

State halts toxics cleanup in bay marsh It wants to be sure the job is done right

By Kelly St. John, staff writer

S.F. Chronicle, Wednesday, September 1, 2004

State officials have delayed cleanup of a marsh on a chemical waste site near the popular Point Isabel regional park on the Richmond shoreline, near the site where a Marin developer wants to build high-rise housing.

The restoration of 22 acres of wetlands scarred by a century of toxic dumping had been scheduled to begin as early as today, when crews were to begin excavating 25,000 cubic yards of polluted soil from the marsh.

But the state's Department of Toxic Substances Control raised serious questions this week about how the cleanup will be handled and whether the developer has the permits it needs. The Regional Water Quality Control Board - - which voted to approve the cleanup in 2002 -- will halt the effort until those concerns are addressed, said Bruce Wolfe, the water board's executive officer.

Wolfe said the water board is eager to move forward. He said that because the endangered clapper rail lives nearby, work must take place in September and October so as not to disturb the nesting birds. If not, the work would be delayed until spring.

"We're looking at how we can move this along as soon as possible," Wolfe said. "In general, we feel we're moving forward appropriately on the project."

But not everyone agrees. On Tuesday, state Assemblywoman Loni Hancock, D-Berkeley, wrote to the state Environmental Protection Agency and asked it to halt work indefinitely until the EPA conducts a thorough review.

"There is a real danger in a sloppily performed toxic remediation," Hancock said.

The marsh cleanup has generated controversy in Richmond, especially among people who live and work near the marsh. They fear regulators have been lax in assuring that toxic dust is not stirred up, threatening their health.

Contra Costa County's public health officer, Dr. Wendel Brunner, has said he is concerned that the cleanup could be dangerous. In July, he asked the state EPA to transfer oversight of the project to the toxic substances department because they have more experience with complicated toxic sites.

Marin developer Russell Pitto plans to spend \$6 million to restore the wetlands and turn them over to the East Bay Regional Park District. Pitto also wants to build 1,330 dwellings on a nearby parcel of land, but that plan has yet to be approved.

In a letter dated Aug. 30, Barbara Cook, who heads the state toxic substances agency's Northern California coastal cleanup office, pointed out that when the water board issued its order in 2002 allowing the marsh cleanup, it did so thinking the land nearby would be developed for industrial use. She said the plan must be re-evaluated because homes could be built nearby.

Cook also questioned whether the developer has received the appropriate hazardous-waste permits, and asked why crews won't be monitoring some dangerous chemicals known to be at the site.

She also said crews should monitor air quality based on standards not only for healthy adult male workers, as proposed, when women and children who may be more sensitive to such pollution are in the area, too.

The marsh and adjacent land have a toxic history. For a century they were the site of a chemical factory that produced sulfuric acid, fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides. The marsh is scarred with red-orange ponds reflecting the color of iron pyrite cinders dumped there over the decades.

It was so polluted in 1998 that state regulators dubbed it a hot spot -- one of the 10 most polluted sites in the Bay Area.

In 2002, the Zeneca Corp. spent \$20 million to clean up land adjacent to the marsh, bringing it up to industrial standards, before selling it to Pitto. Critics said the water board did not safely monitor Zeneca during that cleanup.

Just in Time for Labor Day: Summer

After a cooler than normal August, a more seasonal heat is expected to arrive, starting today.

By Eric Malnic, Times Staff Writer

L.A. Times, Wed., Sept. 1, 2004

It isn't just your imagination. It really has been cooler than usual. But that's about to change.

Temperatures in Los Angeles will begin to climb today after an unusually cool and smog-free August, meteorologists said Tuesday.

The average high temperature downtown last month was about 80 degrees — about 3 degrees lower than normal — but today's high could be closer to 90, with top readings near 105 in the San Fernando and San Gabriel valleys, the National Weather Service said.

William Patzert, an oceanographer and meteorologist at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, said the rising temperatures, which should last through Labor Day, will be largely a result of a large ridge of high pressure building over Southern California, blocking the onshore flow of cool air from the ocean.

That high pressure wasn't around much last month.

"What we had," Patzert said, "was June gloom in August."

The highest temperature in downtown Los Angeles last month was 88 degrees, compared with the record for the month of 106, set Aug. 19, 1885.

He said the cooler weather along the coast was caused, in part, by hotter than normal weather in the deserts.

Patzert said the ocean water between the Hawaiian Islands and Southern California was cooler than usual for much of the summer, keeping the air over the water cool too. At the same time, temperatures in the deserts routinely topped 100.

Cool air is denser than hot air, so air tends to flow from cooler areas toward warmer areas. With a temperature differential often approaching 40 degrees during August, the onshore flow of cool, damp air was especially persistent.

Many days, that dank air piled up against the coastal slopes above L.A. as fog and clouds. Midday sunshine burned away the overcast downtown, but along the coast, it often stayed cloudy and cool all day.

With less heat to generate the chemical reactions and inversion layers that produce smog, the Los Angeles Basin had less air pollution than normal during August, said Sam Atwood, a spokesman for the Air Quality Management District.

Patzert said the cool weather may have stemmed from a long-term weather cycle known as the Pacific Decadal Oscillation. This cycle, he said, is also largely responsible for the six-year drought that exacerbated last year's disastrous fall wildfire season and shows no sign of ending.

"The Santa Ana season is starting," he said. "And if we get a couple of weeks of Santa Anas, it's really going to be grim."

Scientists say a mild El Niño, which often brings excess rain to the Southland, is building in the southeast Pacific, but Patzert said the decadal oscillation could keep the region's weather relatively dry for several years.

Polluting vehicle buyback program revived

State officials revive buy-back program for polluting cars

[Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday Sept. 1, 2004](#)

A buy-back program for polluting cars has been revived by state officials, giving gross polluters an incentive to clean up the roads, and the air.

The Consumer Assistance Program, managed by the Bureau of Automotive Repair, retired 34,000 vehicles from 2000 until 2002, when state budget woes halted it. In those two years, vehicle retirements eliminated 12,000 tons of air pollution per year statewide.

The program now has \$4.5 million to buy back stinky cars at \$500 each (less than the \$1,000 paid previously).

Eligible vehicles must have failed a recent smog check and have current registration.

The state still offers financial aid to low-income people who need help getting their cars to pass smog checks.

For information on both programs, visit www.smogcheck.ca.gov or call (800) 952-5210.

Also, valley residents can continue to report smoking vehicles by calling (800) 559-9247.

Visalia extends bus lines

Exeter, Farmersville residents will be able to get rides to Visalia through City Coach

By Patricia Jiayi Ho, Staff writer

[Visalia Times-Delta, Wednesday, Sept. 1, 2004](#)

Tim Varella Jr. knows the heat.

The 20-year-old, lacking the \$3 for a round-trip bus ride, started walking from Farmersville to Visalia almost every weekday in July in search of a job. It took him two hours and 10 minutes to get from his front door to Court Street, and three hours to get to Mooney Boulevard.

"Twenty-four-hour deodorant only lasts an hour," Varella said. "By the time I got to Mooney, I definitely needed a shower."

Nowadays, thanks to help from a sister, Varella is taking the bus. And thanks to a project between the cities of Visalia, Farmersville and Exeter, Varella and others who depend on public transit may soon be able to travel cheaper and easier.

Although the cities have all agreed to the concept of extending Visalia City Coach services, route details and allocation of operating costs are still being discussed. If all goes well, VCC buses will be making stops in Farmersville and Exeter in October, Visalia transit manger Monty Cox said.

Riders can look forward to more frequent service and more stops, and at a fare at least 50 percent lower than what they pay to ride Tulare County Transit buses.

"We're all working together to provide services that alone, none of us could afford to provide," Farmersville City Manager Eric Swansen said.

Currently, Tulare County Transit buses operated by Orange Belt are the only public link between the communities. Buses run from Visalia to Farmersville to Exeter twice a day, and in the other direction, three times.

"The county provides a lifeline-type service," Cox said. "We're going to be providing quite a bit more."

For Farmersville resident Donny Walker, 35, extended services could not start soon enough.

"Tell them I said to hurry up," he said. "Everybody's talking about it. We're desperate."

Walker, who fixes sprinklers for the city of Visalia, relies on the bus to get him to work. His hours, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., happen to coincide with bus times, but when he gets off early, he has to wait, and when he gets off late, he's stranded. Once, it was 9 p.m. before a friend could pick him up.

Albert Cortez, a 28-year-old Exeter resident and security guard for the Automobile Association of America, has had to pass up jobs that start at 7 a.m. because the bus would not get him to work on time. Infrequent and rigid bus timetables have made scheduling work hours difficult, but Cortez has been able to rely on the understanding of his boss.

Others are not always as fortunate.

"A lot of my neighbors can't get a job because they don't have transportation," Cortez said.

When VCC services are extended to Farmersville and Exeter, buses are expected to run six or seven times a day, round-trip. The routes originate in downtown Visalia, loop through both communities, and return to Visalia.

Currently, there are four stops in Farmersville on the county route. That number may double, Cox said, depending on a balance between the need for more stops and the speed afforded by fewer.

Visalia's Dial-A-Ride service will also be extended to Farmersville, which does not have the curbside pickup service. Exeter will continue to operate its own Dial-A-Ride.

"People forget that some of the seniors have no transportation other than relying on their family members," said Sharon Ziegenbeim, health and human services manager at Farmersville Senior Center. "Anything that might enhance their quality of life by giving them a chance to get into town ... is important."

Funding

Two federal grants will subsidize operation of the VCC and Dial-A-Ride, which add up to "\$450,000 worth of service," Cox said.

A Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality grant, distributed by the Tulare County Association of Governments, will provide money for the first three years of the service. Another federal mass transit grant will pay for 27 percent of the net cost of the services for the first year and increase as CMAQ funds run out.

What is left for individual city funds to pay for is \$50,000 to \$60,000 a year for the next three years.

"One of my biggest concerns is service to unincorporated areas between Visalia, Farmersville and Exeter," Swansen said, adding that almost half the proposed intercity route is under county government. "If the bus is going to be stopping in the county, it makes sense the county should be doing what we're doing."

Overall, city officials agreed that extending fixed route and Dial-A-Ride services has benefits all around.

"Anytime we do something to help people get to jobs and medical care, to things that are in short supply in our community, I think that's a good thing," Swansen said.

According to the 2000 census, 10.3 percent of households in Farmersville and Exeter do not have private automobiles, Cox said. On the existing county route, 22 percent to 25 percent of riders are Farmersville and Exeter residents.

"There is an existing ridership base we will be building on," Cox said. "[The expanded service will] create more opportunities for those who don't have access to cars to be able to get to the same services, the same locations as those who have cars."

Stops will also be added within Visalia city limits as part of the expansion.

On the edges of the city, about five stops that were eliminated in recent route changes will be added back on. Stops along Walnut Avenue will also be added "as much as it makes sense to do so," Cox said.

Swansen emphasized that, at a time of budget difficulties for Farmersville, money will not be taken out from the city's general fund for the project. Also, the utility and sales tax measures on the Nov. 2 ballot would not be used for the transit project.

"A majority of the city's budget can only be spent on specific purposes, based on the revenue source," he said. "If we get transit money, we have to use it for transit."

The driving force for service to Farmersville and Exeter came when, based on information from a 2000 census, Visalia's urbanized area was expanded to include the two cities. The new boundary then grouped the cities under the same federal funding program, Cox said.

Information

A one-way fare for Tulare County Transit is \$1.50, or \$13 for a 10-ride pass.

On the Visalia City Coach, a one-way ride costs 75 cents, a day pass is \$1.50 and a monthly pass is \$28. Fares are from 20 cents to 50 cents less for seniors and disabled passengers, depending on the time of day.

The fare for Dial-A-Ride in Visalia is \$2.50, \$1.50 for seniors and \$1.25 for Americans With Disabilities Act-certified passengers. In Exeter, the fare is \$1 and free for seniors and certified disabled riders.

[Letter to the Modesto Bee, Wednesday, Sept. 1, 2004:](#)

Ethanol a good alternative

In the article "Double ethanol output will spell disaster" (Opinions, Aug. 25), according to the article, it would. Let's use some common sense on this as to the amount of corn to be used for ethanol, a good alternative fuel that burns cleaner than fossil fuel and is renewable. It will not replace all fossil fuel, but would cut back on a lot of it.

Brian Hinton, Modesto