

West Hills College Lemoore hosts free emissions screening to clean up polluting vehicles

By Joseph Luiz

Hanford Sentinel, Tuesday, Nov. 6, 2012

LEMOORE — Want \$500? Get in line.

During the Tune In & Tune Up event on Saturday at West Hills College Lemoore, cars who failed a free onsite emissions test were given a \$500 voucher to a Gold Shield smog shop to help pay for repairs in an effort to clean up the Valley's air. Nearly 500 cars went through the screening, equaling nearly \$250,000 in vouchers.

The event is conducted by Valley Clean Air Now in partnership with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

"We're just trying to clean up vehicles that are high polluters and help clean the air," said Roger Tescher, a member of Valley CAN who was in charge of the event. "Every little bit helps."

Participants had to wait up to two hours to get through the testing due to high volume, with some cars lining up about four hours before the testing was set to begin.

"There's a lot of people that are coming through here," Tescher said. "We're doing a great job of cleaning up the air."

Besides the free emissions testing, the event also offered free food, music and information booths.

Maria Gomez came with her family to get their 1998 Ford F-150 tested after failing a smog exam. She said they received a voucher and will use it soon to make repairs. Gomez said the event is really beneficial.

"It was very helpful for us and should be for other people as well," she said. "It's also good because it's helping the environment, which is really important."

Albert Zaragoza, who owns a 2006 Kia Sportage, came to see if there's a problem with his car after his check engine light came on recently. He said he is glad there is a program like this available.

"Smog repairs are expensive, so that wait is worth it to get that voucher," Zaragoza said.

Although he was expecting more cars at the event, he said he was impressed with the organization of the operation.

"I didn't realize it would be like this," he said. "It's a pretty well-oiled machine."

Will Coronado, one of the emission testers at the event, said that nearly 50 percent of people come through the screening to get their check engine lights checked out. However, he said the testers can't really do anything about it because the screening is for emissions only.

"I think a lot of people have been misled about what exactly we can do here," he said. "We don't look at functional or visual errors; we're only focused on polluted vehicles."

Coronado said fliers and other promotional materials need to make it more clear that only car emissions will be checked so people don't waste their time waiting for the screening.

"This is just a simple check," he said. "It's either go or no go on this."

This is the third time the event has been held at the college since 2010. Valley CAN holds the program all over the Valley, usually holding one or two events a month. The next event is scheduled for Nov. 17 at the International Agri-Center in Tulare.

First ban on wood-burning issued for Tuesday

Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Nov. 6, 2012

The valley air district is putting the kibosh on residential wood burning Tuesday.

Bad air quality is to blame for the ban, which begins at midnight and continues until midnight Tuesday, according to a San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District news release sent Monday.

The prohibition applies to "burning wood, pellets and manufactured fire logs in residential fireplaces, stoves and outdoor burning devices such as fire pits and chimineas" in the valley area of Kern County and in Kings and Tulare counties, the news release said.

Violators can be fined.

The restriction doesn't apply if burning solid fuel is the only way to heat a home or if a residence doesn't "have access to natural-gas service, even if propane is used."

The "Check Before You Burn" program runs from November through February and aims to reduce particulate pollution, according to the news release.

To find out when residential wood burning is and isn't allowed, check the air district's forecast at valleyair.org/aqinfo/WoodBurnPage.htm or call 1-800-SMOG-INFO (766-4463).

First burning ban in effect today

Staff Report, Visalia Times-Delta, November 6, 2012

The first ban on wood-stove use for the season is in force today.

The day-long mandatory curtailment because of poor air quality will be in place from midnight tonight through midnight Tuesday.

The curtailment applies to burning wood, pellets, manufactured fire logs in residential fireplaces, stoves and other outdoor burning devices such as fire pits and chimineas.

Residential wood burning is the single largest source of air pollution during the winter and can pump 17 tons of soot and particles into Valley skies daily. The pollution from wood smoke can exacerbate asthma, bronchitis and cause lung infections.

"Check Before You Burn" runs each winter from November through February and reduces wintertime particulate pollution. Wood-burning forecasts are issued each day by county.

There are two exceptions to wood burning prohibitions:

- If the residence does not have access to natural gas service, even if propane is used.
- If burning solid fuel is the sole source of heat for the residence.

Daily wood-burning forecasts are on page 2A, and are available each day at 4:30 p.m. at valleyair.org or by calling 1-800 SMOG INFO (766-4463).

County approves railroad growth

Lathrop officials dispute cost of expansion plans

By Reed Fujii

Stockton Record, Tuesday, November 6, 2012

Union Pacific Railroad's \$238 million plan to nearly triple the capacity of its intermodal facility outside Lathrop over the next 10 years received environmental clearance last week from San Joaquin County planning officials.

The Planning Commission unanimously approved an environmental impact report and use permit that would see the intermodal facility - where shipping containers and truck trailers are loaded and unloaded from railcars - more than double in size to 286 acres and handle as many as 730,000 container transfers per year.

That approval came Thursday over the objections of Lathrop city officials, who said while they support the expansion in principal that county planners significantly underestimated the cost and the city's share of needed improvements to a nearby freeway interchange.

With the railroad's existing facility south of Roth Road and west of Airport Way near capacity, it makes sense to expand, said Liisa Lawson Stark, Union Pacific director of public affairs.

"Really what we've seen is the domestic intermodal freight sector in North America has been identified as a major growth sector," she said Friday in a telephone interview from her Sacramento office.

The railroad is investing heavily as it looks to the future, another Union Pacific spokesman said.

"This Lathrop project is very much a signature project for us," said Aaron Hunt, Union Pacific director of corporate relations and media.

His company is spending \$3.6 billion this year alone in capital maintenance and improvements, he said.

"All of that is meant to have us ready for growth as we hope to move out of the recession in the coming years," Hunt said.

And the benefits go beyond just the railroad, said Michael Ammann, president of the San Joaquin Partnership, who spoke in favor of the project at the commission meeting.

"It's a very important project," he said Friday from his Stockton office.

San Joaquin County already has tremendous transportation and logistics capabilities, with its inland seaport, major freeways, metropolitan airport and rail intermodal facilities. Expanding that capability can only enhance the region's economic development.

"More and more you hear the importance of logistics in the siting of manufacturing facilities," Ammann said. "We have positioned ourselves to transform our existing infrastructure into a super logistics center and that will attract manufacturing, distribution and jobs, basically."

A study of the rail expansion by the Business Forecasting Center at University of the Pacific, underwritten by Union Pacific as part of the environmental impact report, found it would result in \$412 million in total output; generate \$140 million in additional income; and create an additional \$43 million in tax revenue.

Also, construction and related spending during the three years of the initial expansion will create an annual average of 387 jobs and \$24 million of income in San Joaquin County.

Tom Pogue, assistant director of the Business Forecasting Center, said the project will also ease highway congestion and air pollution as more cargo moves by rail instead of less efficient trucks.

He also agreed that it could help attract new businesses interested in moving products and supplies through the intermodal facility.

"The important thing is to make sure we're taking advantage of this transportation and warehousing capacity," he said.

Glenn Gebhardt, Lathrop's director of community development and public works, said he has no argument with Union Pacific's project itself.

"The city absolutely does support the intermodal expansion," he said Friday.

However, the EIR falls short on plans to improve the Interstate 5/Roth Road interchange.

"We just happen to disagree on the percentage share and the cost of those interchange improvements," Gebhardt said. The gap is somewhere between \$4 million and \$5 million.

City officials had made no decision Friday on whether to appeal the planning commission's decision.