

Fumes leave 3 ill: Hazardous waste scare shuts down streets

By Angela Sykes

[The Madera Tribune, Wednesday, Oct. 13, 2004](#)

Streets were blocked off between Cleveland and Rush avenues on Columbia Street Tuesday afternoon when two sanitation workers and one city worker complained of headaches after they were exposed to a spilled pesticide.

Approximately half a gallon of an unspecified pesticide had been discarded on the street among refuse left for pick-up.

The California Department of Forestry Hazardous Materials Assessment Team was called to the scene to collect samples of the substance. The team determined it was an unspecified, acidic pesticide.

One of the workers who was exposed was transported to a local hospital and the other two were treated at the scene.

County Health Department and CDF officials said the substance should have never been discarded on the street.

Madera Police Department officers were at the scene as well as other city workers.

Lake Berryessa wildfire spreads to 37,000 acres Development evacuated as winds, dry weather feed fire

By Associated Press

[Tri-Valley Herald, Thursday, Oct. 14, 2004](#)

LAKE BERRYESSA -- Firefighters began to get control Wednesday of a more than 37,000-acre wildland blaze northeast of San Francisco.

Nearly 2,000 firefighters were battling the wildfire, which has spread to 37,599 acres in Napa and Yolo counties near Lake Berryessa and was 45 percent contained Wednesday night, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Prevention.

The fire was only 5 percent contained earlier Wednesday, but favorable weather conditions helped the firefighters.

"The winds weren't as severe as they have been," CDF spokeswoman Dianne Sanders said. "The red flag warning was lifted about noon. They were able to make some good progress today."

Full containment of the fire is expected by Saturday night, Sanders said.

The blaze prompted the voluntary evacuation of Lake Berryessa Estates, a community of 75 homes about 60 miles northeast of San Francisco. Swirling winds sent ash drifting onto the Napa Valley wine country town of St. Helena to the west and producing a smoke plume that could be seen as far south as the East Bay.

Air quality warnings were issued throughout the Bay Area.

About \$2 million has been spent to fight the fire. Altogether, 98 fire engines, 23 bulldozers, 20 water tenders, 19 helicopters, one plane and 64 18-member hand crews, including prison inmates, were working to contain the blaze, Sanders said.

One firefighter suffered a minor eye injury Wednesday.

The blaze began Sunday evening near the Yolo County farming community of Rumsey before spreading to nearby hills. Investigators believe the fire was intentionally set and are investigating the circumstances.

Firefighters were also battling a 3,000-acre wildfire in Eldorado National Forest in Amador County.

A total of 50 people were evacuated, including two families staying in summer cabin at Bear River, according to forest service spokeswoman Donna Winkelman.

The fire was fully contained Tuesday but spread wildly Wednesday and was only 10 percent contained by the evening.

"It blew out last night with the winds," Winkelman said. "Last night the winds were just amazing." The fire was actively burning on a ridge south of Bear River Resort and east to Henley Canyon.

The fire has also crossed Ellis Road onto Beaver Ridge.

Firefighters were getting the upper hand Wednesday on three smaller fires in or near Northern California's wine country:

- The Geyser fire that began Monday night atop Geyser Peak in Sonoma County was fully contained after burning 150 acres. The area is just east of Highway 101 between Geyserville and Cloverdale.
- The Pine fire was fully contained after burning about 75 acres northwest of Geyserville. No structures were threatened.
- The Valley fire near Bloomfield northwest of Petaluma also was fully contained after burning 75 acres.

No structures were destroyed in any of the three smaller fires. The cause of each also is undetermined.

OPEN FORUM

A HAND UP

Toward healthier neighborhoods

By Angela Glover Blackwell and Robert K. Ross

[San Francisco Chronicle, Commentary, Thursday, Oct. 14, 2004](#)

Where you live often determines how healthy you are. The recent Chronicle series, "Too Young to Die," focused on how certain neighborhood factors contribute to higher rates of infant mortality, noting that certain California neighborhoods have infant-mortality rates comparable to those in Bulgaria and Tonga. Huge disparities also exist between many communities of color and the rest of America on other diseases and afflictions, such as asthma, diabetes, obesity, cancer and heart disease.

This month, PolicyLink and The California Endowment will publish an annotated bibliography with more than 150 entries of groundbreaking research on how a variety of neighborhood factors affect health. One long-term study of West Oakland residents found that just living in the low-income neighborhood was a health risk in its own right, on top of the risks arising from race, income, gender or prior health status. The Chronicle series also documented that in many low-income communities of color, people of all ages suffer disproportionately from asthma, diabetes and other diseases.

Change is possible, but to save and improve people's lives, we must understand the health impacts from living with economic disinvestment, physical decay and social disrespect, and commit to improving neighborhoods.

Doing so requires a new policy framework that breaks out of the narrow notion that all health issues are connected to the delivery of health care. Access to health services is important, but preventing disease requires a focus on policies that affect the quality of neighborhood life.

For example, look at supermarkets, one key aspect of neighborhood commercial activity. Many low-income communities of color do not have full-service supermarkets and therefore residents have limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables. Not surprisingly, the diets of many of these neighborhood residents tend to be unhealthy, with more calories and fat.

Further, lack of access to healthy foods translates into greater problems with being overweight or obese, which leads to a host of health problems and diseases, such as diabetes and high blood pressure. When there are more commercial options, people make different choices. African Americans' intake of fruits and vegetables increased by 32 percent for each additional supermarket, a recent study by researchers at the University of North Carolina concluded. And, more residents in an African-American neighborhood limited

their intake of fat when they had access to a supermarket than residents in a neighborhood without any markets. There can be positive health impacts from a positive neighborhood change.

Equally important is the air people breathe. Too many of the nation's neighborhoods of color have become dumping grounds, home to toxic sites (witness San Francisco's Bayview-Hunters Point). Many of these neighborhoods have dirty air, with high concentrations of diesel pollution and other triggers for asthma. Poor housing stock exposes residents to additional asthma triggers from mold, mildew, dust mites and the allergens associated with cockroaches and rats. Old, rundown schools tend to have poor air, exacerbating children's problems with asthma. In California, more than 1 in 10 children have asthma, according to a survey by the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, but lower-income children of color suffer disproportionately, with as many as 25 percent of children in some communities having the ailment.

There are clear steps to change. California can allocate economic development dollars for the construction of supermarkets in underserved communities, as Pennsylvania did recently. Schools can eliminate the use of pesticides, monitor ventilation systems (the simple step of regular changes of air filters can make a big difference in air quality) and allow children full access to their medications to decrease problems with asthma. In this last legislative session, measures to improve indoor air quality in schools were defeated, but Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signed legislation that will at least improve asthmatic children's access to the medications that keep them breathing.

Bold, far-reaching steps are needed that can return economic activity to these neighborhoods, protect communities from dangerous exposures to toxins and enforce Clean Air Act standards. Mobilized communities and better neighborhoods lead to improved health.

Angela Glover Blackwell is president of PolicyLink, a national nonprofit in Oakland working to advance economic and social-equity policies. Robert K. Ross, M.D., is the president and CEO of The California Endowment, one of the country's largest private health foundations that seeks to expand access to affordable health care.

Life on the almond orchard

[Modesto Bee, Letter to the Editor Thursday, Oct. 14, 2004](#)

Our almonds are all in, but we are waiting for our neighbors before we clean up.

Country women do not like dirt and dust and yes, we complain and moan and groan. We have to wash the house down, do all the windows and screens, clean the ancient patio furniture and enjoy the blessed rain that will wash the trees and bushes.

The tomato vines will be taken out soon. We had a huge crop. We all canned and ate and gave and they just kept coming. Never had any luck storing any for Thanksgiving. The butternut squash is ready and the vines are dying. The birds are having a ball with the leftover nuts and blue jays are hiding them. It's so much fun out here, but so much work! We were in our 20s when we came; we are now in our 80s. Our two sons worked and value money. Next month is 63 years of marriage and each day is precious. God has blessed us with so much and we give our thanks. The neighbors are all close to our hearts.

NORMA BOWMAN

Modesto