

Health digest: Air district puts out iPhone app, AIDS events

Excerpt from Bakersfield Californian article, Wed., Dec. 5, 2012

The San Joaquin Air Pollution Control District introduced a new way to check before you burn Tuesday with the Valley Air app.

The iPhone app allows users to look up the wood-burning forecasts and real-time air quality data, according to an air district news release. The app also gives users instant access to the smoking-vehicle complaint hotline, the Air Quality Flag program forecast and information, and links to dial the air district, the news release said.

The app is available in the App Store under the name "Valley Air." Apps for Android and Windows technology are expected to be out by the first of next year, the news release said.

Education roundup: Local student's artwork in calendar, more

Excerpt from Bakersfield Californian article, Wed., Dec. 5, 2012

A Bakersfield fifth-grader is among 15 Central Valley students whose artwork is featured in the 2013 Healthy Air Living Kids' Calendar, a bilingual, full-color wall calendar just released by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Elizabeth Leung of Norris Elementary School in Bakersfield drew the winning picture for the month of February. It depicts an idyllic forest full of wildlife under the banner, "Think green, not gray."

The other winners were from Atwater, Clovis, Fresno, Lathrop, Lemoore, Madera, Stockton, Tulare and Woodlake.

The calendars are distributed to schools, community groups, healthcare facilities, churches, civic organizations and non-profit groups throughout the valley. The district prints 20,000 copies of it to promote Healthy Air Living. To obtain a 2013 calendar, contact public.education@valleyair.org or 392-5500.

Proposed Fresno suit targets Madera County's Tesoro Viejo development City Hall may sue over McCaffrey project north of river.

By George Hostetter and BoNhia Lee, staff writers
The Fresno Bee, Tuesday, Dec. 4, 2012

The city of Fresno is expected to sue Madera County today in hopes of influencing the future of a huge residential project north of the San Joaquin River.

The City Council gave the City Attorney's Office the green light to file a lawsuit designed to keep open all of Fresno's legal options on the fate of the proposed Tesoro Viejo residential project.

City officials said they sought an agreement with Madera County that would have led to as much as six months of talks on the project without the courts getting involved. They said the agreement must be done by 5 p.m. today or a deadline passes that limits City Hall's authority to file future lawsuits on the project.

But the Madera County Board of Supervisors, meeting Tuesday, took no action on the city's request, making the lawsuit all but inevitable.

City officials said their current point is not to pass judgment on the wisdom of McCaffrey Homes' Tesoro Viejo. The Fresno-based developer wants to build nearly 5,200 homes and 3 million square feet of retail, office and commercial space on about 1,600 acres. Most of the land is east of Highway 41 and south of Avenue 15 in rural Madera County.

But city officials do insist that such a large project just a few miles away would inevitably worsen Fresno's air, water and infrastructure problems. Regional issues demand regional planning to offset such pain, they said.

"The project has direct and unavoidable impact to the city, despite being across the river," Council Member Andreas Borgeas said.

The council authorized the lawsuit Thursday in a closed-session vote. Before going behind closed doors, the council listened to a handful of speakers express support or opposition to the project.

Brent McCaffrey, president of McCaffrey Homes, said his family-owned company will turn Tesoro Viejo into a statewide model for wise planning and environmental stewardship.

The project will generate many jobs during construction and be home to many permanent jobs when completed, he said. There will be 15 miles of walking/biking trails and 400 acres of open space, he added.

"I ask that you do not sue Madera County," McCaffrey said.

Michael Prandini, chief executive of the Building Industry Association of Fresno/Madera Counties, said the city has no business telling another county how to plan its communities.

Madera County planning director Norman Allinder said the Tesoro Viejo project has been in the pipeline for nearly a decade, giving Fresno City Hall plenty of time to voice its concerns. He said it's not neighborly for Fresno to wait until the last minute, then make legal threats.

"Your silence was tantamount to concurrence" with the project, Allinder said.

The project has sparked a wave of lawsuits from environmental groups who say Madera County was too quick to give its OK.

Sara Hedgepeth-Harris, a lawyer representing project opponents, told the council that Tesoro Viejo is the opposite of smart growth. The project is nothing more than "a commitment to sprawl," she said.

Tesoro Viejo is among several proposed mega-projects planned for a portion of the San Joaquin River's north side that stretches from roughly Children's Hospital Central California to Friant Dam. The entire project area with its many developers has been called simply "Rio Mesa." There could be 100,000 people living there someday.

Such a possibility has generated controversy for decades.

The area has it all for ambitious home developers: Open land now used for farming and grazing, beautiful views of the Sierra Nevada, a major river within walking (or at least biking) distance, the state's fifth-largest city with its jobs and shopping just a short drive away on Highway 41. Developers have long viewed such assets as irresistible to potential homebuyers.

But the prospect of a new city rising on a prime piece of the Valley's dwindling store of open land has generated intense opposition, especially from environmentalists. Where's the water? Isn't the air bad enough already? What about agriculture?

Legal challenges kept Rio Mesa developers on their toes. But the dot-com bust in 2000, then the collapse of the nation's housing market in 2007-08, were the big blows.

Water and air issues remain in the mix, but now the regional political climate has changed, as well.

Fresno Mayor Ashley Swearengin is pushing hard for a revolutionary 2035 general plan update. Curtail suburban growth, she said, and concentrate on infill development. Fresno's social and economic recovery depends on this dramatic change in planning philosophy, she said.

But what's to become of a plan based in part on the return of middle-class homeowners and renters to Fresno's center if, just across the river, a new city outside of Fresno's control is chasing the same customers?

Tesoro Viejo could be the sign that the sleeping giant that is Rio Mesa has awakened.

This prospect has Fresno officials hoping to convince Madera County and Tesoro Viejo to "mitigate" the project's effects on the city.

Exactly what sort of mitigation measures and their cost remain unanswered questions.

Solar system completed at Hanford wastewater plant

(Fresno) Business Journal, Tues., Dec. 4, 2012

The City of Hanford will save an estimated \$7 million on energy costs through a new solar power system recently completed at its wastewater treatment plant.

Built by Chevron Energy Solutions, the 1-megawatt system relies on a single-axis tracking system to position the solar panels toward the sun as it moves through the sky.

Savings from the system will total around \$7 million over the next 25 years, equating to nearly 50 percent of the city's electrical utility purchases at the wastewater treatment plant located at 10555 Houston Ave.

In addition, the system will offset nearly 1,000 metric tons in annual carbon emissions, an amount equal to removing about 200 cars from the road each year.

The project will be dedicated at the site of the wastewater treatment plant today during a ceremony beginning at noon.

City officials as well as community and business leaders are expected to attend while Southern California Edison will present a rebate check totaling \$1.6 million to the City of Hanford as part of the California Solar Initiative incentive program.

Expanded most recently in 2004, Hanford's wastewater treatment plant is able to treat 8 million gallons a day of effluent per day.

Life expectancy rises as fine particle air pollution drops

By Bettina Boxall, staff writer

Los Angeles Times, Tuesday, Dec. 4, 2012

A new study links even small reductions in fine particle air pollution to increased life expectancy.

Researchers who compared data from 545 counties across the U.S., including many in California, found that a drop in fine particulate matter, known as PM2.5, between 2000 and 2007 corresponded with an average rise in life expectancy of 0.35 of a year.

The study, led by researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health, is described as the largest to date to find public health benefits from ongoing reductions in U.S. air pollution levels.

Fine particles, which are about 1/30th the average width of a human hair, come from a variety of sources, including vehicles, smokestacks and fires. They also form when gases emitted by power plants, industry and vehicle engines react in the atmosphere.

The tiny particles can lodge deeply in the lungs, aggravating heart and lung diseases. Those most at risk include people who are active outdoors, children and the elderly.

Nationally, average concentrations of particulate matter, both fine and coarse, have fallen over the years. The researchers wanted to know whether the relatively smaller decreases in PM2.5 levels since 2000 are still improving life expectancy.

The study, which appears in Monday's online edition of the journal *Epidemiology*, controlled for changes in other factors, such as smoking and socioeconomic status. The findings showed that cutting fine particle pollution had the greatest effect on life expectancy in urban areas – possibly because of differences in particle composition. Women also seemed to benefit more than men.

“This study provides strong and compelling evidence that continuing to reduce ambient levels of PM2.5 prolongs life,” said coauthor Francesca Dominici, professor of biostatistics at the Harvard School of Public Health.

Citing scientific evidence that exposure to particle pollution causes premature death and is linked to a variety of significant health problems, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has proposed strengthening air pollution standards for fine particles.