

Don't get burned, check first

Starting a fire on the wrong day could cost you money

By Michael G. Mooney, staff writer, and

Mark Grossi, Fresno Bee

In the Modesto Bee, Wednesday, November 1, 2006

Wait a minute!

Before firing that fireplace, fire pit, pellet or wood-burning stove, you'll need to check with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The district's annual Check Before You Burn program began at midnight, requiring those burning with wood, pellets or manufactured logs to call the district's toll-free phone number, check online or in The Bee before burning.

The program is in its fourth year and runs through February.

The program aims to cut air pollution throughout the San Joaquin Valley by discouraging, or, in some cases, banning wood burning when air quality is unhealthy.

Air district field inspectors write \$50 citations for first-time offenders, and fines can escalate for additional violations.

Last year, the district wrote 159 violation notices, nearly half - 71 - in Fresno County.

By comparison, 16 citations were issued in Stanislaus County, nine in San Joaquin County and none in Merced County.

Air district spokesman Anthony Presto said that better wind dispersion in the Northern San Joaquin Valley keeps the area's air a bit cleaner than air in the central and southern sections.

Tiny flecks of soot and ash from wood fires add to the region's chronic particle pollution.

Medical researchers have linked particle pollution to lung disease, heart problems and premature death.

The district forecasts the wood-burning status daily for all of the seven valley counties - Stanislaus, Merced, San Joaquin, Fresno, Madera, Tulare and Kings - as well as the valley portion of Kern.

Burning is prohibited when the air is expected to be unhealthy for everyone. Wood burning in open fireplaces or older inserts is discouraged when air quality is projected to be "unhealthy for sensitive groups."

The restrictions do not apply to:

Devices fueled exclusively by natural gas or propane

Cooking stoves

Homes in areas with no natural gas service

Homes at elevations of 3,000 feet or higher

Homes with no other heating device

"Our mission," Presto said, "our focus is to protect health. We always are working to try to clean the air further. This is a really important program. It's very effective."

For more information, visit www.valleyair.org <<http://www.valleyair.org>> or call the district office at 557-6400.

No-burn season ignites today

Ban on bad-air days will be enforced for the next four months; here are some burning questions, and answers

BY STACEY SHEPARD, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, Nov. 1, 2006

The San Joaquin Valley's no-burn season starts today and is in effect through February. During this time, wood burning is prohibited on bad-air days. Violators may face fines. Here's what you need to know:

What is a no-burn day?

A day when it's prohibited to burn wood, pellets or manufactured logs in a fireplace or stove. A no-burn day is in effect when the air quality index is 151 or higher.

Burning is "discouraged" -- but not prohibited -- on days when the air-quality index is 101 to 150. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District regulates wood burning and issues a daily wood burning status.

Am I impacted?

The regulation applies primarily to Kern County residents living in the valley. Those living in places where the elevation is 3,000 feet or higher -- like Frazier Park or Pine Mountain Club -- are exempt. The rule also does not apply to residents living in eastern Kern County, as they fall within the boundaries of the Kern County Air Pollution Control District, which does not regulate wood burning.

Also exempt are:

- Areas with no natural gas service.
- Homes where wood burning is the sole source of heat because no other heating device is available.

Why do we have this rule?

The regulation aims to reduce particulate matter, a type of pollution that's generated by engines, industry, fires and wind-blown dust, among other sources. Particulate matter lodges in the lungs and can aggravate asthma and heart disease. Wood smoke in urban Bakersfield is one of the top pollutants on bad air days in the winter months, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

How do I know if it's a no-burn day?

The no-burn season runs November through February. The daily wood-burning status is issued the afternoon before the day it's in effect. The status is available by calling 1-800-SMOG-INFO, or by visiting www.valleyair.org. It can also be found on *The Californian's* weather page and on most television news weather reports.

What are the penalties?

A fine of \$50 is issued to violators who burn wood when it's prohibited. There is no penalty for burning on a day when wood fires are discouraged.

How is the regulation enforced?

Air district inspectors generally respond to complaints called in to a hot line. Fines are only issued when smoke is observed coming out of a chimney on a no-burn day. Investigators may also give tickets if they see a violation while responding to a complaint.

Investigators used infrared heat detectors, which could take a temperature reading when pointed at the chimney from outside the home, when the no-burn regulation first took effect in early 2004. That practice was abandoned later that year due to privacy issues and usefulness of the devices.

How do I file a complaint?

Complaints can be called in to 1-800-SMOG-INFO, or 1-800-926-5550. Names of individuals filing a complaint are kept confidential.

What are the alternatives to burning wood?

Devices fueled by natural gas, such as gas fireplace inserts. If you must burn wood, pellets are the cleanest fuel source.

Hard woods -- like oak or almond -- that have been well-dried are also cleaner burning.

Reader Reactions

"I would rather have a permit to be able to burn on a certain number of days of the year...than be told which days I could (burn)."

Jonathan Foth, Bakersfield

"I understand pollution is serious, but I don't think it's to the point where we shouldn't be able to burn firewood. It saves money in the winter when you don't have to fire up your heating and air conditioning unit."

Chalres Puckett, Bakersfield

"I think it's a great idea because we need to do whatever we can to keep down the pollution in our community. I support (the rule) and think others should, too."

Kaaren Page, Bakersfield

"I don't think enough people burn wood to make a difference. I don't get upset one way or the other but we've got too many regulations already."

Ron Worley, Bakersfield

Burn restrictions set to begin

Hanford Sentinel, Wednesday, Nov. 1, 2006

HANFORD - Winter limitations on wood burning begin Wednesday.

The program run by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District runs through the end of February. The purpose of the program is to reduce wintertime air pollution by discouraging or prohibiting fireplace use on high pollution days.

The first status will be issued this afternoon.

Information: (800) 766-4463.

Activists seek to join defense of air quality

Builders say clean-air fees are an illegal tax.

By Mark Grossi / The Fresno Bee, Merced Sun-Star

November 1, 2006

Three clean-air activist groups announced Tuesday they will try to join the legal defense of an air quality rule that will bring in millions of dollars from builders to reduce pollution from city sprawl.

The groups - Fresno-based Medical Advocates for Healthy Air, Environmental Defense and the Sierra Club - support the local air district against builders and other groups, which sued the district in June over the rule.

In the lawsuit, builders contend the rule contains fees that amount to an illegal tax. Clean-air activists, who call the measure "indispensable," are scheduled Dec. 6 in Fresno County Superior Court to make a motion to intervene.

"I see children and adults every day who are suffering from lung disease aggravated by the region's air pollution," said Kevin Hamilton, a respiratory therapist and a co-founder of the medical advocates. "We can't continue to stand by and do nothing."

But the rule is unfair, because it does not relate directly to pollution emissions, according to the four groups suing the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The groups are the California Building Industry Association, the Coalition for Urban Renewal Excellence, the Fresno-based Valley Taxpayers Coalition and the Modesto Chamber of Commerce.

The goal of the rule is to reduce bad air caused by traffic from new homes, businesses, commercial buildings and schools built on the edge of cities.

Local air authorities estimate the fees from the new rule would raise \$103 million from construction over the next three years.

But builders can reduce the fees by installing such features such as outdoor outlets for electric lawn mowers, bike lanes and energy-efficient water heaters.

Money raised from the rule would buy such new technology as clean-running buses and street sweepers. The investments are intended to reduce the smog, dust and soot that make the Valley one of the worst air basins in the country.

The fees are about \$780 per house this year, but they will escalate to almost \$1,800 over the next few years. The building industry estimates the fees will raise \$225 million over the next five years.

Nathan Magsig, Clovis mayor and head of the Coalition for Urban Renewal Excellence, one of the plaintiffs, said there has been no consideration for builders who provide affordable housing. His organization builds and renovates homes for low- and moderate-income families.

"Additional barriers to purchasing a home are popping up all the time," he said. "This is one of them."

Manteca buses in new era of transit

After today, residents can take the 'shopping route' or 'hospital route'

By Paul Bugarino, staff writer

Tri-Valley Herald, Wednesday, November 1, 2006

MANTECA - A new bus system will be embarking on a road less traveled for city public transit when it debuts today - and officials are expecting it to make all the difference for residents.

The soon-to-be red, white and blue-clad Manteca Transit - the buses aren't painted yet - will rumble through city streets, leaving behind not only exhaust, but the city's limited transit options.

"It's exciting," said Adam Emmer, the city's transit analyst. "Right now it's so new that even the buses are designless, but as soon as we can they are going to have logos on them and route signs will be placed around the city."

"The community has waited many, many moons for this. It's going to be a positive and something that people will use daily," said Sam Medina of MV Transportation and general manager for the Manteca bus service.

Fairfield-based MV Transportation was awarded in August a 20-month contract with Manteca for slightly under \$1 million.

Emmer said he spent most of Tuesday preparing general information about the transit routes and fares for the public. Medina said he was "fine-tuning everything", including route times and road compliance issues.

Seniors and disabled people will pay only 50 cents to use the bus, children will pay 75 cents and regular fares will be \$1.

One route runs north and south in a loop primarily on Main Street and Union Road, called the shopping route. The other route, dubbed the hospital route, includes both Kaiser Permanente and Doctors Hospital of Manteca and runs primarily east and west on Yosemite Avenue and Center Street.

Riders will be allowed one transfer per trip to switch routes. The new bus system provides two routes, running weekdays from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Saturday from 6 a.m. to 4 p.m. Service is not offered on Sunday.

In addition to the two fixed routes, an on-demand dial-a-ride service will pick up and drop off eligible passengers - the disabled and seniors - at a specific location. The cost for that extra service is \$2.

"People are ready for this," Emmer said, adding that inquisitive Mantecans having been calling on a daily basis.

Both the two fixed routes and dial-a-ride service are intended to replace Manteca's taxi voucher program, which gave about 550 disabled and elderly people a discount for taxi rides. The city spent about \$300,000 on the system last year, then deemed the program no longer cost effective.

"We would love to see this thing become well-utilized and reduce the amount of traffic congestion in the city and improve air quality," Emmer said.

Medina, a Modesto resident, said he has seen the positive impact in that community, in particular with seniors and disabled, and feels Manteca will enjoy the same benefits.

"People will start to see that it will allow them to be so much more mobile than they are now," he said.

The city is working with the regional county district to seamlessly connect city routes to regional ones.

For more information about routes, call the transit office at (209) 239-9236. The city is working on putting transit information on its Web site.

County Planners Endorse Raceway

By Corinne Reilly
Merced Sun-Star

Oct. 26, 2006

Plans for the Riverside Motorsports Park cleared their second-to-last major hurdle Wednesday when the Merced County Planning Commission voted unanimously to recommend the project for final approval by the Board of Supervisors.

The 5-0 decision followed an hour of deliberation and nearly four hours of public input on the 1,200-acre, \$230 million motorsports venue, considered by many to be one of the most controversial projects in local history.

"Two down, one to go," raceway CEO John Condren said after the vote, referring to a preliminary decision earlier this week by the Board of Supervisors to override a 2003 finding that the raceway's proposed location is too close to Castle Airport runways.

To move forward, raceway developers must win final approval from the Board of Supervisors, which is scheduled to vote on the project on Dec. 12.

"We appreciated the Planning Commission taking the time to review the project and make the recommendation they did," said Mark Melville, raceway vice president.

While the Planning Commission's decision serves only as a recommendation to the board, many believe Wednesday's vote foreshadows the project's ultimate approval.

Opponents of the raceway spoke passionately before the vote about the environmental detriments projected to come with the construction and operation of the raceway.

Some criticized the commission afterward for what they said was the commission's failure to fully evaluate the project's ramifications and consider all the arguments made during the public hearing.

"I'm disappointed that there was only one hour of deliberation on this, and I'm disappointed that there was no discussion by the commission about air quality," said Merced resident Tom Grave. "It was all lock-step. I wouldn't even call it deliberation."

Commission chair Steve Sloan said during the hearing the commission wouldn't consider written comments from Foster Farms submitted Wednesday morning, saying the comments came too late.

"If they're not going to consider all of the information given to them, then that's not how the public process is supposed to work," said Diana Westmoreland Pedrozo, director of the Merced County Farm Bureau and one of 24 people who spoke against the project during the hearing.

Karen Crane-McNab, whose family owns farmland adjacent to the raceway's proposed site, said the environmental review that preceded the commission's decision wasn't sufficient.

"They still haven't addressed the significant impacts that have been identified in fire hazards, toxic air pollutants and traffic ... We've had six generations on this ranch that will be altered forever by this."

An environmental report on the project concluded that the motorsports park will result in significant traffic congestion, noise levels above county standards, increased air pollution and the loss of agricultural land.

Project supporters say the raceway will vitalize the area's economy and bring much-needed entertainment.

"I think they made the right decision today," said Merced resident Ken Olsen. "This is a worthwhile project that will benefit a lot of people in the area."

Fifteen people spoke in favor of the raceway during Wednesday's public hearing.

In addition to the vote to recommend the project for board approval, the commission voted to recommend amendments to the county's general plan and zoning code to allow traffic and noise levels resulting from raceway operations to exceed current county standards.

The venue is proposed to cover 1,200 acres just north of Castle Airport. It's planned to include 14 separate tracks and is expected to draw as many as 50,000 people on designated weekends.

If approved, the park is expected to open in 2008. It was first proposed in 2003.

The commission also recommended adding fencing around the entire raceway's perimeter, increasing the height of some noise barriers and consulting with local fire officials to discuss fire protection for property near the raceway's proposed site.

The Board of Supervisors will host another public hearing on the project immediately prior to its Dec. 12 vote.

Groups Defend Clinton-Era Air Program

By Pete Yost, Associated Press Writer

In the N.Y. Times, S.F. Chronicle, Washington Post and other papers, Wednesday, November 1, 2006

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Environmental groups are defending a Clinton-era clean air program that the Bush administration is trying to weaken, arguing to the Supreme Court that a power company must install costly pollution controls on its aging coal-fired plants.

The outcome of the case, *Environmental Defense v. Duke Energy Corp.*, could affect three dozen power plants in 10 states where utility companies are challenging federal requirements under the New Source Review program.

At issue is whether the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals had the authority to handle the case when it ruled in favor of Duke. Also in dispute is whether pollution emissions should be calculated hourly, as Duke wants, or annually, as the environmental groups say.

The enforcement program is aimed at reducing power plant emissions of nitrogen oxide and sulfur dioxide that contribute to smog and acid rain. Retrofitting aging coal-fired plants with the latest pollution-control equipment is costing billions of dollars.

States where utility companies are challenging federal requirements are Alabama, Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia.

Justice also were hearing arguments Wednesday about whether a two-year-old ruling that excludes witness statements to police from trials when the witnesses do not testify should apply to older cases.

An appeals court said the ruling was retroactive when it threw out Marvin Bockting's 1988 conviction in Nevada for sexually abusing his 6-year-old stepdaughter. The girl's statements to police were used to convict Bockting, but she did not testify at the trial.

The state appealed; other appeals courts have not applied the 2004 high court ruling retroactively.

The power plant lawsuit, among several initiated during the Clinton administration, was inherited by President Bush when he took office in 2001. His appointees to the Environmental Protection Agency pursued the air pollution cases, but they decided not to file any new ones.

A few months after the Duke court victory at the 4th Circuit in Richmond, Va., the Bush administration proposed an industry-friendly rule that is along the lines of what Duke and other utilities always have wanted.

The Duke case's origins date to the 1970s when Congress amended the Clean Air Act to require installation of expensive pollution equipment on newly constructed power plants. Lawmakers gave older plants a partial exemption, believing that the power industry would be phasing out the older facilities.

Instead, the companies revamped their aging plants, enabling them to operate hours longer each day, resulting in production of more electricity and the emission of even more pollutants.

Environmental groups accuse the power companies of gaming the system, engaging in rebuilding while telling regulators they were only doing routine maintenance.

Duke's lawyers say the company conducted its work on plants "in full view and with the knowledge of" EPA and state regulators.

Former EPA attorney John Walke, now clean air director of the Natural Resources Defense Council, says the agency discovered what the utilities were doing only after a systematic review that uncovered huge capital expenditures.

The power plant case is Environmental Defense v. Duke, 05-848. The case on witness statements is Whorton v. Bockting, 05-595.

Pay now or later for warming, study says

Britain offers a chilling economic forecast for a world that fails to spend heavily and quickly to curb greenhouse gases.

By Kim Murphy, Times Staff Writer
L.A. Times, Tuesday, October 31, 2006

London - A major study issued Monday concludes that without rapid and substantial spending, global warming will reduce worldwide productivity on the scale of the Great Depression, devastate food sources, cause widespread deaths and create hundreds of millions of refugees.

The report commissioned by the British government, which officials called the most comprehensive review of the economics of climate change, warns that failure to act could cost up to 20% a year in lost income worldwide. Acting now, however, could bring about meaningful control of greenhouse gases at an annual cost of 1% of global gross domestic product, it says.

The findings appear to counter the long-standing argument of the Bush administration that controlling greenhouse gases is costly and possibly ineffective.

However, the savings would occur only with the kind of rapid and comprehensive international cooperation on the issue that so far has proved elusive.

British officials said they would take immediate action to legislate carbon-reduction targets, push expanded international carbon-trading programs and move toward reducing carbon emissions in Europe by 30% by 2020 and 60% by 2050. Carbon trading allows companies to exceed emission limits by buying credits from those that are below their emission targets.

Prime Minister Tony Blair, calling the report by senior government economist Nicholas Stern "a landmark in the struggle against climate change," warned that there was a limit to what Britain alone could do.

"Britain is more than playing its part," Blair said. "But it is 2% of worldwide emissions. Close down

all of Britain's emissions and in less than two years, just the growth in China's emissions would wipe out the difference. So this issue is the definition of global interdependence."

But the report's findings show that "if the science is right, the consequences for our planet are literally disastrous," Blair said. "And this disaster is not set to happen in some science-fiction future, many years ahead, but in our lifetime."

In Washington, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the lead U.S. agency on global warming, had no immediate comment on the British report. Agency spokesperson Jana Goldman said officials could not react to the report until they had read it.

The report examines the consequences of acting - or failing to act - to control rising temperatures due to greenhouse gases from deforestation and fossil fuels.

The current level of greenhouse gases is already 54% higher than it was before the Industrial Revolution, and could be double that level as early as 2035, the report suggests. Such an increase could raise temperatures by more than 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit by mid-century and a disastrous 9 degrees by century's end, it says.

The result would be melting glaciers that trigger floods and reduce snowpacks that supply drinking water, threatening a sixth of the world's population, the report says. Other effects would include reduced crop yields, leaving hundreds of millions of people unable to produce or purchase sufficient food; an increase in vector-borne diseases; up to 200 million people displaced because of rising sea levels and drought; and the possible extinction of 15% to 40% of species.

"The report sets out I think very clearly that this is not just an environmental issue, or even just an economic issue, but it is a security issue," Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett said. "There are some people all over the world who still believe there can be some kind of trade-off between economic and climate security. I think this report knocks [that notion] on its head."

Stern, a former chief economist for the World Bank, said the study found that it was still possible to achieve meaningful temperature controls at a cost equivalent to consumers paying an average of 1% more for everything they buy, and substantially less than the cost of failing to act.

"That's manageable," Stern said. "We can grow and be green."

The report calls for using taxes and regulations to make carbon use more costly, policies supporting low-carbon technology, and changing the public's attitude toward energy efficiency.

Air carriers and utilities could be among those hit hardest by any new emissions-reduction laws. Already, Britons are looking at a possible end to bargain-basement fares to the Continent and higher prices for out-of-season and exotic vegetables from the tropics.

Poor countries will bear the brunt of the effects of climate change, the report says, but it suggests that rich countries must bear 60% to 80% of the responsibility for emissions reductions.

"The conclusion of the review is essentially optimistic. There is still time to avoid the worst impacts of climate change if we act now and act internationally," Stern said. "But the task is urgent. Delaying action, even by a decade or two, will take us into dangerous territory. We must not let this window of opportunity close."

Tulare to get energy-saving update at wastewater treatment plant

By Jillian Daley, Staff writer

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Tuesday, Oct. 31, 2006

The Board of Public Utilities Commission signed a \$5.2 million contract with Alliance Power of Colorado Monday to set up the city's wastewater plant to run on milk processing waste.

Tulare public works director Lew Nelson said the city gets a \$3.38 million grant from Southern California Edison for choosing a project that converts energy with in a nonpolluting way, with fuel cells. A fuel cell is a device that takes in the methane gas and puts out carbon dioxide, water and energy. Milk waste (what is left after making cheese) goes through a process where organisms convert the waste into methane.

The system is like a battery, said Alliance project manager Brian Moreau. "The difference is in a fuel cell, you continually add more fuel," he said.

The treatment plant, on Paige Avenue and Enterprise Street, runs on 1,800 kilowatts of energy now. With three new fuel cells, it would produce 750 kilowatts.

The city will buy the remaining energy from Edison.

The new process will "save \$1,990 a day in electric power," Nelson said.

Fuel cells need no air permits.

"It generates no air pollution," he said.

Aid groups drive to curb deadly gas-guzzling cars

By Ruth Gidley, Reuters

Published in the Washington Post

Wednesday, November 1, 2006; 10:16 AM

LONDON (Reuters) - Aid workers in risky environments may fear violence but they are more likely to die -- and hurt the people they are trying to help -- in a car crash, logistics experts say.

These specialists are joining a growing initiative to make humanitarian groups more responsible with their gas-guzzling four-wheel-drive cars, which belch out fumes that pollute the local environment and make people sick.

Many agencies campaign on environmental issues, but few people in the aid world are watching fuel emissions of the 60,000 vehicles used in their industry, according to the initiative, called Fleet Forum.

"We're not just delivering aid, but killing the children we're trying to feed," said Rob De Jong, acting head of the Urban Environment Unit of the U.N. Environment Programme (UNEP), one of about 40 groups involved in the initiative.

Aid agencies spend about \$800 million a year on vehicles, but they could save \$160 million annually -- and many lives -- by training staff in road safety and buying appropriate cars to higher environmental standards, the logistics specialists say.

"Pedestrians are more frequently killed than car users, and if a breadwinner dies that has a major impact," said George Fenton, a logistics expert with agency World Vision.

Rob McConnell, who coordinates Fleet Forum, said: "Crashes seem to be regarded as fate ... drivers aren't trained, accidents aren't recorded, steps aren't taken to prevent it from happening."

People working in risky environments are also less careful.

An aid worker who would automatically use a seatbelt at home in Denmark will rarely bother in Congo, even if the car is plowing through knee-deep mud on a near-vertical hillside.

Another who would never trust a drunk driver in Canada will ride home from a party in Sri Lanka with a friend who cannot keep his eyes on the road.

"They're more irresponsible in the field," McConnell said. "You find more car crashes, more drug abuse, more sexually transmitted diseases. Standards of behavior change."

Accidents are not just about bad driving. In many places where aid agencies work -- from the deserts of Darfur to mountaintop villages in Kashmir -- road surfaces are uneven and often unpaved.

But aid agency drivers have often not been behind the wheel of such powerful cars before, McConnell said.

"You give a guy a brand new Toyota Landcruiser, he'll drive like a lunatic," he said. "He feels like a big man. It's a sign of power."

"PRACTISE WHAT YOU PREACH"

Working with aid agencies, U.N. bodies, donors and commercial organizations that want to pass on their expertise, Fleet Forum aims to encourage aid groups also to be more efficient and use cleaner fuels.

Gas-guzzling cars, like the ubiquitous shiny white four-wheel-drive with an agency logo on the side, are the norm for aid workers even in cities, McConnell said.

"You'll see four different people from the same office going to the same meeting in four different vehicles," he said. "Practice what you preach. That's what we're bad at."

Pollution is a fact of urban life in the developing world, where legislation often lags behind industrial countries, UNEP's De Jong said.

Bad air quality contributes to approximately 3 million deaths a year, and is a major factor in lung disease, heart problems and asthma, according to the Partnership for Clean Fuels and Vehicles, which includes U.N. bodies and aid agencies.

Lead emissions are especially harmful to children under six, it says, and yet most aid agencies do not make much effort to use lead-free fuel or fit catalytic converters.

Agencies do have to work within the constraints of their environments: "If leaded fuel is all you can get, you have to use it," De Jong said.

And he said it was hard to persuade agencies to buy cars with filters, which could cost \$800 per vehicle -- a huge investment if an agency only uses the car for three years.

But if an agency passes the vehicle on to a local group at the end of a project, De Jong argued the initial layout would still be helping the environment 12 years on.

Fleet Forum's McConnell said agencies could save between 15 and 20 percent of costs by better management and maintenance.

But even though vehicles are the second-highest cost after staff for humanitarian organizations, it is hard to get agencies to listen.

"Road safety ain't sexy," McConnell said. "They'll spend packets looking at how aid workers are sexually exploiting people in refugee camps. Why isn't hitting people with cars as important?"

World Vision's Fenton thinks organizations are slowly getting the message, as top aid officials and government donors get involved.

"We've got to take something very abstract like climate change and turn it into something concrete," De Jong said. "You're trying to save lives but you're also polluting the air."

Anti-smoking wave on the rocks in O.C.

Supervisors opposing ban dispute effects of secondhand smoke on beach-goers.

By JEFF OVERLEY

The Orange County Register

SANTA ANA - The tide finally turned in favor of smokers Tuesday as Orange County supervisors snuffed out a proposed beach smoking ban.

A rare setback for anti-smoking efforts, the vote stems a three-year period in which two dozen beaches in California - including all city beaches in Orange County - have gone tobacco-free.

Citing the erosion of personal freedoms, two of four supervisors cast votes against the plan, which would have affected all seven miles of county shoreline. Supervisor Jim Silva abstained from voting, saying he had accepted campaign contributions that could be perceived as a conflict of interest.

"The government is best which governs least," Supervisor Bill Campbell said in opposing the law. "There's a feeling that we should have government intervening to tell people how to behave. I don't know if that's right."

Supervisor Chris Norby, who also voted against the plan, asked whether restrictions on soft drinks, alcohol and trans fats would be next.

He also responded to critics who said the law would curb secondhand smoke. "The typical beach-goer probably breathes a lot more smoke around a fire ring than from tobacco," Norby said.

Supervisor Tom Wilson, who spearheaded the ban, countered the civil-liberty argument.

"It is absolutely no fun for people like me ... to tell people what to do and where to do it," Wilson said. "But sometimes an action is so dangerous ... that we have no choice."

Nevertheless, the idea foundered, and did so in a political climate that has been notably receptive to tobacco-control campaigns.

In 2003, Solana Beach became the first West Coast city to clear its shore of cigars and cigarettes, prompting similar bans all along the coast.

This year, the U.S. Surgeon General and California Air Resources Board each issued strong warnings on the dangers of secondhand smoke.

On Tuesday, supporters of the county beach smoking ban turned out in force, while only one speaker criticized the plan.

"It would be nice to tell people to hold onto their butts and use a proper receptacle. But experience has told us that's not the case," said Rick Wilson, coastal management coordinator for the Surfrider Foundation. "All that sand is just too tempting. It's one big ashtray."

Westminster resident Darrell A. Nolta asked supervisors to stanch the trend of smoking restrictions, saying they should "stop the insanity."

Supervisors followed that advice, and after the law's defeat, tobacco-control activists sounded off.

"The supervisors just turned their backs ... on the children of Orange County," said Stephanie Barger of the nonprofit Earth Resource Foundation.

"The government that does nothing is not needed," added Jim Walker of Stop Tobacco Abuse of Minors Pronto. "It's sad when you cannot recognize clear and present danger," said Walker, who as part of his presentation to supervisors had displayed candy cigarettes and photos of a pregnant woman smoking.

Proponents vowed to try again when two new supervisors take office in January, but their prospects appear dim.

Seeking to replace Wilson are former state Assemblywoman Pat Bates and Laguna Niguel Mayor Cathryn DeYoung, both of whom support the ban.

But Silva's replacement will be outgoing County Treasurer-Tax Collector John Moorlach, who said Tuesday he would likely oppose such a law.

That leaves three supervisors opposing the ban, and probably leaves smokers free to light up.

[Modesto Bee editorial, Wednesday, November 1, 2006:](#)

Valley partnership is ready to begin its real work

The eight counties of the San Joaquin Valley share a river system, two major freeways - Highway 99 and Interstate 5 - and an agriculture based economy. They also share persistent problems: lower levels of education and income, higher violent crime rates and poor air quality.

For the past year, 26 elected and community leaders from throughout the valley have met to identify ways to make things better.

This group, the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley, was created in 2005 by Gov. Schwarzenegger, a state leader who finally recognized the valley's problems and potential. Schwarzenegger assigned his top Cabinet people to give the partnership a high priority.

Last week, Schwarzenegger visited the valley again as the partnership approved its strategic action proposal. At his Fresno appearance, the governor praised the work of the partnership and said it is laying the foundation for improving the region's economy.

Its proposal outlines six major strategies:

- ? Create a diversified, globally competitive economy supported by a highly skilled work force;
- ? Create a model kindergarten-through-12th-grade public education system;
- ? Implement an integrated framework for sustainable growth;
- ? Build a 21st-century transportation system;
- ? Attain clean-air standards;
- ? Develop high-quality health and human services.

Valley leaders had to think regionally to reach these conclusions. Now, the real work begins and the hardest parts will fall on valley residents - not only those in elected positions, but those in business and nonprofit roles.

Counties will need to cooperate, rather than compete, on activities such as recruiting industry and luring tourists. They need to celebrate each other's successes and, as appropriate, emulate them. They need to establish and nurture trust.

Citizen support will be critical. Valley residents need to think beyond their neighborhoods. They need to support candidates who not only pledge to work as part of a region, but also have demonstrated that they will do it.

Two items on the Nov. 7 ballot are key - the gubernatorial election and the infrastructure bonds.

Schwarzenegger not only visits the valley often, he also backs up his words with funding. Schwarzenegger's commitment to the region is refreshing and genuine; he deserves valley residents' support at the polls.

The five state bond proposals (Propositions 1B, 1C, 1D, 1E and 84) represent a long-term investment in economic prosperity and in safety. Especially important for the valley is Proposition 1B, which contains \$1 billion to improve 400-mile Highway 99.

The partnership is advancing plans to make the valley better. There's a sense of momentum; this is no time for us to lose it.

Key Players

The partnership board includes:

- ? Stanislaus County Supervisor Jeff Grover
- ? San Joaquin County Supervisor Victor Mow
- ? Los Banos Mayor Michael Amabile
- ? Modesto businesswoman Sheila Carroll

- ? Merced businesswoman Sharron Thornton Stockton businessman Fritz Grupe, co-chairman
- ? California Transportation Commissioner Kirk Lindsey of Modesto (liaison)

[Bakersfield Californian, Commentary, Tuesday, Oct. 31, 2006:](#)

Auto Club supports Measure I, Prop. 1A, 1B

By Linda Heald

Bakersfield is the fastest-growing city in America, with more than 250,000 residents. Businesses throughout Kern County are growing and creating high-paying jobs, making our area an attractive and affordable place to live and raise a family.

But the flip side of this good news is our increasing traffic problem. From 1990 to 2003, Bakersfield's population grew by more than 40 percent. During the same period, the number of hours that Bakersfield drivers sat in traffic increased by 148 percent.

The Automobile Club of Southern California has worked extensively on local transportation issues on behalf of our 108,000 Kern County members. It is clear to us that our local transportation needs are beyond the ability of our current resources to address. We need congestion solutions that will get us around quickly and conveniently, [while reducing traffic-related air pollution](#) and improving our highway safety.

That is why the Auto Club supports Measure I on the Nov. 7 ballot. Local residents and community groups have spent countless hours working together to create this measure. It is supported by the Kern County League of Women Voters, Kern Taxpayers Association, Kern County Fire Fighters and the Kern Transportation Foundation, among many others.

Measure I will provide Kern County with an additional \$920 million in locally controlled funding that will be spent exclusively on local transportation projects. These are projects that will be delayed for years or never completed if we are not able to provide local funding for them because federal and state transportation revenues for our county are extremely inadequate.

Projects that would be funded by Measure I include: new lanes on Highways 46 and 99, Rosedale Highway and Westside Parkway; \$200 million in backlogged road maintenance needs countywide; reducing emissions to improve quality of life; and providing additional transit services to the disabled and to the county's growing senior population.

Measure I is accountable to the public because it has an independent oversight committee and a specific funding plan. None of the money can ever be taken for use outside Kern County or diverted to non-transportation purposes. Just 1 percent of the funding can be used on administration -- the other 99 percent all goes toward building, fixing and operating our local transportation networks.

Without Measure I, Kern County will have a significant disadvantage in competing for state and federal transportation grants requiring local matching funds -- funds that such counties as Los Angeles, San Bernardino and Riverside already have available because of their approval of local transportation sales taxes.

In addition to Measure I, the Auto Club is also supporting statewide Propositions 1A and 1B. Proposition 1A will ensure that the sales tax we pay on gasoline is used for transportation and cannot easily be taken or borrowed for other purposes. Proposition 1B will provide almost \$20 billion in bond funding to jump-start transportation projects that have been delayed for too long because of lack of funding.

Together, these three measures would go a long way toward easing our local traffic congestion.

Measure I and Propositions 1A and 1B are critical to our mobility. Please join the Auto Club in supporting them.

Linda Heald is district manager for the Automobile Club of Southern California.

[Visalia Times-Delta, Letter to the Editor, Wednesday, Nov. 1, 2006:](#)

Measure R will make a difference for county

On Nov. 7, all of us in Tulare County have an opportunity to make a difference in the road conditions throughout our county.

The roads that I drive to and from my house in the Exeter area are in desperate need of repair. I have contacted the county road department about these conditions many times, which has resulted in a couple of shovel loads of road mix being thrown into the most dangerous of holes. This type of "Band-Aid" fix is a temporary repair, which only worsens year after year. Meanwhile, all of us continue to weave around the deficiencies in these roads day after day.

Measure "R," the half-cent transportation sales tax measure, will generate more than \$1.3 billion during the next 30 years; of that, \$554 million will be used throughout Tulare County to build new roads and to repair existing roads that have been neglected over the years.

Additionally, more than \$91 million will be used to improve environmental improvements such as bicycle pathways, signal light synchronization, low emission buses, and safer access to public transit services.

The reality of it is that tax dollars collected in Tulare County and sent to Sacramento are returned in the form of pennies for every dollar sent, and every year it gets worse. The only way to secure additional funding is to generate it here locally and keep it in Tulare County.

Measure "R" tax dollars can only be used in Tulare County to address the projects spelled out in the measure, nowhere else.

All of us are either part of the problem, or part of the solution. This is our county, let's work towards making it the best it can be. A vote in favor of Measure "R," will allow us to do just that!

GARY ROHMAN, Exeter

[Bakersfield Californian, Editorial, Wednesday, Nov. 1, 2006:](#)

VOTE Nov. 7: The Californian recommends:

The following is a summary of The Californian's recommendations regarding Tuesday, Nov. 7, ballot initiatives.

LOCAL

MEASURE G YES. This \$100 million bond issue is needed to repair and construct schools in the Bakersfield City School District.

MEASURE I YES. Proceeds from this half-cent sales tax will be used to match state and federal transportation funds, repair Kern County's deteriorating roads and construct new routes. This will make Kern a "self-help" county, allowing it to capture transportation funds that are now going to other counties.

STATEWIDE

PROPOSITION 1A YES. Transportation Investment Fund. It would make it more difficult for the Legislature to tap gasoline sales tax revenue for purposes other than transportation.

PROPOSITION 1B YES. Highway Safety, Traffic Reduction, [Air Quality](#), Port Security Bond Act of 2006. A \$19.9 billion bond issue to pay for road repairs and expansions, bridge repairs and improvements to port security and public transportation.

PROPOSITION 1C YES. Housing and Emergency Shelter Trust Fund Act of 2006. A \$2.85 billion bond issue to pay for affordable-housing assistance and housing for farmworkers and the homeless.

PROPOSITION 1D YES. Education Facilities. Kindergarten-University Public Education Facilities Bond Act of 2006. A \$10.4 billion bond issue for school and university construction.

PROPOSITION 1E YES. Disaster Preparedness and Flood Prevention Bond Act of 2006. A \$4.09 billion bond issue to repair levees and flood-control systems.

PROPOSITION 83 YES. Sex Offenders, Sexually Violent Predators. Punishment, Residence Restrictions and Monitoring. It would increase penalties for violent sexual predators and child molesters, prohibit registered sex offenders from living within 2,000 feet of a school or park and require violent offenders to wear a satellite-monitoring device for life.

PROPOSITION 84 NO. Water Quality, Safety and Supply. Flood Control. Natural Resources Protection Park Improvements. It would create a \$5.4 billion bond issue to pay for clean water, flood control and conservation projects. While the projects appear to have merit, the initiative is special-interest driven. The bipartisan developed 1A to 1E megabond package deserves support, instead.

PROPOSITION 85 NO. Waiting Period and Parental Notification Before Termination of Minor's Pregnancy. It would prohibit an abortion for a minor until 48 hours after a physician notifies her parent or guardian. Exceptions are made for medical emergencies, parental waiver or court order.

PROPOSITION 86 NO. Tax on Cigarettes. It would raise the tax on a pack of cigarettes by \$2.60, making California's price about \$7 a pack the highest in the nation. The money would be used to pay for health care programs and education. Law enforcement fears this initiative will increase smuggling and black market crime. It singles out a few Californians to pay for services to many.

PROPOSITION 87 NO. Alternative Energy. Research, Production Incentives. Tax on California Oil. It would impose a 1.6 percent to 6 percent tax on producers of oil extracted in California. The money would be used to pay for incentives for research and alternative energy production. While the goals may be admirable, there is doubt this initiative would succeed in achieving them. Kern County government services could be severely hurt.

PROPOSITION 88 NO. Education Funding. Real Property Parcel Tax. It would impose a \$50 tax on each real property parcel to pay for kindergarten-through-12th-grade programs, including class-size reduction, textbooks and school safety programs. This creates a statewide property tax a revenue source generally reserved for local government and schools.

PROPOSITION 89 NO. Political Campaigns. Public Financing. Corporate Tax Increase. Contribution and Expenditure Limits. It would allow political candidates who raise a specific number of \$5 donations to receive money from the state and would raise taxes on banks and corporations by 0.2 percent to pay for the program. This initiative is poorly written and unfair.

PROPOSITION 90 NO. Government Acquisition, Regulation of Private Property. Although its stated intent is to prohibit state and local governments from condemning private property for other private uses, it has far-reaching consequences that interfere with necessary regulatory functions. It could harm taxpayers and property owners.