

Are fireplaces going out of style?

By Steven Mayer, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Sunday, Feb. 27, 2011

There are few things more quintessentially American than gathering around a crackling fire blazing in the home hearth. The word "hearth" itself not only means fireplace, it also denotes family, and carries with it traditional images of home, warmth and a direct connection to the values and rugged individualism of America's pioneer past.

But in California's southern San Joaquin Valley, where smoke from winter fires often remains trapped near the ground -- in the very air we breathe -- attitudes about fireplaces may slowly be changing. "Keeping the home fires burning" for some in Bakersfield has begun to equate to unnecessarily risking the health of one's neighbors.

"I've never even used our fireplace," said county worker and local podcaster Dave Lee, who shares a home in Bakersfield with his wife, Lindsey.

"I have a nephew, now 10, who was diagnosed with asthma a couple of years ago," Lee said. "If fewer people are burning, I think that's fewer days my nephew will have to be on breathing treatments."

BAN THE BURN?

Smoke from residential wood burning, especially when the valley's winter inversion layer keeps it trapped low to the ground, not only can irritate the airways, it can be toxic over time, said Seyed Sadredin, director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. Tiny particles in the smoke can cross into the bloodstream, which is especially dangerous for people with heart problems and other conditions.

Wood smoke has also been linked to respiratory problems in young children.

Sadredin knows -- maybe better than anyone -- the passion and intensity of those who hold their fireplace freedoms dear. But he also has seen a gradual change taking place in the culture and attitudes of many valley residents since 2003, when wood-burning restrictions were first set in motion through the air district's annual "Check Before You Burn" program.

"We don't get the hate mail we used to get," Sadredin said. "That's one way I measure the change."

These days, the district is more likely to get calls from someone complaining of wood burning in their neighborhood, or even from people asking for an outright ban on residential wood smoke.

At a recent visit to *The Californian*, Sadredin said he believes such a ban may eventually become necessary. But first it would have to be vetted and discussed through an extensive public process.

TO BURN OR NOT TO BURN

Bakersfield mom Kimberly Parker has a wood-burning fireplace in her home. But, like Dave and Lindsey Lee, she never uses it.

Her youngest son has a respiratory illness, so she's not interested in generating pollution in her neighborhood or traces of wood smoke in her home.

"I don't have the need for a fire, and having my child breathing easily is more important," she said through an exchange of Twitter messages.

Besides, she added, fireplaces are inefficient and don't spread heat throughout the home.

As a resident of Tehachapi, Aaron Mauldin lives outside the valley air district, so he technically doesn't have to abide by the 40 to 50 no-burn days called in a typical winter.

But Tehachapi gets smoky when it's cold, he said. So Mauldin is happy to stick with what he calls his "gas fake fireplace."

Others say nothing can take the place of the ambiance of a natural wood fire in the home. The flames dance, the coals glow red and a primitive warmth radiates from the hearth giving families something beautiful to enjoy -- something other than TV or video games.

Bakersfield wife and mother Kristie Mendoza loves having a fire on just about any cold winter's night. And her attachment to the tradition reflects the views of a lot of local people who see fireplace restrictions as an unnecessary government intrusion into their everyday lives.

"We have a fireplace that we use a lot, whenever the mood strikes, which it does frequently," Mendoza said through Twitter.

And honestly, the air district's fireplace restrictions are not factored into her decision to burn or not to burn, she said.

"I paid thousands of dollars for that fireplace, so I use it when I wish."

IS IT WORKING?

The annual fireplace-use program that regulates wood burning in the San Joaquin Valley will end its ninth season on Monday. Officials with the air district have credited the program for dramatically reducing winter particulate pollution throughout the eight-county district. The determination to allow or to restrict residential burning is made daily from Nov. 1 through the end of February, and the determination often differs, depending on county, region or weather.

Residents with no natural gas service or any other form of heat are exempt from the rule.

Sadredin said residential wood burning emits tons of gasses and particulates daily. But the 2009-2010 season was the cleanest on record for the air basin, and it came on the heels of the second cleanest season the winter before. An end-of-season report released by the air district in April found that controls limiting wood burning -- not higher rainfall levels -- were largely responsible for last winter's lower concentrations of PM 2.5 pollution, particles smaller than 2.5 micrometers in diameter.

Particulate pollution is distinct from smog-producing ozone, which is a summer problem.

CHIM-CHIMNEY

According to statistics from Arlington, Va.-based Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association, sales of fireplaces, wood stoves and inserts in the United States have fallen from a peak of nearly 800,000 units in 1999 to fewer than 236,000 in 2009. Part of that decrease may be explained by economic pressures on consumers and lackluster home sales in recent years. But nationwide sales haven't exceeded 600,000 units since 2001.

David Bonner, owner of Bakersfield Chimney, said the push to reduce wood burning in the valley has significantly affected the fireplace service and sales industry.

"Years ago, there were seven or eight chimney sweeps in Bakersfield," he said. "Now there are two of us."

Fortunately for Bonner, he has diversified into several directions, so he says he's still doing a brisk business. But he's seen a lot of changes in his 25 years in the industry.

"It seems like people are busier nowadays," he said. Too busy to build a wood fire. Too busy to think about whether it's a burn day or not.

"I'm a biased observer," Bonner acknowledged. "But the air pollution people have cast a pall over the whole fireplace thing. It's a very negative campaign. It makes people feel bad about burning."

And while fewer people are using their fireplaces, the ones who love them, love them dearly.

"There's a lot of hard-core wood-burners out there," he said.

FUTURE OF THE FIREPLACE

Phil Burns, director of the city of Bakersfield's Building Department, said both the city and the county are bound by the state building code and the California Green Building Standards Code, which occasionally come in conflict with each other.

It's complicated, he said. But in simple terms, residential developers recognized years ago that natural gas-fired hearths were the way to go in homes that included a fireplace. Very few wood-burning fireplaces

are built into new homes anymore, Burns said. And when they are, they are typically in custom homes that have large enough lots to disperse the smoke generated by fires.

Almost all new hearths are gas-fired, Sadredin confirmed.

Even Bonner the chimney sweep said he's gone to gas. You can turn it on and off with a switch, he said, and there's no messy ashes or soot to clean up.

WHY PICK ON WOOD-BURNERS?

Sadredin says he's heard all the reasons why reducing chimney smoke is a foolish effort. Some claim fireplace pollution is negligible when compared to agricultural burns. Others claim most of Kern's air pollution blows in from the Bay Area and counties to the north, so why torture the homeowner? And still others argue that federal air standards are rising so high, it's become impossible to meet them -- so why try?

Sadredin counters that restrictions on ag burning are more stringent than they've ever been. Farmers cannot burn when residents can't burn wood in their fireplaces, he said. And when growers are allowed to burn, it is contingent on weather and other factors connected to air quality. And besides, most ag burning occurs away from concentrated neighborhoods.

"Residential wood burning happens where you live," he said. "It's trapped at low surface levels right in your neighborhood." And that's a bigger health hazard than remote ag fires.

On the question of imported pollution, no more than 10 percent of Kern's measurable air pollutants come from up-valley.

Sadredin is the first to complain that the new federal standards coming down the pike are virtually unattainable. But doing nothing is not an option, he said.

"Rather than throw our hands up, we need to press the federal government to establish realistic standards," he said.

By targeting pollutants that have the most significant health effects, Sadredin says the valley can achieve a 90 percent health benefit with a 20 percent reduction in targeted emissions.

"We need to reduce air pollution where it matters," he said.

FIRESIDE CHAT

Local Twitter users chime in on fireplace trends: Do you have a fireplace or other wood-burning appliance? Do you use it?

CreatorsFan -- We have a fireplace. We burn wood about 2 or 3 times per winter. I don't think fireplaces are going out of style at all. They do more than just heat the room. They are cozy, heartwarming and mesmerizing.

Robin_is_lost -- We use our fireplace as often as we can on burn days. We also use a fireplace up in the mountains. Rarely use our gas "fireplace."

BakoMom -- I have a gas fireplace and LOVE it.

thatgirlshauna -- Yes!

meanbkstoregirl -- yes, and not as often as I would like, but yes! And burn day availability is a big part of why I don't use it as often as I would like.

joerod4 -- We have a wood burning stove, used to have a fireplace but remodeled. Haven't used in like 2 years though. :(

Businesses using Valley CAN to help clear air

By Reed Fujii

Stockton Record, Sunday, Feb. 27, 2011

The idea of businesses trying to improve air quality in the San Joaquin Valley isn't so odd, said Douglass Wilhoit, chairman of Valley Clean Air Now.

"It's the business of everybody to try to clear up the air," he said.

But what can the businesses provide - the Valley CAN board includes owners and executives of large farm companies, a food processor, Pacific Gas & Electric Co. and Chevron Corp. - that regulators such as the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District does not? "The simple answer, and this may ruffle some feathers, is the business community is the best one to get things done," Wilhoit said.

With its business perspective, Valley CAN offers programs and methods with which companies help improve air quality, while also benefitting the bottom line and without imposing unwanted rules and regulation, he said.

"If given the tools, private enterprise can do it best," he said.

The San Joaquin Valley is a large bowl that collects and holds emissions from the region's million residents, their businesses and their 2 million vehicles, as well as vehicles from other areas traveling on Highway 99 and Interstate 5. Pollution from the Sacramento and San Francisco Bay areas also contribute to the air basin's problems.

The Valley falls short on standards for ozone and particulate matter, typically exceeded state ozone standards more than 100 days a year and for fine particulates from 90 to 100 days a year.

With funding largely from Chevron, Valley CAN sponsors a variety of small-scale approaches aimed at having people take personal responsibility for air pollution, said Tom Knox, a staff member of the nonprofit agency.

"We give out about a quarter million dollars a year in grants to a whole variety of projects that are usually tangible things that you can look at and say that makes sense," he said.

For example, Valley CAN underwrote a best-practices manual for the region's metal plating industry to help the industry reduce its emissions.

Also it helped a number of Hmong farmers in the Fresno area get away from the traditional practice of burning crop stubble. Working through local community groups to connect with the farmers, it provided crop shredders, currently shared by about two dozen farm families, and training in how to use them.

As a nongovernmental agency, Valley CAN is able to quickly identify and respond to such needs, Knox said.

"There's really no other short-term access to this kind of environmental grant money."

It also helps sponsor of the upcoming REXPO, sustainable collaboration conference, planned March 9 in Stockton.

But Valley CAN's signature is the series of Tune In & Tune Up events it sponsors throughout the Valley, aimed at getting older "gross-polluting" vehicles repaired and smog certified.

The problem is older, out-of-tune cars are responsible for large amount of vehicle pollution, but their owners often can't afford the necessary smog repairs. They are usually unregistered.

"Since the state doesn't acknowledge the existing of unregistered vehicles, they fall into a black hole," Knox said.

Events are usually held at community college campuses in the region and Valley CAN offers \$500 vouchers for vehicles failing a simple emissions test.

"The hard work is getting out into low-income neighborhoods and getting the word out that we're not the government, ... we just care about your car," Knox said.

Organizers work through community groups and social agencies in touch with low-income and immigrant communities to make the connection.

This year, with funding from the Foundation for California Community Colleges and the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, Valley CAN plans 15 Tune Up events, the first held in January at San Joaquin Delta College. Knox said more than 350 vehicles were checked at the Stockton event, and 250 owners received vouchers good for a full smog check and repairs.

"We are now working hard to plug these people into smog appointments," he said.

In 2008, the Tune In & Tune Up program was one winner of the annual Governor's Environmental and Economic Leadership Awards.

Officials granting that award noted a typical Tune In & Tune Up event removes approximately 3,000 tons of carbon monoxide, 300 tons of hydrocarbons, and 150 tons of oxides of nitrogen from the air in one year.

Industry jobs studies are imprecise

The Associated Press

In the Hanford Sentinel, Monday, Feb. 28, 2011

Industry officials say with confidence that 7.3 million jobs will disappear if the Obama administration goes through with tighter rules to reduce smog. The industry-sponsored researcher who came up with that number isn't so sure.

"There's uncertainty around that," economist Don Norman said of the "shockingly high" job loss number he extrapolated using a study sponsored by the oil and natural gas industry's American Petroleum Institute and covering just 11 states.

"Even if the numbers are half of that, the number is huge," he said.

Norman, like most economists on any side of any issue, is quick to acknowledge that economic models used for calculating estimates of job losses and other effects from a particular policy depend on the assumptions fed into them, and that the reality can be far different.

Yet in testimony before House committees now run by anti-regulation Republicans, industry witnesses repeat numbers from imprecise economic models. Members of Congress often cite the same figures without the researchers' caveats.

"Some models are garbage in, garbage out. If you put in junk . you get junk coming out in the end," said John Irons, a researcher for the self-described left-of-center Economic Policy Institute.

Republicans have made a political issue out of what they refer to as job-killing regulations in a bad economy. Industry studies portray dire job losses from a wide range of proposed regulations, from rules that would govern the Internet to restrictions on student loan terms for students at for-profit colleges.

The potency of that argument hasn't been lost on President Barack Obama, who ordered a review of regulations that already has produced some rollbacks. The House, in legislation passed this month to finance the government through September, voted to shield greenhouse-gas polluters, coal companies and telephone and cable providers as well as the for-profit colleges from regulators.

In at least one case, the government itself got into the act. The Interior Department's experts estimated their proposal for protecting streams from coal mining would trim coal production and cost the jobs of some 7,000 of the nation's 80,600 coal mine workers.

Researchers defend their craft by insisting they make intelligent assumptions based on knowledge of the industry they study. But unlike the certainty expressed in congressional testimony, they know their limits.

"If anybody who does economic work tells you they know everything, they're full of crap," said John Dunham, whose research company conducted a study for the meat industry. He concluded that an Agriculture Department marketing proposal could cost the industry 104,000 jobs.

Norman came up with the potential loss of 7.3 million jobs by assuming the worst-case scenario for industry: The Environmental Protection Agency adopts the strictest possible limits on smog-inducing ground ozone and some plants close rather than install expensive pollution-control equipment.

The EPA, however, proposed a range of ozone levels it may adopt. It's not known how far the agency will go in its final rule.

Norman's study for Manufacturers' Alliance/MAPI accepted the compliance cost estimates from the oil and gas industry's 11-state study to estimate that industry costs would soar to \$1.013 trillion annually between 2020 and 2030 under the toughest possible smog limits. The early study concluded that in 2020, the 11-state costs of complying with the strictest possible standards for ozone would be \$187.1 billion, with job losses of 1.45 million.

There were other major differences between the two studies:

- The manufacturing group's nationwide study assumed that some plants would close rather than install expensive pollution-control equipment. The 11-state study assumed plants would stay open and install the equipment. The EPA makes the same assumption and says that industry innovations usually bring down the cost of control equipment.
- The alliance did not factor in efforts to lower ozone levels by reducing auto emissions; the petroleum group's study did. It costs far less to test vehicle emission systems -- motorists usually pay for inspections -- than for industry to install expensive control equipment.
- The alliance did not factor in areas of the country that could devise ways to meet air-quality standards without major job losses. In setting ground ozone standards, the EPA gives states leeway in devising ways to meet the air-quality requirements. The 11-state study only researched areas that may need expensive additional measures to comply with a new air-quality rule.

Those opposed to government regulations rarely mention the potential benefits to society. The EPA, for example, estimated that its proposed smog standards could prevent up to 12,000 premature deaths and 58,000 cases of aggravated asthma, and save as much as \$100 billion in health costs.

Some industry models don't take into account job gains. Someone has to manufacture and install new anti-pollution equipment. If meat sales drop, purchases of fish or other foods may increase, ensuring that a supermarket would not lay workers off.

"It's not up to me to make the other guy's case. It's up to them to make their case," said Dunham, who did the meat industry study.

Researcher Stuart Sessions studied potential costs of an Occupational Safety and Health Administration noise-reduction plan that has now been withdrawn. Hired by the Coalition for Workplace Safety, composed of employers and trade associations, Sessions said he did take into account jobs that would be created if new noise-reduction equipment would be required.

His model produced a wide range of possible scenarios: job losses from a low of 8,300 to a high of 200,000.

Sessions acknowledged the limits of his research.

"I'm waffling, but that's a responsible thing for an analyst to do," he said. "It's important to try your best to come up with estimates of costs and benefits. It's important to be fair and honest about the uncertainties and let policymakers decide, 'Is it worth the cost?'"

REXPO will put on a green show

By Reed Fujii

Stockton Record, Sunday, Feb. 27, 2011

Improving the environment and growing a business don't have to be separate pursuits.

REXPO VII: Sustainable Collaboration, a March 9 conference presented by Greater Stockton Chamber of Commerce's Green Team San Joaquin and Valley CAN (Clean Air Now), is built to highlight practices, programs and products that can serve both purposes.

"It's bringing people together and finding that common ground of environmental stewardship and lowering the cost of doing business," said Blain Bibb, Green Team chairman and chief executive of ServiceMaster Building Maintenance in Stockton.

He pointed to his own business as an example.

After launching it in 2007, even as the housing and mortgage collapse were under way, Bibb decided to turn the janitorial business into a sustainable venture.

"(We) started the investment in our company to become the standard for green cleaning," he said.

ServiceMaster began using just three environmentally friendly cleaning products, which replaced eight standard cleansers. It started using microfiber cleaning cloths, which are more costly than plain terrycloth but use less water and last longer. New types of vacuum cleaners produced less noise and dust but increased productivity.

As a result of those and other changes, Bibb said, "We were able to work faster, keep up the quality, be green and were able to cut our rates anywhere between 20 and 30 percent, depending on the type of building we were cleaning."

And the company grew tenfold during the period, certainly the worst economic period since the Great Depression, to having more than 50 employees up from five and serving more than 100 buildings from just 10.

"Being green helped us to do that," Bibb said.

REXPO VII - to run from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Hilton Stockton, 2323 Grand Canal Blvd. - will provide a showcase of green business boosters applicable to all kinds of companies.

Two speaker panels in the morning and one in the afternoon will cover opportunities for public-private collaboration, how being a leader on climate change issues can benefit business, and current grant and loan programs.

In addition, Panama Bartholomy, deputy director of the California Energy Commission who oversees the Energy Efficiency and Renewables Division, will be the luncheon keynote speaker.

Entry to the event is \$30, which includes lunch. For more information, call the Greater Stockton Chamber of Commerce, (209) 547-2770.

REXPO VII

When: 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. March 9

Where: Hilton Stockton, 2323 Grand Canal Blvd.

Agenda

6 a.m. to 2 p.m.: Electronic waste and clean polystyrene collection: sponsored by Onsite Electronics Recycling

7-7:45 a.m.: Exhibits open

8 a.m.: Welcome by San Joaquin County Supervisor Leroy Ornellas

8:10 a.m.: Introduction by Blain Bibb, Green Team San Joaquin chairman

8:15-9:45 a.m.: Clean Energy Collaboration for Business, Education and Government.

Panelists:

- Mike Dozier, San Joaquin Valley Partnership, moderator
- DeeDee D'Adamo, office of Rep. Dennis Cardoza, D-Atwater
- Paul Johnson, San Joaquin Valley Clean Energy Organization
- Jim Genes, University of California, Merced
- Sam Geil, Geil Enterprises Inc.

9:45-10 a.m.: Coffee break/ exhibits

10-11:30 a.m.: Bottom Line Benefits of Being a Leader on Climate Change

Panelists:

- Susan Eggman, Stockton City Council, moderator
- Judy Corbett, Local Government Commission
- Trish Kelly, Applied Development Economics
- Lisa Mortenson, Community Fuels
- Joseph Oldham, city of Fresno

11:30 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.: Exhibits open / Tours of Hilton Stockton's Green Conference Room

12:15 p.m.: Rick Goucher, president of Greater Stockton Chamber of Commerce, introduces keynote speaker

Keynote luncheon speaker: Panama Bartholomy, deputy director of the California Energy Commission

1:30-1:50 p.m.: Exhibits open

1:50 p.m.: Introduction of Stockton Mayor Ann Johnston by Blain Bibb

1:55-3:15 p.m.: Show me the Dough!: Grant Programs and Financing

Panelists:

- Tom Knox, Valley Clean Air Now, Moderator
- Tom Wilson, Pacific Gas & Electric Co.
- La Ronda Bowen, California Air Resources Board
- Calvin Young, CalRecycle
- [Seyed Sadredin, San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#)
- Mather Kearney, Governor's Office of Economic Development
- John Sugar, California Energy Commission

3:15 p.m.: Prize drawings

3:30-4 p.m.: Exhibits open

Market intelligence: Economy drives Kern adults to bus travel, carools

Bakersfield Californian, Saturday, Feb. 26, 2011

High unemployment, a struggling economy and rising gas prices are driving more Kern adults to travel by bus and carpool. According to a Scarborough Research survey released in September, 64,818 Kern adults (11%) reported carpooling in 2010, a 51 percent increase compared to 2009. More than 49,000 adults (8%) traveled by bus in 2010, a twelve-month increase of 28 percent. Carpool and bus travel in Kern County grew faster than the national average, topping both Fresno and Los Angeles counties but lagging behind Sacramento.

Geographic area ... % of adults who carpoled ... % change '09 vs. '10

United States ... 7% ... 21%

Sacramento County ... 13% ... 77%

Kern County ... 11% ... 51%

Los Angeles County ... 14% ... 16%

Fresno County ... 8% ... -19%

Geographic area ... % of adults who traveled by bus ... % change '09 vs. '10

United States ... 9% ... 4%

Sacramento County ... 9% ... 58%

Kern County ... 8% ... 28%

Fresno County ... 8% ... 18%

Los Angeles County ... 12% ... -1%

Profile of Kern adults who use carpools and bus travel: Adults who use these modes of transportation are most likely to be: young, women, low-income, high school educated, Hispanic, not employed, and have children in the household. Over the past 12 months a greater percentage of these travelers are: age 18-24, students, single, unemployed and have a household income under \$25,000.

Characteristic ... % who carpool ... % who travel by bus

Men ... 46% ... 40%

Women ... 54% ... 60%

Age 18-34 ... 61% ... 57%

Age 35-55 ... 29% ... 31%

Age 55+ ... 10% ... 12%

Household Income

Under \$50,000 ... 67% ... 80%

\$50,000 or more ... 33% ... 20%

High school grad or less ... 70% ... 65%

Some college or more ... 30% ... 35%

Hispanic ... 67% ... 59%

Children in the household ... 70% ... 59%

White collar job ... 22% ... 15%

Blue collar job ... 35% ... 26%

Homemaker ... 10% ... 9%

Student ... 17% ... 15%

Laid off or unemployed ... 12% ... 17%

Source: Scarborough Research 2009 & 2010; surveys of 204,000 U.S. adults (1,900 in Kern County). The Bakersfield Californian Market Research Department

Green Team aims to leave children a clean Stockton

Chamber effort brings together area businesses

By Denise Ellen Rizzo

Stockton Record, Sunday, Feb. 27, 2011

STOCKTON - The desire to have cleaner air and water are mere dreams to most people, but Frank Ferral is part of a Stockton group working to make this dream a reality.

Ferral is the program and public policy director of the Greater Stockton Chamber of Commerce and his focus is on an eco-friendly Green Team San Joaquin project.

The team is a collaboration to promote environmentally friendly alternatives to businesses across San Joaquin County, particularly in Stockton.

Frank Ferral

Age: 46

Background: Political science and public administration degrees

Title: Program and public policy director at the Greater Stockton Chamber of Commerce.

Personal: Wife, Elizabeth; three children

Experience: Employed at Greater Stockton Chamber of Commerce since 1997.

"We all have kids, and we want to leave this world better than when we came into it," Ferral said. "If we can do that, we help businesses and the environment at the same time. It's a win-win. We can make a better place for all of us to eat, work and play in."

For the past 14 years, Ferral has worked at the chamber, but it wasn't until 2006 that he turned his focus to the Green Team.

According to the team's web site, the group works with business and community leaders to increase awareness of available resources, programs and incentives to assist them in reducing the cost of doing business. Each month, business representatives, both in and outside of the chamber, meet to discuss new ideas and showcase green products and services. Current sponsors of the Green Team initiative include Walmart, Simplot and Granite Construction Co.

"It's an opportunity to be innovative and help companies," Ferral said. "It's why I'm here - to reduce cost through environmental stewardship. We've got to work together. Everything we do is about jobs. You shouldn't make a new (environmental) rule or regulation without creating jobs."

The team also is focused, he said, on helping the environment by promoting products or businesses that are eco-friendly.

Among some of the Green Team's success stories are Stockton-based Onsite Electronics Recycling, which is a full-service recycling firm that creates jobs by using workers to dismantle the electronic waste. The Green Team recently recognized the company as the second business in the county to pass a vigorous assessment process.

Another company achieving success through its green practices is the Dart Container Corp. in Lodi, which uses post-consumer foam food service and packaging containers. The materials are recycled and the foam is diverted from landfills and made into reusable products such as crown molding, picture frames and agricultural products.

"It's cool, innovative stuff," Ferral said. "We're developing these mechanisms to make it easy (for businesses)."

Twice a month, Ferral and members of the team's REACON group - which includes private businesses, municipal and county solid-waste divisions and economic development professionals - go on visits to businesses to help them identify ways their company can reduce costs through green methods. Among the sponsors are American Recycling, Pacific Gas & Electric Co. and San Joaquin County Public Works.

Ferral said the group makes suggestions such as the use of energy-efficient light fixtures, shutting off computers and unplugging unused appliances.

By working cooperatively with local businesses, Ferral said, Stockton is leading the way for the rest of the Valley through example, engagement and collaboration.

In late August, chamber officials were presented with the 2010 Golden Arrow Award for Overall Excellence by the California Product Stewardship Council.

The award was created to promote California businesses that are reducing waste, saving money and creating green jobs.

Ferral said receiving the award was a humbling experience.

Douglass Wilhoit, chamber chief executive officer, said, "It is our board of directors, our volunteers, support staff ... it's truly a team effort."

The next big event for Ferral and the Green Team will be March 9 at their REXPO VII: Sustainable Collaboration to be held at the Hilton Stockton. The event will feature ways for businesses and public

agencies to incorporate energy-efficient methods, recycling and ways to implement water conservation and clean-air values into everyday operations.

Solar oil project debuts in Kern

By John Cox. Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Friday, Feb. 25, 2011

Kern County's international reputation as a leader in the field of enhanced oil recovery took a step into the solar age Thursday with the unveiling of a McKittrick demonstration project that could anchor certain costs associated with producing thick, hard-to-get crude considered key to the industry's future.

Despite overhead clouds that threatened to obscure the project's potential, attendees from around the world marvelled at GlassPoint Solar's first solar steam generator, a greenhouse-looking installation that consists mainly of ultra-light parabolic mirrors continually tilting to focus the sun's rays on a tube of steam that is then injected underground to make heavy oil flow more easily.

Touted as the world's first commercial solar enhanced oil recovery project, the classroom-size installation on an oil field leased by Denver-based Berry Petroleum Co. is too small to fuel many local "steam flooding" oil operations, the largest of which generate as much as 85 times more heat than the new demonstration project.

Fremont-based GlassPoint plans to use the project as a test, monitoring the plant's efficiency as it ramps up to operational independence over the next few months. The company hopes to build similar but much larger steam generators to customers in Kern and around the world.

GlassPoint CEO Rod MacGregor said that by lowering production costs, the technology will allow companies to exploit oil fields whose remaining reserves are otherwise too expensive to tap.

"If you move the economics you can extract more oil," he said.

Other speakers at Thursday's event echoed that point. Rep. Kevin McCarthy, R-Bakersfield, additionally applauded GlassPoint's ability to develop the project without using government money. The CEO of the California Independent Petroleum Association, Rock Zierman, added that growing domestic oil production reduces need for imported fuel.

Most of the world's enhanced oil recovery projects -- including technologies pioneered in Kern County -- generate steam by burning natural gas or other fuels such as agriculture waste, all of which fluctuate in price and pollute the air to one degree or another.

GlassPoint's system requires no fuel other than the sun's rays, and has an estimated lifespan of about 30 years. Its glass housing protects the mirrors against wind and dust, and an automated window washer is expected to reduce if not eliminate the need for maintenance.

Two local companies -- TJ Cross Engineers Inc. and PCL Industrial Services Inc., a specialized construction firm -- were involved in helping design the installation and built it in less than six weeks.

PCL business development manager Mark Pittser said the company, which builds steam generators in and around Bakersfield, joined GlassPoint's project partly because it "wanted to be part of something that was green."

He added that TJ Cross and his team contributed innovations to the installation, such as the addition of moisture barriers to keep the surface of the glass free of vapor.

"It was a team effort," he said.

A technology advisor at Petroleum Development Oman LLC, Syham Bentouati, told GlassPoint's audience that solar steam generation was a "no-brainer" that nevertheless requires proper conditions.

GlassPoint estimated that its solar project can deliver up to 80 percent of a steam flooding oil production site's annual needs. The remaining 20 percent would continue to be fueled by natural gas or other fuel.

Taft oilman Fred Holmes, president of Holmes Western Oil Corp., complimented GlassPoint on its new plant, calling it simple, environmentally friendly and apparently maintenance free.

Holmes also said he was aware that "a lot" of local oil producers are watching to see whether the technology deserves to be scaled up to handle high-volume production. Holmes Western is among those watching, he said.

Solar power could be future of enhanced oil recovery

By Dennis McCall

Taft Midway Driller, Friday, Feb. 25, 2011

McKittrick, Ca. — The world's first solar powered enhanced oil recovery project was unveiled today on the eastern border of the tiny western Kern County town of McKittrick.

Housed in a gleaming glasshouse enclosure, the large curved solar mirrors generate power that preheats water for a nearby Berry Petroleum Company steam injection operation.

It is a pilot project created by Fremont-based GlassPoint Solar, Inc. to test the effectiveness of using solar power to replace natural gas as the fuel to generate steam for secondary oil recovery.

GlassPoint CEO Rod MacGregor said the system produces energy more efficiently and more economically.

Solar can reduce natural gas consumption by up to 80 percent, he said. "The price is fixed for the life of the system," he told a gathering of industry representatives and dignitaries, including Rep. Kevin McCarthy, R-Bakersfield. "If you move the economics, you can move more oil."

That translates to more revenue and more jobs, he said, estimating that switching to solar power will create as many as 25,000 jobs for Kern County.

Enhanced recovery is the future, MacGregor and other speakers agreed. "This is just the beginning," McCarthy said. "We're not going to stop." MacGregor said the McKittrick site will be used to test GlassPoint's design "and then we'll scale up."

The challenge, McCarthy said, will be overcoming environmental hurdles and developing locations for larger fields of solar panels. "Getting the offsets will be a big hurdle," he said, referring to other land that must be purchased in order to do business on property inhabited by endangered critters like the kit fox, Tipton kangaroo rat and the blunt-nosed leopard lizard. The oil patch is home to many of them.

Longtime Westside oil man Fred Holmes agrees the technology has enormous potential if obstacles can be overcome. The test site "really isn't big enough to do much good," he said. "What we really need to be effective is about 40 acres of this."

GlassPoint's design differs from other solar fields in that its mirrors are housed in a sealed environment, protecting the front surface of the reflectors. Sunlight only passes through glass once on its way to the receiver tube to maximize efficiency.

It has an automatic washing system that reduces operating costs and water use.

The panels have the highest steam production per unit area.

Artwork selected

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Monday, Feb. 28, 2011

Two Cherry Avenue Middle School students in Gene Chavez's art class had their artwork selected for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's calendar.

Allison Cardoza's artwork will be displayed for the month of April and Parker Clyborne's artwork will be displayed for October.

The contest was open to students in grades one through 12 who attend schools in the Valley.