

Contractors seminar focuses on techniques, air regulations

By J.N. SBRANTI

Modesto Bee, Friday, August 8, 2008

A free seminar to help commercial construction contractors learn about environmentally friendly "green building" standards and air quality regulations will be offered Aug. 21 in Modesto.

The Building Industry Association of Central California will host the 9 a.m.-to-noon event in the Gingko Room at the Modesto Centre Plaza.

The seminar will feature experts on the evolving regulatory requirements for green building and air quality compliance as it relates to commercial construction.

Among those making presentations will be technical compliance specialists from the [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#) and California Air Resources Board, an environmental consultant from the Hoge-Fenton Law Firm and members of the building association's governmental relations staff.

Existing air quality mitigation standards, new diesel fuel standards for off-road construction equipment and new and proposed green building regulations will be discussed.

"This is an offshoot of our green building task force, which is quite advanced on the residential side. When we determined there was a dearth of information in the commercial construction sector, we decided to (sponsor the seminar)," explained Stephen Madison, the building association's executive vice president.

Madison said a couple of Northern San Joaquin Valley commercial construction projects are using green building techniques.

"Marriott Courtyard in Merced built their hotel at the highest level of LEED standards, which is Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design," Madison said.

Construction to expand Modesto's Salvation Army shelter also is striving to be green.

Madison said the shelter "has self-imposed standards" for water conservation, improved natural lighting, painting materials that feature low or no volatile organic compounds to improve indoor air quality, and energy- efficient heating and air systems.

Boxer honors county's environmental program

By Chris Metinko - Oakland Tribune

Tri-Valley Herald, Friday, August 8, 2008

U.S. Sen. Barbara Boxer continued handing out environmental awards around the East Bay on Thursday, this time honoring Alameda County's eco-friendly policies.

The chairwoman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee also found herself answering a myriad of questions ranging from offshore drilling to a possible vice presidential candidacy.

"It would make as much sense to put me on the (Democratic presidential) ticket as it would to put this podium on the ticket," said Boxer, D-Calif., during a question-and-answer session with the press at the county's Juvenile Justice Center. Boxer made the trip to San Leandro to present a "Conservation Champion Award" to the county's Sustainability Program, which focuses on the development of green buildings and other eco-friendly ideas.

Boxer took a tour of the Juvenile Justice Center, which opened last year and is the prime example of the county's efforts to implement its Sustainability Program. The building won a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design gold rating, with an 850-kilowatt solar panel

system — enough to power 1,000 homes. The center also was built with site-grading equipment that used biodiesel fuel, preventing more than 200 tons of carbon dioxide emissions.

Boxer was taken by her tour of the building, which she took with county Supervisor Keith Carson and county Administrator Susan Muranishi, among others.

"It's quite an experience — a wonderful experience," Boxer said of the tour.

Earlier this week, Boxer presented another "Conservation Champion Award" to executives at Amyris Biotechnologies Inc. in Emeryville, which is finding ways to produce biofuel by having genetically engineered microbes feed on renewable sources such as sugarcane and cellulose-heavy crops.

Boxer said her office created the award to pay tribute to good news, and get away from the media's "if it bleeds, it leads" mind-set. She said she hopes the award will create more awareness of environmental issues, something she feels is already happening.

"Change is coming, and yes we can — if you catch my drift," smiled Boxer, an obvious allusion to Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama's campaign slogan.

Just as she had done earlier in the week at the bio-tech in Emeryville, Boxer used the occasion to discuss other environmental and political issues with reporters:

4 Regarding offshore drilling, Boxer said the country needs an overall energy plan to deal with its needs. "We need an energy policy," she said. "All we have now is an Exxon policy, which is drill, drill — burn, burn."

4 On the topic of protests in China during the Olympics, the senator said she supports all peaceful demonstrations, and the games will provide China with a chance to reflect. "This is a moment for China to take stock of herself," Boxer said.

4 Boxer said she believes people do see the urgency for more AIDS research and funding, especially in light of new data that showed the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention may have underestimated the number of new AIDS cases in the country by as much as 40 percent. "I think the new statistics were very shocking to people," she said.

Up to the challenge

By Andrea Wolf – Correspondent
Tri-Valley Herald, Friday, August 8, 2008

PIEDMONT'S NEWLY FORMED Environmental Task Force has a lot to accomplish in the next year, but officials are confident the city's residents' enthusiasm and the diverse team is up to the challenge.

Combining city employees, environmental experts, residents and school board members, the new team has until next summer to address three main environmental concerns in Piedmont, Mayor Abe Friedman said.

The first goal is to divert 75 percent of the city's landfill waste into recycling by the year 2010. Secondly, the group hopes to reduce energy consumption by public agencies in an effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Lastly, the team has been charged with developing educational programs and other non-regulatory means to encourage recycling and reduced energy consumption by Piedmont residents.

Headed up by Teddy Gray King, a member of the Piedmont Park Commission since 2005, the task force will also draft plans to make public buildings and areas as green as possible by setting up energy saving and recycling programs, King said.

Making Piedmont an exemplary city in terms of environmental sustainability was one of Friedman's priorities, he said. And Friedman said he is confident King is the woman to lead the team and the rest of the city, in Piedmont's progressive directive.

"Teddy has been really dedicated to serving the community since she moved to Piedmont," Friedman said. "She has done a fantastic job on the Park Commission and I wanted someone who has shown they have the skill set to reach our goals in the limited time given."

King, a San Francisco native who moved to Piedmont in 2004 with her husband, said she knows she and the rest of the task force have a full plate, but she's excited to get started.

"I know we are all ready to get going on what needs to be done," King said. "I'm honored to participate and I think we are going to come up with innovative ways to get the carbon footprint on Piedmont reined in."

The first step to sustainability has already begun, she said, when Piedmont residents received their new recycle and compost bins this year.

"One of our first priorities is to provide more public outreach about the new recycle program," King said. "We understand changing people's garbage habits will take some time."

Friedman said there have been a few hiccups in the new program, which allows residents to separate organic waste from their garbage headed to the landfill, but the response so far has been very positive.

Friedman said the support from city residents has been overwhelming and although the task force has only been given a year to accomplish its three main directives, he believes the public enthusiasm for the program thrive.

"We need to first focus on the low-hanging fruit," Friedman said. "There are things we easily can, and should, begin doing in the city right away."

King comes to the task force from a career of political and city service. The UC Berkeley alum started her career as an intern for House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-S.F. She also worked for the San Francisco Board of Supervisors and U.S. Rep. Lynn Woolsey, D-San Rafael.

King said her time working in Washington D.C., was when she really became interested in environmental issues.

"Lynn was green before it was even popular," King said of Woolsey, who represents Sonoma and Marin counties. "On the Park Commission, we deal with these issues frequently. I have always been committed to environmental protection."

In addition to her political career, King said having her first child, a 19-month-old son, made her even more interested in instituting environmental protection policy in her city.

"I see now what my son will have to deal with years from now and his generation will be facing carbon emissions emitted over the last 150 years," King said.

Friedman said the City Council has not yet decided whether or not the environmental task force will be dissolved once the one year deadline has passed.

But King said the key to the task force's continued success lies in the hands of the city's residents.

"To make it successful and make sure people feel good about it, the task force has to listen to residents," King said. "We are going to have a laser-like focus on our three directives and make sure it is an open of a process as possible."

Residents are encouraged to participate in the Piedmont Environmental Task Force meetings, which will be held the fourth Tuesday of each month. The first meeting will be Aug. 26.

Olympics start in a mix of haze, heat and humidity

By TINI TRAN, Associated Press Writer

In the S.F. Chronicle, Modesto Bee and other papers, Friday, August 8, 2008

BEIJING, China (AP) -- Heat, humidity and haze cloaked the start of China's long-awaited Olympic Games in a sultry blanket Friday.

Temperatures in the National Stadium, known as the Bird's Nest, averaged about 30 degrees Celsius (86 degree Fahrenheit) in advance of opening ceremonies, and moderate humidity made the air feel heavier.

The noxious air has been a major headache for Olympic organizers, with athletes voicing concerns over the potential impact to their health and performance. Beijing's air pollution regularly reaches levels two or three times above what the World Health Organization considers safe.

On Friday, the official air pollution index for Beijing was at 94, similar to levels of moderate pollution recorded earlier in the week. The WHO recommends levels below 50 for healthy air, while China considers anything above 100 to be harmful to sensitive groups including children and the elderly.

For U.S. swimmer Garrett Weber-Gale, the first view of the skies over Beijing as he was flying in earlier this week was a shock.

"I really noticed the first day that it was pretty smoggy. We landed on the plane and I think we were all like, 'Wow. Is this weather? Is this smog? Is this fog? What is it?' It was kind of surprising to see that," he said.

Beijing officials on Friday continued to insist that the murky haze enveloping the city is not the result of pollution, but instead is fog created by moisture vapor in the air. Visibility, they say, is not necessarily an indicator of air quality.

"The air quality, I think it's good. It looks a little bit misty. You cannot judge the air quality by its appearance. You have to trust the scientists," said Wang Wei, executive vice president and secretary general for Beijing's Olympic Organizing Committee.

China has invested billions in "greening" the capital, and implemented drastic measures to ensure air quality for the Olympics. Last month, some 2 million cars were taken off roads, constructions sites were shut down and dozens of factories were closed across the capital. Similar measures were taken in surrounding provinces.

Du Shaozhong, deputy director for Beijing's Environmental Protection Bureau, said the measures have succeeded in reducing the level of major pollutants, including particulate matter. The first three days of August showcased clear blue skies and very low pollution, though the last five days have been thick with haze and moderate pollution.

"All those results have brought us to the gate of the Olympic Games. We will be able to ensure that air quality during the games is good enough," he said.

The next few days are expected to bring a respite in the form of rainshowers.

Guo Hu, director of Beijing Meteorological Observatory, said satellite pictures show heavy clouds moving in from the northwest and predicted heavy rain sometime this weekend.

"With this rain, we expect the weather in Beijing to be clearly improved," he said. "We have to look at the favorable weather conditions which can help spread and remove major pollutants."

The International Olympic Committee said this week that the air in Beijing is safe for athletes, though they will be monitoring pollution levels regularly. Outdoor endurance events, including the marathon, may be postponed if levels are too high.

In the meantime, some Olympic athletes say they are less concerned with pollution than they are with Beijing's heat and humidity.

"They turned the factories off. A lot of the roads are blocked off, so there aren't as many cars. I think it's in the best condition it has ever been in. But it's still very hot and very humid, and it's pretty tough. I've practiced out there the last two days and it is probably the most humid place I've ever played," said U.S. tennis player Sam Querrey.

Olympics smog watch: China says pollution control efforts paid off

USA TODAY, Friday, August 08, 2008

Chinese officials say there was an acceptable level of pollution in the air as the opening ceremonies began today at Bird's Nest Stadium.

The latest readings from BBC News show that the so-called [PM10 level](#) fell in Beijing, but it's still a little above the World Health Organization's target for developing countries and much higher than the organization's overall "air quality target."

"Maybe the fog makes it not a nice picture to look at the Bird's Nest or the Water Cube, but the monitor south of the two stadiums reads the API at 80 today. It conveyed a strong message that our efforts had paid off since August," Du Shaozhong, deputy director of Beijing Municipal Environmental Protection Bureau, tells reporters, according to the state-run Xinhua news agency.

Pollution levels unclear but a key concern

By Elizabeth Weise

USA TODAY, Friday, August 08, 2008

BEIJING — "This is going to be a little shocking," Staci Simonich says as she unscrews the aluminum housing that covers the collection filter in her air-sampling machine atop the geology building at Peking University.

When the environmental chemistry professor pulls the cover off, the filter underneath is as gray as the lint filter in a much-used clothes dryer.

"This is 24 hours worth of particulate matter from Beijing air," she says. "It's the darkest I've ever seen."

Simonich has been taking air samples for the last seven days. She hasn't finished her analysis and doesn't have exact figures, but her rough estimate is that pollution levels are between two and seven times higher than in a typical larger American city and six times higher than the average during the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, the Oregon State University researcher says.

The International Olympic Committee is monitoring the air hourly and will take action if there is concern, says Arne Ljungqvist, chairman of the IOC medical commission.

Such concern is reasonable, says John Balmes, a pulmonologist and professor of environmental health at the University of California at San Francisco.

Particulate matter is the most dangerous. Burning materials create tiny pieces of carbon, which absorbs various chemicals onto its surfaces. These burn and injure the lining of the airway and lungs, Balmes says.

For people with pre-existing heart and lung disease, exposure to high levels of particulate matter can elevate their risk. If the air in Beijing remains highly polluted, Balmes expects increased heart problems and perhaps deaths, especially among older spectators with heart and lung problems.

Because of concern about pollution, four American cyclists arrived in Beijing wearing face masks. They released a statement Wednesday apologizing for their action, which they called "a precautionary measure."

Another concern is ozone, formed via a chemical reaction of pollutants in the air and sunlight. Ozone can cause decreased lung function, airway inflammation and chemically burns the airways. Studies done during the Los Angeles Olympics in 1984 found that cyclists exposed to ozone in the laboratory had decreased performance.

And because exercising athletes take in between seven and eight times more air than a sedentary person, they're more likely to be affected, Balmes says.

Exactly what the pollution levels in Beijing are is unclear. The official Olympic air pollution figures are posted daily by the Beijing Municipal Environmental Protection Bureau, based on averages of samples taken for a 24-hour period at locations around the city.

Simonich says the values she's seeing are generally about two times higher than what's being reported by the city, though she notes that her collection site at Peking University is more urban. She did say the levels are 20%-40% lower than they were a year ago.

The BBC has been taking handheld particulate matter readings, which have been significantly higher than those published by the city. The British Broadcasting Corp. reported 134 micrograms per meter July 28. The city reported 98, far above the World Health Organization's guidelines for healthy air of 50.

Weather Channel senior forecaster Buzz Bernard has found Beijing visibility at about 3 miles. During the best weather of the last few weeks, when blue skies appeared over the city, it was up to 6 miles.

In an effort to lower the number, China shut down factories, closed cement plants and restricted private vehicle use in the weeks leading up to the Games.

The hope, says Tong Zhu, an environmental science professor at Peking University who oversees air-quality experiments, is for a lasting effect.

"There has been a definite improvement over the last year," he says. "Most of the anti-pollution efforts put into place for the Olympics will stay in effect afterwards," which should go a long way to eliminating Beijing's daytime haze.

The location of the city is also a contributing factor. Beijing is mostly flat, ringed by mountains on its north, east and west sides. It is open to the south, which allows pollution and dust from southern urban and manufacturing areas to flow in, but no way to flow out.

"A perfect day for the Olympics would be rain at night to wash the pollution that's built up out of the air, cloud cover during the day to limit the sunlight that causes chemical reactions and then wind from the north to blow the pollution out of the basin," Simonich says.

The nightmare scenario: no rain and an inversion layer traps pollution, with no wind to clear it away. Showers are predicted this weekend.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Friday, Aug. 8, 2008:](#)

High-speed rail now hostage

Governor's veto vow may threaten passage of crucial bond measure.

Legislation meant to enhance the chances of passing Proposition 1, the high-speed rail bond measure on the November ballot, finally passed the Senate Thursday. That's good news, but the bill -- and the bond measure -- may wind up hostage to the ongoing budget stalemate in Sacramento.

AB 3034, by Assemblywoman Cathleen Galgiani, D-Tracy, would make a number of changes urged by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, including a cap on administrative costs by the agency that will build the system, an updated business plan for attracting federal and private investment, and the opportunity for segments of the line not envisioned as part of the system's first phase to compete for the initial funding from the \$9.9 billion bond.

More good news for the Valley: Several Republican senators who've been among the most vocal critics of high-speed rail -- Roy Ashburn, Jeff Denham and Dave Cogdill -- voted to move AB 3034 along. We have long been puzzled by their indifference or outright opposition to a project that would benefit the Valley more than it would any other part of the state. Perhaps they've come around.

But Schwarzenegger vowed on Wednesday to veto any legislation that reaches his desk -- or is already there -- until the Legislature comes up with a budget.

That's a problem, because the ballot language for Proposition 1 needs to be finalized by Monday. If it isn't, the changes the governor sought won't be part of the language that voters will address in November.

So the governor has worked himself into a nice fix. If he keeps his grandstanding promise to let all bills languish or die until the budget is on his desk, he risks defeat for a high-speed rail measure he says he supports strongly. But if he reneges on his veto promise -- even in this case only -- he risks being perceived as weak by the Legislature, whose members would love seeing him politically emasculated.

A spokesman for the governor said the high-speed legislation wouldn't be an exception to the governor's vow.

Apparently that makes sense in Sacramento, but the logic escapes us. The high-speed rail project is the most promising public-works effort since the state built its water system. Now this crucial measure could face a tougher fight at the polls in November just so the governor and the Legislature can continue the painful theatrical farce that passes for governance in Sacramento.

State workers have already been thrown into anxiety, worrying whether they'll be paid for the work they do. Local governments face deep and painful cuts in their budgets. The sick, the elderly, the young, the poor -- the usual suspects -- will bear the brunt of closing a \$15 billion deficit.

And now the governor is willing to risk high-speed rail and its benefits -- a generation of well-paying construction and engineering jobs, cleaner air, reduced dependence on foreign oil and a cheaper alternative to more and more highways and failing airlines -- all for the sake of posturing on the budget.

In that, he perfectly resembles most of our legislators. They're becoming such birds of a feather, it's a wonder they don't get along better.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses cloudy festivities. A grey cloud of pollution surrounds Beijing; it has manifested a problem with Olympic organizers who had promised clean air for the capital of China. For more information on this and other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Nubla la fiesta

El Diario, Friday, August 08, 2008

Beijing— Una espesa neblina gris en torno del Estadio Nacional y sobre la ciudad redujo la visibilidad a un kilómetro y medio. En vísperas de la ceremonia inaugural de los Juegos Olímpicos, el aire contaminado de Beijing puso de manifiesto el problema acuciante más visible para los organizadores olímpicos que habían prometido limpiar la capital.

Pese a los enormes esfuerzos chinos por mejorar la calidad del aire en los meses anteriores, la bruma espesa que cubría la ciudad ayer ilustra lo difícil que puede ser despejar el aire. Al fin de cuentas dependerá de las circunstancias climáticas: viento y lluvia.

“Yo esperaba que las medidas pudieran tener más efecto que la semana pasada”, dijo Zhu Tong, profesor adjunto en el Colegio de Ciencia e Ingeniería Ambiental, en la Universidad de Beijing, que ha aconsejado al gobierno en cuestiones de contaminación.

“Lamentablemente, tuvimos condiciones meteorológicas que no fueron propicias para despejar el ambiente. Por eso, el aire estancado en Beijing ha contribuido a que se acumularan los contaminantes. Espero que en el próximo par de semanas tengamos condiciones que nos permitan limpiar los aires”.

El pronóstico para hoy, durante la ceremonia inaugural, anticipaba cielo cubierto con ligera probabilidad de lluvias por la tarde. Pero el alivio podría llegar el fin de semana, con un pronóstico de lluvias moderadas que podrían despejar los contaminantes.

Ayer, el índice de contaminación en el aire era de 96, que se acercaba al límite de aire aceptable. Los registros de 51 a 100 son considerados contaminación moderada, y todo lo que sobrepase los 100 es perjudicial para los grupos sensibles, incluyendo niños y ancianos.

El aire notoriamente contaminado en esta megaciudad de 17 millones de habitantes ha sido una preocupación desde que Beijing ganó la organización de los juegos en el 2001. China ha invertido 140 mil millones de yuans (20 mil millones de dólares) para descontaminar la ciudad. Pero los esfuerzos ambientalistas han sido contrarrestados por la constante construcción y el aumento del tránsito.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses a cloud of smog drapes the inaugural Olympic ceremonies. The levels of pollution in Beijing usually double or triple the levels that the OMS considers to be safe.](#)

Nube de smog arropa la ceremonia inaugural

El Diario, Friday, August 8, 2008

El calor, la humedad y una nube de smog arroparon el viernes la inauguración de los Juegos Olímpicos en Beijing.

La temperatura en el Estadio Nacional, conocido como el Nido de Pájaro, tuvo un promedio de 30 grados centígrados (86 fahrenheit) durante la ceremonia inaugural, y la humedad hacía que el aire se sintiera más pesado.

La contaminación ha sido un dolor de cabeza para los organizadores, y los atletas expresaron preocupación por los posibles efectos nocivos para su salud y desempeño. Los niveles de contaminación en Beijing usualmente duplican o triplican los niveles que la Organización Mundial de la Salud (OMS) considera seguros.

El viernes, el índice oficial de contaminación del aire en Beijing era de 94, similar a los niveles de contaminación moderada registrados en la semana. La OMS recomienda niveles menores de 50 para un aire saludable, mientras que China considera que cualquier cifra por encima de 100 es peligrosa para personas sensibles.

Las autoridades de Beijing insistieron el viernes que la neblina que cubre la ciudad no es producto de la contaminación, sino que se trata de una neblina por el vapor de humedad en el aire. La visibilidad, sostienen, no necesariamente es sinónimo de la calidad del aire.

"Creo que la calidad del aire es buena. Se ve un poco nublado. Uno no puede juzgar la calidad del aire por su apariencia, hay que confiar en los científicos", dijo Wang Wei, vicepresidente ejecutivo y secretario general del comité organizador de Beijing.

China ejecutó drásticas medidas para reducir la contaminación, entre ellas sacar de circulación a la mitad de los vehículos y el cierre de fábricas y construcciones.

Se espera que en los próximos días haya lluvia que ayude a despejar el ambiente.

El COI informó esta semana que el aire en Beijing es seguro para los atletas, aunque indicó que seguirá de cerca la situación.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses California takes advantage of the Olympic Games to measure the levels of reduced pollution.](#)

Aprovecha California los Juegos Olímpicos para medir descontaminación en China

Manuel Ocaño
Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingue, Thursday, August 07, 2008

La Oficina de Recursos del Aire de California informó que aprovechará una reducción de emisiones contaminantes de China durante los Juegos Olímpicos que inician hoy para dejar ver a ese país los beneficios que tendría si reduce permanentemente su contaminación.

El gobierno chino informó que suspenderá operaciones de fábricas y reducirá uso de vehículos en las inmediaciones de Beijing durante las olimpiadas.

La referida oficina de California comparará por su parte imágenes y análisis de contaminación en periodos regulares de actividades en China, y durante esa reducción de emisiones.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses a new warning for air pollution in the Northern California.](#)

Nueva advertencia por contaminación del aire en California

Manuel Ocaño
Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingue, Friday, August 08, 2008

Autoridades ambientales de California insistieron en emitir una nueva alerta por los altos niveles de contaminación en el norte del estado.

La Oficina de Recursos del Aire de California informó que los residentes pueden por si mismos saber si el aire tiene una contaminación al menos aceptable o si es preferible permanecer en interiores.

Si desde donde se encuentre una persona tiene una vista panorámica de unas nueve millas, el aire entonces es aceptable aún si no es del todo saludable.

Si en cambio es posible ver sólo a una distancia de unas tres millas, es preferible quedarse en interiores y evitar actividades al aire libre.