

Clearing the Air With Valley Teachers

Junior high and high-school students throughout the San Joaquin Valley will benefit from an innovative, hands-on training program offered free of charge to their teachers.

[Foothills Sun-Gazette, Thursday, May 19, 2005](#)

More than 60 teachers representing the eight counties of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District will evaluate the Clean Air Challenge teaching curriculum over the course of the next year. Based on the program's classroom success, teacher response and funding, the program will be expanded next year into more classrooms.

Clean Air Challenge is a theme-based curriculum designed to teach students about air quality issues and how their personal decisions collectively affect air quality in the San Joaquin Valley. Teachers were trained in January and February in Bakersfield, Fresno, and Modesto to learn how to engage their students in scientific research on environmental problems that affect human health.

The training workshops are funded by a grant from Valley Clean Air Now, a private, non-profit organization that educates the public about the importance of taking personal responsibility for improving air quality. The Valley Air District has reviewed the curriculum and supports its introduction into Valley schools.

Northern California teachers who piloted the program acknowledged how well the curriculum correlates with California science standards. As a result over the past two years, more than 250 Northern California teachers have embraced the program.

"The most effective way to influence the future of our environment is through what our students are learning today," said Jaime Holt, the Air District's Public Education Administrator. "This valuable educational resource will benefit the Valley's children tomorrow's adults for years to come."

Teachers were selected based on the subjects that best fit the curriculum of Clean Air Challenge: chemistry, earth, physical, environmental, integrated and general science. All teachers attending the training program will be invited to attend a reunion workshop next year to receive updates on the program. Subject to funding, additional teacher workshops may be held in the San Joaquin Valley in the future.

To learn more about the Clean Air Challenge, call Glenn Craig at 310-394-9864 or go to service@entford.com.

Vote on rock quarry put off

By Lynn Doan, Staff writer

[Tulare Advance-Register, Wednesday, May 18, 2005](#)

VISALIA — For the second time around, the Tulare County Board of Supervisors voted Tuesday to delay its decision on a proposed rock quarry in Woodlake.

A last-minute comment filed by the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment raised new concerns about air quality and traffic around the proposed 280-acre site east of Highway 245. So after a 10-year battle with neighbors, the company seeking the quarry, Kaweah River Rock, will wait another week before supervisors decide the fate of its second quarry.

"I don't know what the issue is," said Kaweah River Rock general manager David Harrald, who expected the board to decide Tuesday. "There's nothing more to say."

The company has been trying to build a second quarry in Woodlake since 1995, scaling back the project to resolve environmental concerns expressed by the county and neighbors.

Valley Citizens for Water, a group of neighbors spearheading the effort to delay the project, argued that there's a lot more to say. Del Strange, a spokesman for the group, said Tuesday that the county's environmental studies on the project haven't addressed neighbors' issues.

Some of the group's major concerns are the quarry's effect on groundwater availability and quality, flooding and financial restitution.

The company has assured county supervisors that a recharge system would prevent the quarry from affecting neighbors' groundwater availability.

Caroline Farrell, attorney for the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment, a group based in Delano, said the center has other concerns: [air quality](#) and traffic.

In a letter to the county, the center requested that Kaweah River Rock form a contract with its truckers that would prohibit them from using some roads and avenues. The letter also said the county had yet to address the issue of potentially harmful emissions from rock crushing.

After meeting with county counsel in private, supervisors voted to delay their decision on the project until next Tuesday, which would allow county staff time to "amend the study."

How the board will amend the study, Strange said "it's a flip of the coin."

"They could just rewrite it to make it complete and deny the appeal, or they could rewrite to uphold our appeal," Strange said. "All is not lost."

OSHA officials turned away

Fresno City College won't allow inspection of a science building.

By Jim Steinberg

[Fresno Bee, Thursday, May 19, 2005](#)

State officials said they were denied entrance Wednesday to the Math-Science building at Fresno City College, where they are looking into complaints that substandard ventilation of formaldehyde and other chemicals endangers health.

The state Division of Occupational Safety and Health said it will ask a Fresno County Superior Court judge next week to force the State Center Community College District to admit its inspectors into the building.

"I should say this is unusual," said Dean Fryer, a spokesman for Cal-OSHA in San Francisco. "It is really unusual. It just raises questions about what's happening there."

Calls to college and State Center officials elicited a written statement Wednesday evening. The statement said the district, Chancellor Tom Crow and the City College administration "are fully committed to the safety of the students and employees of the district. This matter is being handled through litigation with Cal-OSHA and arbitration with the State Center Federation of Teachers. We have been advised by counsel not to make any other comment."

Crow was in Sacramento on Wednesday, meeting with officials about the building issue. Trustees President Patrick E. Patterson did not return messages left at his home, and Vice President Isabel Barreras could not be reached by late Wednesday.

Trustee Phillip Forhan said the safety of district students, faculty and staff "is paramount."

"In spite of assurances from our district administration, I am shocked to learn from Cal-OSHA that the administration has chosen to obstruct a state regulatory agency's access to the classroom laboratories to perform their inspection," Forhan said in a written statement. "As a trustee, I would hope that the administration would cooperate with Cal-OSHA in an effort to immediately resolve this dangerous situation rather than stonewalling."

It wasn't clear why Cal-OSHA officials were trying to inspect the building Wednesday.

Chemistry and biology instructors have complained of inadequate ventilation and dangers from formaldehyde and other fumes. State Center trustees were told at their last meeting that the district was correcting all health problems in the Math-Science building.

Those problems caused the state to fine the district \$20,100 in April. State citations included failure to adequately control hazardous substances and regulate carcinogens as well as inadequate ventilation.

Math instructor Zwi Reznik, president of the State Center Federation of Teachers, said Wednesday that he had filed another complaint. The union says the district has failed to notify faculty and others that they have been exposed to dangerous levels of formaldehyde.

In a May 5 letter to Crow, Reznik wrote:

"At the May 3, 2005, meeting of the board, you stated ... that the district will be reporting during closed session its plans for dealing with the matters addressed by the Cal-OSHA citations. You specifically stated that the faculty have been involved in making these plans. That is a blatant falsehood! I have conferred with the faculty in the chemistry and biology departments. To put it as simply as possible, they have no idea what you are talking about. We can find no indication at all of any faculty involvement."

Crow's meetings in Sacramento came on the same day that Cal-OSHA representatives called a meeting with Brian Speece, associate vice chancellor for business and operations for the college district, Reznik said.

Speece told the State Center board of trustees in October that faculty members have been concerned for years about toxic chemicals used and stored in the Math-Science building. He reported that the district had already spent \$155,000 in two years to make health improvements in science labs.

Speece also said in October that State Center had called chemistry and hygiene experts, who had surveyed the building for four hours. And State Center's insurance experts had submitted a draft report on what City College needed to do to address health issues. That report included the need for safer storage of chemicals and installation of closed hoods to trap hazardous fumes.

Speece also reported in October that the college intended to perform more work on the Math-Science building this summer.

Cal-OSHA fined the district for exposing students and faculty to the chemicals without adequate ventilation. An April 18 notice of the fine cited failure to control hazardous substances and regulated carcinogens. In levying the fine, Cal-OSHA gave State Center until May 24 to correct all violations.

Faculty members say they have been complaining for years about the chemicals and inadequate ventilation; instructor Carl Johansson said in April that complaints dated back at least 17 years.

Howard Hurtt, a City College chemistry support technician, said Wednesday that Cal-OSHA acts primarily to protect employees, "but I am concerned with students. We are just dumbfounded" by the turning away of inspectors.

Hurtt said he has held his job one year. He mixes chemicals and readies chemistry preparation areas.

"We thought the district was on board with this and wanted to do things right," Hurtt said.

Toyota Denies GM Hybrid Deal Coming Soon

By YURI KAGEYAMA, AP Business Writer

[S.F. Chronicle, Thursday, May 19, 2005](#)

TOKYO, Japan (AP) -- Toyota Motor Corp. President Fujio Cho said Thursday that he affirmed a partnership with General Motors Corp. at a recent meeting with GM Chief Executive Rick Wagoner but denied a deal was coming soon to share hybrid technology.

"It's not possible," Cho told a small group of reporters at a reception for auto officials in Tokyo, while acknowledging future talks may produce results.

Cho said GM and Toyota have been exchanging information about another ecological technology called fuel cells, but they have not reached a point of developing technology together.

The Japanese media have been rife with speculation that Toyota and GM may come up with a new deal on environmental technology, such as hybrids or fuel cells, as part of a 1999 pact the automakers have to work together on such technology.

Hybrids produce good mileage by switching between an electric motor and gas engine, and Toyota has an edge in that technology with its popular Prius sedans.

Fuel cell is still largely an experimental technology that's pollution-free because the vehicles run on energy produced when hydrogen stored in a fuel tank combines with oxygen in the air.

At a time when booming Japanese automakers are grabbing U.S. market share from faltering GM and Ford Motor Co., Toyota and Japan's other manufacturers are growing jittery about a replay of trade tensions that surfaced during the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Wagoner, who met with Cho and other officials over dinner last weekend while visiting the Aichi World Expo in Japan, discussed the importance of GM and Toyota ties as a legacy, Cho said.

"We agreed we must make sure this pipeline of partnership grows stronger, not weaker," Cho said.

Toyota, based in Toyota city, and Detroit-based GM have a longtime partnership that does not involve stakes in each other. They run a plant together in California.

Cho doesn't expect anti-Japanese sentiments to flare up immediately in the United States, but Toyota officials have been watching closely for any signs, he said.

Compared to two decades ago, Japanese automakers have opened more U.S. plants and are increasingly being seen as good corporate citizens that create jobs and good products for Americans.

Earlier this week, Toyota announced it will start making hybrids at its plant in Kentucky.

11 states sue over mercury policy

Reuters News Service

[Published in the Orange County Register, Thursday, May 19, 2005](#)

WASHINGTON - Eleven states, including California, sued the Bush administration Wednesday to block new rules allowing coal-burning utilities to trade rights to emit toxic mercury, adding to a flurry of lawsuits challenging the regulations.

The core issue in all the lawsuits is whether the Environmental Protection Agency went far enough with its March regulations to protect public health. Mercury contaminates fish and water and has been linked to neurological disorders in children.

The EPA regulations rolled out in March ordered utilities to cut emissions of mercury by 70 percent by 2018 through a cap-and-trade system.

Wednesday, the 11 states filed a federal lawsuit saying the cap-and-trade rules will lead to "hot spots" with concentrated mercury levels near power plants. That's because polluting utilities will be able to buy rights to emit the toxic chemical rather than reduce levels outright.

"These laws are deeply flawed and contrary both to science and law," said New Jersey Attorney General Peter Harvey. EPA officials have downplayed the possibility of hot spots, and the agency said it will "vigorously defend" the rules against court challenges from states and environmental groups.

The nation's 1,100 coal-burning power plants emit about 48 tons of mercury each year, the largest unregulated U.S. source.

[S.F. Chronicle, Commentary, Thursday, May 19, 2005:](#)

OPEN FORUM

Why I am not an environmentalist

Orson Aguilar

Growing up in East Los Angeles as the son of Guatemalan immigrants, the everyday challenges faced by the people of my neighborhood seemed far removed from the American dream: the lack of good housing and jobs, money for groceries, failing schools and all-too-common police brutality. If you had asked us,

we would have told you we were concerned about the days when the air pollution was especially thick, or when the smells coming from the incinerator directly south of our housing complex were particularly bad.

We would have told you we were concerned, but that these were not the greatest challenges facing us. That's not to say they were not important problems, but any agenda that did not speak to our economic and social needs seemed irrelevant.

For communities like mine, environmentalism has seemed to be about preserving places most of us will never see. Even when environmentalism has focused on problems that affect urban communities, such as air pollution or lead poisoning, it has pointedly avoided addressing our desperate need for economic development. Environmentalists do not talk about the importance of a living wage or affordable housing because, we are told, those are not environmental problems. Foundations feed this problem by failing to recognize minorities and urban city residents as prominent stakeholders in the environmental arena.

While many leaders of the environmental movement have a deep and abiding interest in social and economic equity, that concern is largely absent from their work because it is "not their job." The same mistake is made by every other progressive movement, including the civil-rights movement. We have become trapped in narrow categorical definitions of ourselves rather than a comprehensive understanding of what values we stand for in the world.

I experienced firsthand these narrow definitions when, in the late 1990s, my organization tried to pass legislation to make it easier to revitalize "brownfields" -- the thousands of idle and polluted lots in inner cities. Our legislation would have encouraged the development of brownfields by clarifying clean-up standards so that developers would know what was required of them, and then limiting liability for current owners when environmental pollution had occurred under previous owners. It also would have given cities and counties more power to go after owners of abandoned and potentially polluted inner-city sites.

Our legislation should have been an important priority for environmentalists because developing brownfields would take pressure off expanding construction to California's rapidly dwindling green spaces, farmlands and wilderness. And yet the Sierra Club opposed the bill, claiming that the legislation's flexibility could be abused by unscrupulous developers. We felt there were adequate safeguards, and that together, civil-rights and environmental groups would be able to protect inner-city residents from new risks while accelerating economic development.

We eventually compromised on a watered-down version of the bill that was signed into law. But because the new standards remained so inflexible, we haven't seen the kind of economic redevelopment of urban brownfields that low-income and mostly communities of color desperately need. Contaminated urban sites remain contaminated, economic development and affordable housing in the inner city hasn't occurred, and California's green spaces continue to be developed. The brownfields bill failed because we have failed to construct a vision for community and economic development that speaks to our shared aspirations -- from having more urban parks for kids to play in to having jobs that pay a livable wage to protecting California's natural beauty. Civil-rights groups, economic development advocates and environmentalists today find themselves divided by technical policy when we should be united by a common vision.

After last November's election, an essay called "The Death of Environmentalism" ignited a wide-ranging debate within the entire nonprofit community. Its East Bay authors, Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus, accused the environmental movement of failing to offer a compelling vision for America. Instead, they said, environmentalists give "I Have a Nightmare" speeches and offer technical proposals far removed from the lives of ordinary Americans.

Their essay was important not only for those of us who care about the environment, but also for those who care about any social progress. Consider this quote: "The environmental movement's incuriosity about the interests of potential allies depends on it never challenging the most basic assumptions about what does and does not get counted as environmental. Because we define environmental problems so narrowly, environmental leaders come up with very narrow solutions."

Remove the word "environmental" from the sentence and replace it with "civil rights," "women's rights," "environmental justice" or "social justice" and it makes just as much sense. For too long, progressives have created their identities according to the very specific problems we hope to solve. While I don't

consider myself an environmentalist, I do care about many of the things that environmentalists work to protect and preserve. I care more deeply, however, about creating good jobs and affordable housing for my community. This means that the environmental or post-environmental movement that will speak to my community must first and foremost promise economic development and better quality of life.

While many feel sadness and anger that environmentalism is dead, I am optimistic that in dying, environmentalism might give birth to a new politics that offers a better future. Those environmentalists who are ready to be reborn will find many new allies like me ready to join them in building a new and more expansive movement on the other side.

Orson Aguilar is the associate executive director of the Greenlining Institute.