

Putting a charge in downtown

Stockton alliance shifts to new fleet of plug-in electric vehicles for maintenance

By Alex Breitler

Stockton Record, Saturday, August 10, 2013

Maintenance workers with the Downtown Stockton Alliance are hard to miss, laboring in their bright green shirts to remove trash from city streets and graffiti from the walls of businesses.

You'll still see them, of course, but you might not hear them so much anymore.

The alliance has switched to an all-electric fleet of maintenance vehicles. Even the drivers are still sometimes surprised when they fire up their buggies and are met with virtual silence.

"This is such a step up," worker Brandon Trahan said Friday, as he and his partner pressure-washed graffiti off a San Joaquin Street structure.

It'll be quieter, and it should be cheaper. Last year the alliance burned through \$17,000 in gas for its John Deere vehicles. Maintenance costs were also increasing as those vehicles got older.

A nearly \$100,000 grant from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District allowed the alliance to switch to the new Polaris Ranger buggies, which may be small, but are capable of hauling up to 1,700 pounds in cargo. They're even four-wheel drive.

Now some of that gas money can be spent on other things, Trahan said.

"It allows us to do more for the community," he said.

Electric vehicles of all shapes and sizes have become a more common sight zipping around downtown streets. Earlier this year, the San Joaquin Regional Transit District unveiled its first all-electric passenger bus. And maybe you've seen the electric UPS trucks that were manufactured at Stockton-based Electronic Vehicles International.

Collectively, "We're making a sustainable downtown," said Troy Brodrick, interim manager at the alliance.

It's not clear exactly how much the alliance will save on fuel costs; officials will need to factor in how much it costs to charge the new vehicles, and how long their batteries will last. The vehicles are plugged in and charged once a day.

One more advantage: These vehicles are enclosed, while the old gas models were wide open and exposed to the wind and rain.

"They're just a neat little buggy," Brodrick said.

Haystack fire in Goshen may affect Visalia air quality

Staff reports

Visalia Times-Delta, Monday, Aug. 12, 2013

A haystack fire in Goshen that began at about midnight Sunday may be generating smoke for up to two days, affecting air quality in Visalia, Tulare County Fire Battalion Chief Claudia Whitendale said.

The fire, which was responded to by eight vehicles including engines, water tenders and a battalion chief, consumed 2,000 tons of hay.

Whitendale said that hay fires are slow-burning, typically putting off smoke for an extended period of time. Fire crews generally contain them to the point that they are not threatening any structures, then monitor them as they burn for a couple of days.

Health officials concerned with smoke from Aspen Fire

Sierra Star, Tuesday, August 6, 2013

The Aspen Fire, burning more than 21,000 acres north-east of North Fork, has prompted the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to issue a health cautionary statement due to the smoke the fire has created in several Eastern Madera and Eastern Fresno county communities surrounding the fire.

Smoke from fires produces fine-particulate matter, which can cause serious health problems including lung disease, asthma attacks and increased risk of heart attacks and stroke. Where conditions warrant, people with heart or lung disease should follow their doctors' advice for dealing with episodes of particulate exposure. Additionally, older adults and children should avoid prolonged exposure or heavy exertion, depending on the conditions in their area.

Health facilities in Oakhurst have reported a small increase in volume of patients, most of which already suffering from chronic lung disease such as COPD and Asthma.

Mainly older, fragile people seem to have the worst symptoms and most trouble dealing with the smoke from the fire.

"As always, the best rule of thumb for residents is that if you can see and smell smoke, take appropriate precautions," said Samir Sheikh, the air district's director of air quality analysis.

Residents can check the nearest air monitor to their location to determine localized air-quality conditions. Visit the Real-time Air Advisory Network page on the District's website to subscribe for free: www.valleyair.org/Programs/RAAN/raan_landing.htm. Updated fire information can also be found at inciweb.org/.