

Free smog checks and vouchers attract long line of vehicles to West Hills event

By Eiji Yamashita

Hanford Sentinel, Monday, Feb. 27, 2012

LEMOORE — Miguel Trujillo was eager to get his beat-up 1992 Toyota pickup fixed after going through a free smog testing program at West Hills College Lemoore Saturday morning.

He waited for hours to get his truck tested, and in the end it failed.

But the Avenal resident was not worried, thanks to a \$500 voucher he received to help his vehicle meet state emission standards.

“It’s very helpful for people like me,” Trujillo said, holding the smog-repair voucher he can use at state-designated Gold Shield smog shops. “I was stressing out because the company I work for just got bought out, and the new company laid most of us off. ... I was looking at about \$200 or more to repair just the catalytic converter.”

Trujillo was one of hundreds of Kings County residents who showed up to an event designed to target gross polluters in the Valley, where residents breathe some of the dirtiest air in the country.

It was a win-win event for vehicle owners, who either got a free smog check or a \$500 voucher for repairs needed to bring vehicles, many of which are unregistered, into compliance with emissions standards. Sponsors said the effort was a cost-effective way to make a big impact on cleaning the Valley’s air.

The parking lot outside the college’s Golden Eagle Arena was packed with drivers, some of whom lined up as early as midnight to receive the free tests.

The program — known as “Tune In & Tune Up” — was sponsored by Valley Clean Air Now (CAN), a nonprofit air quality advocacy group funded by Chevron, Foundation for California Community Colleges and the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. The event has been held for seven years in the region.

“All evidence points to unregistered, out-of-tune vehicles being the single largest source of potential emissions reductions in the Valley,” said Tom Knox, spokesman for Valley CAN. “It’s also one of the cheapest ways to reduce air pollution.”

Knox said high repair costs stand as a huge barrier to these drivers.

“It just takes an effort to attract folks driving these vehicles to voluntarily fix their emissions,” Knox said. “People want to follow the law, but we constantly hear the story from people that repairs are very expensive and that is a deciding factor in their not being able to register their vehicles.”

A smog test can run anywhere from \$50 to \$80. Failing a test means vehicle owners need to make repairs, such as replacement of catalytic converters, that could cost hundreds of dollars before the vehicle can meet smog standards. Getting help in making those repairs is a major reason why the event is a hit among local residents.

The program was not scheduled to start until 9 a.m., but officials began testing by 6:30 to accommodate a long line of eager drivers who had waited all night for the event’s opening.

By 11 a.m., more than 300 motorists were serviced, Knox said. Sherrie Patterson’s 22-year-old SUV was one of them.

The Hanford resident wasn’t complaining after waiting more than three hours for her car to be tested.

Her car failed the emissions test. It’s a good thing Patterson left with a \$500 voucher.

Otherwise, Patterson added, “I’d go home and have a good cry and a good kick and see what is needed. I’d probably try to do most of it myself.”

Valley leaders vie for federal dollars in D.C.

By Michael Doyle

Modesto, Bee, Tuesday, Feb. 28, 2012

WASHINGTON -- San Joaquin Valley officials this week are pursuing federal dollars, a Capitol Hill game that's plentiful and elusive.

In a \$3.8 trillion federal budget, money abounds. But with earmarks verboten, deficits high and competition stiff, valley representatives acknowledge that it's harder than ever to bring home specific local funding for their projects in California.

"Three or four years ago, earmarks were still very much in place," Fresno County Supervisor Henry Perea said Monday, observing the change in federal budgeting. "Now, it's a little bit more like Jell-O."

Join 8 million other Savers with the Orange Savings Account. Open now. Nonetheless, Perea has joined 19 other Fresno County business, academic and political leaders in this week's 3½-day lobbying venture on behalf of transportation and other projects. Separately, a four-member delegation from Livingston is on the prowl.

Billed under the unifying "One Voice" banner, the Fresno County wish list ranges from a transportation bill that might help improve State Route 99 to assistance with controlling air pollution and streamlining environmental reviews for roadwork.

Instead of local line items, this year's wish list emphasizes broader programs — such as "high priority corridors" and "nonattainment air quality areas" — that happen to apply to the San Joaquin Valley. State Route 99, for instance, already is a designated "high priority corridor," so any overall program boost eventually would trickle down to California.

"Even though earmarks are gone, there are still billions of dollars available," noted Melissa Garza, associate regional planner for the Fresno Council of Governments.

Underscoring the potential regional competition, four representatives from Livingston are separately making the rounds this week in their search for federal assistance.

"We want to hit up some congressmen," Livingston Mayor Rodrigo Espinoza said Monday.

Federal grants, too, are part of the Livingston delegation's agenda, with city officials targeting a variety of potential opportunities, including funding, to help nurture a downtown cultural arts district.

The cross-country trips are either a gamble or an investment.

Livingston City Manager Jose Antonio Ramirez estimated that his city is spending about \$5,000 on the Washington, D.C., trip that includes Mayor Pro Tem Margarita Aguilar and city grant-writer James Gordon. The costs of the Fresno County trip are spread among participating cities, corporate sponsors such as Granville Homes and the Fresno Council of Governments.

Stanislaus County Supervisors Watch

Modesto Bee, Tuesday, Feb. 28, 2012

A total of 1,063 volunteers contributed 60,800 hours last year in unpaid labor associated with Stanislaus County agencies, never expecting high-level recognition. That should change, now that the county has been approved as an "official certifying organization" for President's Volunteer Service Awards, according to today's scheduled presentation before county supervisors. Established in 2003 by the U.S. President's Council on Service and Civic Participation, the program seeks to encourage volunteerism and honor exemplary service. The 4-H leads the way in Stanislaus County with 17,000 volunteer hours last year, followed by the Health Services Agency's 10,800 hours. Leaders hope to engage more agencies, including the Sheriff's Department, a report says. Four volunteers have tallied enough time for lifetime awards, requiring at least 4,000 hours: Loren Horton (9,105 hours), Karen Thomas (8,275) and Betty Radcliffe

(7,984), all with the Health Services Agency, and Terri Wenstrom (8,233) with Parks and Recreation. See www.stancounty.com/volunteer for details on opportunities.

Today's Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors meeting begins at 9 a.m. in the basement chamber at Tenth Street Place, 1010 10th St., Modesto. In other action, supervisors are scheduled to:

- Apply for a \$6.3 million federal transportation grant, to help widen Claribel Road from McHenry Avenue to Oakdale Road, east of Modesto. Leaders plan to spend \$14.9 million making the two-lane road four lanes and adding a traffic signal at Coffee, with work expected to begin late in the year.
- Allow Modesto to buy private property outside the city limit needed for reconstruction of Pelandale Avenue's interchange with Highway 99, or acquire it with eminent domain
- Adopt plans for Las Palmas Avenue improvements near Patterson. Widening the road and installing traffic signals at intersections with Elm and Sycamore avenues is expected to cost \$1.8 million, and the work could be done by early October.
- Reorganize support for the five county supervisors, who previously employed one field representative each. If approved, they would share one part-time and two full-time workers, saving about \$60,000 through the fiscal year ending June 30.
- Secure \$320,500 in air pollution grants. The money would help buy \$507,700 worth of equipment upgrades to reduce emissions in the county's environmental resources and parks departments.
- Apply for \$100,000 in air pollution grants, to buy two vehicles using alternative fuels for environmental resources and three for public works
- Accept \$20,000 in federal money to help voting by people with disabilities

On the Net: www.stancounty.com/bos/agenda/2012/Ag02-28-12.pdf.