, as those consumers who have not been allowed surface water tapped the underground source of water as if it, too, were limitless.

It is a simple truth that unless we have a wet year every year in California, there isn't enough water to go around. It has taken several years of drought to show that water deliveries to the cities, businesses, fishes and farmers have been over-promised by as much as eight times the actual quantity that can be supplied.

And because our aquifer is so low now, the water that would normally be flowing downstream will be sucked into the ground like a dry sponge.

Also, since 90 percent of water in Northern California comes, in some part, from the Sierra snowpack, that means we need colder weather in the winter to provide us the snowpack density and depth to secure the water we have been demanding. If climate change continues to bring earlier, warmer springs, even if winters are wet, the snowpack will not help us through the summer and early fall.

We need to face the fact that when the climate changes, even in small amounts, our water supply becomes threatened.

High cost of energy

Just recently, a Tracy Press letter-writer had complained about the David-and-Goliath comparison between the emissions of his SUV and the inexplicably higher emissions of GWF Peaker Plant after it converts to full-time operation. Until we become more efficient with our energy consumption, the need for more power plants will be inevitable.

Despite the fact that California has one of the highest percentages of renewable, clean-energy portfolios of any state in the nation, the simple truth is that the cheapest way to create energy is to burn fossil fuels.

If everyone in Tracy, residents and businesses alike, installed solar panels on their roofs, the expansion of the peaker plant wouldn't be necessary. Until we take responsibility for our energy, we will continue to deal with the emissions created by powering our lives.

Air pollution and health

We are spoiled at the moment with clean air quality, with the repeated storms scrubbing our inversion layer clean. But the fact is that as soon as the temperature rises, so does the air pollution in the San Joaquin Valley, rated second worst in the state below Los Angeles.

Air pollution makes breathing tough for those with respiratory diseases, such as asthma. The small particulates in air pollution also become embedded in kids' lungs, stunting their full development. The conditions are so bad that the local air pollution board is creating a program for schools to fly flags on unhealthy days to warn kids to stay inside.

A world where our kids can't go outside because the air is too unhealthy for them? It's already here.

You might not see the sum of the parts as climate change. But you can't deny that we could take better care of our environment, so that, as a result, we can take better care of ourselves.

For a change: Conserve your water. Conserve your energy. The less we use, the more can be shared. This will create less need for dams, peripheral canals and emission-spewing power plants.

To make a difference: Recycle. The best way to show that you care for the Earth is to value all of its resources and recycle, rather than discarding what has been removed from the planet.

To make a stand: Talk to our local leaders and suggest to them that Earth Day be celebrated as a community, as it is elsewhere in the valley and in our state.

• *Christina D.B. Frankel is a 20-year Tracy resident, architect and mother of three. Her column, Living Green, runs twice monthly in the Tracy Press. She can be reached at cdfrankel@sbcglobal.net.*