

Duraflame firelogs are going green

Company drops petroleum for plant-based wax

By Reed Fujii Record Staff Writer

Stockton Record, Thursday, November 22, 2007

STOCKTON - Back in 1969, California Cedar Products Co. figured out a clever way to dispose of the tons of sawdust it generated in making wood-pencil slats: Mix the powder with petroleum wax, itself a byproduct of oil refining, to produce long-burning logs.

Thus was born Duraflame Inc., today the top-selling brand of artificial firelogs.

But time brings change. After Cal Cedar's pencil-slat operation was moved to China in 2001, Duraflame needed to find new sources of fiber for its firelogs. That led it to establish plants in Somerset, Ky., and Ontario, Canada, to tap other sources of sawdust. Logs made in Stockton incorporate a varying mix of materials, including ground almond and walnut shells from California orchards.

And now, Duraflame officials said they will use only plant-based waxes in their branded firelog products, eliminating consumption of 100 million pounds of petroleum wax per year.

What was once a niche product has turned mainstream, particularly with major U.S. retailers such as Wal-Mart launching corporate initiatives to offer and promote more Earth-friendly products.

"We started on this about 5 years ago with the idea of trying to make a truly sustainable, 100 percent renewable sort of product," said Chris Caron, vice president of brand development. Dubbed the all-natural firelog, it was sold primarily through green-conscious retailers such as Whole Foods Markets and Trader Joe's.

"What's happened in recent years is that whole organic and healthy living lifestyle has mushroomed in popularity," he said.

Going to all renewable materials has led to strong gains for the Stockton company. Caron said Safeway expanded its offering of Duraflame products and it is Home Depot's sole supplier for wood-based firelogs.

"Retailer reaction has been very good. I think our timing has been very good in making this transition," he said. "We picked up what we believe is 25 percent incremental share in distribution. It was pretty significant."

Privately held Duraflame does not detail its sales or production figures.

What Duraflame calls biowax is also known as vegetable paraffin, various waxy materials typically made from soy or palm oil or wood resins.

Over the long term, there is not much difference in cost between plant-based or petroleum waxes, particularly as the materials used for biowax are increasingly valued for producing motor fuels, such as ethanol or biodiesel.

"Biofuels and petroleum seem to be marching in lockstep in price, because they are feeding on each other," Caron said.

The primary advantage of the plant-based waxes is that they are from a renewable resource and carbon-neutral in terms of adding to carbon dioxide to the atmosphere. That's because soy plants or pine trees, for example, take carbon dioxide from the air to produce oil and resins. In contrast, burning petroleum wax releases carbon trapped underground for millennia.

While not addressing the issue of global warming gases, clean-air officials show preference for artificial firelogs over natural wood when consumers want to light a cozy fireplace or outdoor fire.

Duraflame says a 6-pound firelog will burn for three to four hours, while a natural-wood fire might consume 30 pounds of material over the same span.

"It's just more efficient," Caron said, comparing it to the difference between driving a hybrid car or a Hummer. "You get the same utility of transportation, but it's just far more efficient.

That's significant in Washington's Puget Sound, said Mike Schultz, communications project manager for the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency.

"Our issue is wood smoke," he said, noting that many residents in the area burn wood for heat and enjoyment during the long, cool winters.

While the agency urges its residents to consider natural gas or propane before turning to any wood-fuel products, he said, "We do not demonize wood burning. We demonize wood smoke."

Following that reasoning, he said, "If you're going to be running a fireplace, we recommend that people burn Duraflame or manufactured logs because they do burn so much cleaner."

One test result showed that a manufactured-log fire produced less than 25 percent of fine particulate matter of a fire from Douglas fir cordwood, he said.

The San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District has some of the nation's tightest restrictions on wood smoke, said Seyed Sadredin, air pollution control officer.

The region fails to meet federal standards for fine particulates, those measure 2.5 micros or smaller, in the air.

"Given that situation, we discourage any type of wood burning at any time during the winter months," he said.

On bad-air days, when the air-quality index tops 150, all wood burning is prohibited.

When the index stands between 100 and 150, burning is discouraged and manufactured logs are preferred over natural cordwood.

"If you do have a choice, the (manufactured) logs are much cleaner than ordinary wood. ... The best option would be not to burn wood at all," Sadredin said.

Fresno conference to focus on expanding clean energy, fuels

The Fresno Bee

Monday, Nov. 26, 2007

The San Joaquin Valley Clean Energy and Fuels Conference is planned Monday in Fresno to talk about opportunities for expanding such technology in the region.

The conference will run from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. at the Fresno Convention Center New Exhibit Hall, Rooms 2009 through 2012 and 2015 through 2018, at 848 M St.

San Joaquin Valley Clean Energy Organization and the Sierra Club have joined forces to put on the conference. Officials said the Valley is in need of new ways to grow economically, yet reduce air pollution.

The conference will bring together businesses, investors, workforce development groups, policy makers, government officials, utilities, agriculture, transportation, environmental groups and others interested in the future of clean energy and fuels.

Admission fee is \$10 for students, \$20 for the general public. Online registration available: www.valleycleanenergyconference.org/.

Judge to decide whether race park can move ahead

State farm bureau joins three other organizations suing RMP to stop project over environmental concerns.

By Corinne Reilly
Merced Sun-Star, Tuesday, November 27, 2007

Riverside Motorsports Park CEO John Condren joined the throng of people waiting for the start of a court hearing held Monday in Merced. The judge of the hearing may determine the fate of the \$250 million project.

The future of the Riverside Motorsports Park project is now in a judge's hands.

Parties in a lawsuit that aims to stop the quarter-billion-dollar racetrack complex met in a Merced County courtroom on Monday, where attorneys on both sides made their final arguments.

San Joaquin County Judge Elizabeth Humphreys, who heard the case because all local qualified judges were rejected by the parties in the suit, now has 90 days to issue a written decision.

A ruling against RMP could reverse the Merced County Board of Supervisors' 2006 approval of the project, which is planned to replace 1,200 acres of almond orchards near Castle Airport. The project has yet to break ground.

Four groups -- the California Farm Bureau Federation, the San Joaquin Raptor Rescue Center, Protect our Water and Citizens for the Protection of Merced County Resources -- filed the suit against Merced County in January. It alleges that the county violated the California Environmental Quality Act because it failed to adequately evaluate noise, traffic, pollution and other environmental effects the racing complex could bring.

During the daylong hearing Monday, Gregory Maxim, an attorney representing the environmental groups, said the county rushed the RMP project to approval instead of fully evaluating how the racetrack's development will affect the environment. "It was a sprint to the finish line, and as such, a number of shortcuts were taken," Maxim said. "The county has failed its obligation to its citizenry ... as this project went barreling through to its approval."

Specifically, Maxim and attorneys representing the Farm Bureau argued that the county didn't give the public enough time to review and comment on the thousands of pages of environmental studies on the RMP project. They also claimed the county failed to consider alternative sites for the project that would have meant the destruction of less farmland, and that the county's environmental studies didn't look at how the project could spur future growth in the area.

And, they argued, the county isn't requiring RMP to do enough to offset the environmental damage that studies say the racetrack complex will inevitably bring.

Attorneys representing the county and RMP argued that the county's review process was more than adequate. "To the contention that this process was rushed -- the reviews of this project took more than three years," said Sacramento-based attorney Joseph Ellinwood, who represents the county. The county met all the legal requirements necessary to approve the RMP project, they said.

RMP first proposed building the massive eight-venue motorsports complex in 2003. Blueprints include a shopping mall, restaurants, an arcade and a lake. Besides professional racing events, the park would host amateur racing, drag racing, motocross and go-kart events, concerts, car shows and festivals, racetrack officials have said.

Those opposed to the project say it will be too detrimental to the environment. Raceway proponents say it will boost the local economy and provide sorely needed entertainment.

The Board of Supervisors approved the project last December. RMP officials say they plan to break ground in 2008, though county officials have questioned the feasibility of such a timeline.

RMP CEO John Condren attended Monday's hearing, as did RMP Vice President of Operations Mark Melville, defeated City Council candidate Bob Acheson, several farmers and ranchers who live near the track's planned site and members of Merced County Citizens Against the Raceway.

James Fincher, the county's lead attorney, declined to speculate on whether the county and RMP will beat the lawsuit. "It's hard to get a sense of what the judge is thinking," he said.

Diana Westmoreland Pedrozo, executive director of the Merced County Farm Bureau, said she's optimistic. "We're happy that our arguments are finally being heard, and we look forward to the judge's decision," she said.

If the environmental groups and the Farm Bureau are successful, RMP would have to start over with lengthy, costly environmental reviews to keep its project alive.

Air district plans to crack down on eateries' charbroiling of beef Agency adjusts plan to require restaurants that cook a lot of the red meat to install pollution control devices

By Denis Cuff, Staff Writer

Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald, Tuesday, November 27, 2007

"Beef: It's what for dinner," the ads say.

Beef: It's also the target of an air pollution rule proposed to reduce charbroiler emissions from Bay Area restaurants.

The region's nine-county pollution agency said Monday it has revamped a proposed charbroiler pollution rule so emission controls would be required only at restaurants that cook large amounts of beef.

Charbroiling beef produces more fine smoke particles, a health threat to people, than grilling less fatty chicken, shrimp or vegetables, pollution managers say.

"We believe we have a very good proposal that goes after the biggest pollution source from charbroilers, beef," said Jack Broadbent, chief executive officer of the Bay Area Air Quality Management District.

One statewide restaurant association still opposes the rule even though the group is less upset now that the revamped proposal would exempt places that charbroil chicken and fish or only small amounts of beef.

"The new proposal is an improvement, but the bottom line is they are still proposing very expensive pollution control technology," said Johnnie Foster Downs, the California Restaurant Association's director of local government affairs.

The district air board will consider the charbroiler rule after a public hearing at 9:45 a.m. Dec. 5 at district headquarters in San Francisco.

Steakhouses and other restaurants would have to install pollution control devices by Jan. 1, 2013, if those businesses met each of two standards for under-fired charbroilers, which have a slotted grill heated from below.

The grills must be 10 square feet or larger, and the restaurants must charbroil at least 800 pounds of beef in a week, according to the new proposal.

A different standard of 400 pounds of beef per week would apply to less polluting, fast-food type charbroilers that cook foods on a conveyor belt heated from both below and above.

Gayle Uilkema, an air board member and a Contra Costa County supervisor, said the new beef-based proposal is fairer and less worrisome to mom-and-pop-type restaurants.

"I don't want to drive small restaurants out of business," she said. "I don't feel it's unfair to focus on beef because it's the biggest emitter of these particles that can affect public health."

The Bay Area fails to meet a tougher new federal health standard for fine particles on 20 to 30 nights a year, the air district said.

The California Restaurant Association, however, called the compliance cost of the rule too high -- an estimated \$30,000 to \$60,000 per restaurant to install equipment.

Charbroiler pollution is small compared to diesel cars, the group said.

"If it made a huge impact in pollution, I could understand, but charbroilers are not a big source," said Foster Downs.

Commercial charbroiling in the Bay Area emits about 6.9 tons a day of fine particulates and another 1.1 tons a day of smog-forming organic gases, the district estimates.

The proposed rule would produce a 90 percent reduction in fine particle emissions among the highest-polluting beef charbroiling restaurants, according to an air district report.

The Golden Gate Restaurant Association, which represents 900 Bay Area restaurants, has taken a neutral stand on the rule.

"We feel they listened to our concerns and came up with a reasonable compromise," said Kevin Westlye, executive director of the association.

Spare the Air advisory issued for tonight

Bay City News Service

Tri-Valley Herald, Late Monday, November 26, 2007

For the second time this season, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District is calling on Bay Area residents to Spare the Air tonight and refrain from lighting a fire or using any other wood burning appliances.

Air quality levels tonight with respect to particulate matter are very high and in some pockets of the Bay Area will exceed 100 on the air quality index, something highly unusual, according to BAAQMD chairman Mark Ross.

"We do get high levels above 85 and 90 about 30 days a year in the winter but to exceed 100 is an unusual event," said Ross.

A good score on the air quality index would fall somewhere between zero and 50 and moderate levels of particulate matter would fall between 50 and 100, a typical Bay Area index level. Exceeding 100 is considered unhealthy for sensitive groups, such as active children or people with respiratory diseases, according to the BAAQMD.

A weather pattern of very still air has produced a situation where the particulate matter has stood still without a weather system to blow it out, according to Ross.

"We are saturated with soot at this point and will reach the point that is unhealthy for those with impaired lung capacity and asthma," he said. "Cardiac issues can also arise from part of the matter passing into the blood stream."

According to the air district, particulate matter is defined as very small liquid and solid particles suspended in the air, and includes particles smaller than 10 microns in size, as well as finer particles smaller than 2.5 microns in size. It is of concern because it can enter nasal passages and the lungs and cause serious health effects such as aggravated asthma, nose and throat irritation, bronchitis, lung damage, and premature death, according to BAAQMD. People with respiratory illnesses, children and the elderly are more sensitive to the effects of particulate matter, but it can affect everyone.

Tonight's Spare the Air advisory is voluntary, according to Ross, and coincidentally it falls on the same night the district is holding its last in a series of public workshops on the district's proposal for a ban on wood burning on evenings like tonight, where the air quality is poor.

The wood-burning ban would reduce emissions of harmful particulate matter from wood-burning devices, including indoor and outdoor fireplaces and wood-burning stoves. The ban would be similar to those in Sacramento and in the San Joaquin Valley, Ross said.

Like most pollution control measures, Ross said the ban would rely on public input. Levels of enforcement would range from warnings to outright fines.

Ross said that just like cigarette smoking bans, there are people that believe the district is impinging on their rights to burn in their fireplaces, but to that Ross says, "Even then, smokers were sharing in the risk. Now a home can be burning wood and it's the homes down the block getting the effects without the cozy little fire in their living rooms."

The district hopes to adopt some sort of an ordinance by the spring. Following that, the district will spend a year or two of educating the public on the ordinance before enforcing fines.

Tonight's workshop will be held at 6 p.m. at the Robert Livermore Community Center, Cresta Blanca Room, 4444 East Ave., Livermore. A live webcast is available at www.baaqmd.gov.

Unhealthy air forecast for tonight

Chronicle Staff Report

S.F. Chronicle, Tuesday, November 27, 2007

San Francisco -- Air quality officials have declared this evening a Spare the Air night in the Bay Area and are asking people to drive less and not to burn wood in fireplaces and woodstoves.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District said the cold, still conditions forecast for this evening could lead to unhealthy air conditions. Vehicle emissions and residential wood burning are the two biggest contributors to air pollution on such evenings, the agency said.

If wood burning is necessary, the agency recommended burning only clean, seasoned wood.

Unlike Spare the Air days during summer, there is no free public transit during wintertime advisories. To see the current air quality forecast, go to www.sparetheair.org.

World must fix climate in less than 10 years: U.N.

By Raymond Colitt, Reuters

Washington Post Tuesday, November 27, 2007

BRASILIA (Reuters) - Unless the international community agrees to cut carbon emissions by half over the next generation, climate change is likely to cause large-scale human and economic setbacks and irreversible ecological catastrophes, a United Nations report says on Tuesday. The U.N. Human Development Report issues one of the strongest warnings yet of the lasting impact of climate change on living standards and a strong call for urgent collective action.

"We could be on the verge of seeing human development reverse for the first time in 30 years," Kevin Watkins, lead author of the report, told Reuters.

The report, to be presented in Brasilia on Tuesday, sets targets and a road map to reduce carbon emissions before a U.N. climate summit next month in Bali, Indonesia.

Emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases into the atmosphere help trap heat and lead to global warming.

"The message for Bali is the world cannot afford to wait, it has less than a decade to change course," said Watkins, a senior research fellow at Britain's Oxford University.

Dangerous climate change will be unavoidable if in the next 15 years emissions follow the same trend as the past 15 years, the report says.

To avoid catastrophic impact, the rise in global temperature must be limited to 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit (2 degrees Celsius). But carbon emissions from cars, power plants and deforestation

in Brazil, Indonesia and elsewhere, are twice the level needed to meet that target, the U.N. authors say.

Climate change threatens to condemn millions of people to poverty, the UNDP says. Climate disasters between 2000 and 2004 affected 262 million people, 98 percent of them in the developing world. The poor are often forced to sell productive assets or save on food, health, and education, creating "life-long cycles of disadvantage."

A temperature rise of between 5.4 and 7.2 degrees Fahrenheit (3 and 4 degrees Celsius) would displace 340 million people through flooding, droughts would diminish farm output, and retreating glaciers would cut off drinking water from as many as 1.8 billion people, the report says.

In Kenya, children 5 or younger are 50 percent more likely to be malnourished if they were born during a drought year, affecting their life-long health and productivity.

Countries have the technical ability and financial resources but lack the political will to act, the report says. It singles out the United States and Australia as the only major Western economies not to sign the Kyoto Protocol, an agreement signed by 172 countries to reduce emissions. It expires in 2012.

Ethiopia emits 0.1 metric tons of carbon dioxide per capita, compared to 20 metric tons in Canada. U.S. per capita emissions are over 15 times those of India's.

PROPOSED ROAD MAP

The world needs to spend 1.6 percent of global economic output annually through 2030 to stabilize the carbon stock and meet the 3.6-degree Fahrenheit temperature target. Rich countries, the biggest carbon emitters, should lead the way and cut emissions at least 30 percent by 2020 and 80 percent by 2050. Developing nations should cut emissions 20 percent by 2050, the UNDP says.

"When people in an American city turn on their air-conditioning or people in Europe drive their cars, their actions have consequences ... linking them to rural communities in Bangladesh, farmers in Ethiopia and slum dwellers in Haiti," the report says.

The UNDP recommends a series of measures including improved energy efficiency for appliances and cars, taxes or caps on emissions, and the ability to trade allowances to emit more. It said an experimental technology to store carbon emissions underground was promising for the coal industry, and suggested technology transfer to coal-dependent developing countries like China.

An international fund should invest between \$25 billion and \$50 billion annually in low-carbon energy in developing countries.

Asked whether the report was alarmist, Watkins said it was based on science and evidence: "I defy anybody to speak to the victims of droughts and floods, like we did, and challenge our conclusions on the long-term impact of climate disasters."

[Manteca Bulletin Opinion Sun., Nov. 25, 2007](#)

Hetch Hetchy: San Francisco-style hypocrisy

By Dennis Wyatt, Managing Editor

There is perhaps no smugger environmentalist than the one who resides in San Francisco.

The city is home to the Sierra Club, Save the Redwoods League and boasts some of the country's strongest concentrations of membership in more radical movements such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals as well as Earth First!

San Francisco intellectuals are noted for attacking Central Valley farmers, Sierra lumbermen and Los Angeles for environmental crimes.

The most enduring symbol of hatred for the San Francisco environmental crowd are dams. They represent everything supposedly evil about modern-day California. They contend the huge concrete structures destroy wild rivers, flood pristine canyons and spur urban growth where it shouldn't occur.

The San Francisco crowd's favorite whipping boy is Los Angeles. They detest what Los Angeles has done in the name of water development, specifically with the Owens Valley and Mono Lake. The devastation caused by diverting large amounts of water from the eastern Sierra watershed starting in the 1920s to satisfy LA's every growing thirst is routinely described as one of the "biggest environmental disasters of the 20th century."

It's a shame San Franciscan environmentalists are such hypocrites. If it wasn't for the wanton destruction of Hetch Hetchy Valley, San Francisco wouldn't have had the cheap water needed to grow into a cosmopolitan city at a tip of a peninsula without the local means to support 800,000 residents.

That same exact criticism is leveled at Los Angeles by the Sierra Club crowd. The City of Angeles should never have been allowed to spring up on land that didn't have reliable sources of local water to support its growth. The importation of cheap water at the expense of the provinces in the distant Sierra was the only way L.A. could grow.

San Francisco should know. They beat L.A. to the punch. The city destroyed Hetch Hetchy Valley - a place the environmentalists' icon John Muir described as second only to Yosemite Valley in beauty - long before the Los Angeles Water Department started stealing water rights in the Owens Valley.

The political maneuvering San Francisco did in Congress to build a dam in a national park in the 1910s was as underhanded as the well-documented deceit that took place in the Owens Valley.

To add insult to injury, San Francisco pays pennies on the dollar for the cost other municipalities pay for water collected and stored in other dams on federal property. The city's prosperity is essentially subsidized by the rest of California.

The holier-than-thou stance of most San Francisco environmentalists is a bit too much to stomach.

San Francisco traces its tremendous growth from an outpost 156 years ago to one of the most cosmopolitan cities the world has even known to the Gold Rush. The Gold Rush brought "environmental havoc" to California.

We know this because Earth First! as well as the Sierra Club constantly remind the rest of us - particularly those in the Central Valley - that we are destroying the planet by accommodating urban growth as well as how we are toiling the soil to produce food.

Sierra and North Coast timber interests are routinely slammed for desecrating forests. It is nothing compared to the wholesale cutting that was used to produce lumber for San Francisco.

Nor does it begin to compare with the massive amount of earth displaced by gold seekers who essentially shipped their wealth back to San Francisco.

Environmentalists are absolutely right that we have to balance growth and various practices needed to support civilization such as farming and mining against the need to protect as well as preserve nature.

They are wrong not to hold San Francisco and its suburbs to the same high standards.

It took Central Valley counties two decades to get the Federal Environmental Protection Agency to concede what everyone this side of the Altamont Pass and Carquinez Strait already knew - the San Francisco Bay Area is responsible for a large chunk of our [air pollution](#).

The ocean breezes clear the auto-generated smog as well as pollution from factories into the 360-mile long Central Valley basin where it is trapped by mountains on all sides.

The San Francisco Bay Area is just now being held to the same stringent factory output standards as the Central Valley.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Tuesday, Nov. 27, 2006:](#)

Nothing to offer

The more I hear about trying to bring tourism to Fresno, the more it makes me wonder who is the half genius who thinks this could ever happen?

What does Fresno have to offer for tourists? A whole lot of dirty air, two-star hotels at best, a mini-water park, an over zealous police force that makes the people who live here miserable and a run-of-the-mill museum. That would make me want to come to Fresno for a vacation.

Jared Hesse, Clovis

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the call to amend the dairy ordinance in Fresno County until it is determined what will be the environmental impact on air quality and water. For more information, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Frenan permiso ganadero en California por impacto ambiental

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Wednesday, November 21, 2007

Una comisión de California pidió al condado de Fresno detener un permiso a ganaderos para revisar el impacto que tendrán proyectos, denominados mega-establos, en la calidad del aire en la región, una de las más contaminadas en el país.

La Comisión de Salubridad Ganadera de Fresno pidió al cabildo de gobierno que más que detener el permiso, lo anule, para diseñar reglamentos.

Los megaproyectos podrían aumentar unas 35 mil cabezas a establos en esa área que enfrenta fuerte deterioro del aire.

La ganadería es una de las principales fuentes generadoras de gas butano, que sobrecalientan la tierra y perjudican el aire.