

Tracy man gets 10 months for Clean Air Act violation

By Mike Martinez - Tri-Valley Herald
Tri-Valley Herald, Thursday, Sept. 4, 2008

SAN FRANCISCO — A federal court judge sentenced a Tracy man to 10 months in prison after he was convicted of illegally demolishing a building containing significant amounts of asbestos.

The sentence was handed down last week to Wassim Mohammad Azizi, 37, after he was found guilty by a jury on May 13 of three violations of the Clean Air Act.

During the six-day trial, evidence showed Azizi failed to comply with the federal regulations on the removal of asbestos-containing material. He was convicted of violating work practice standards, including failing to properly notify the air district, failing to wet the asbestos-containing material, failing to keep it in leak-tight containers and failing to dispose of it at an authorized location.

"Exposure to asbestos can cause cancer or other serious respiratory diseases, and the government will not tolerate illegal and unsafe asbestos removal practices that put the public health at risk," said Nick Torres, Special Agent in Charge of the Environmental Protection Agency's Criminal Investigation Division.

The Clean Air Act requires that any activity involving material containing asbestos, a hazardous air pollutant, must be in compliance with "work practice" standards. Among other things, these standards require that the owner and operator contact the EPA or the Bay Area Air Quality Management District at least 10 days prior to beginning any activity; properly label bags containing regulated asbestos-containing material; and manage the asbestos-containing material so that there is no discharge of visible emissions.

The sentence was handed down by U.S. District Court Judge Maxine Chesney, who also sentenced Azizi to a two-year period of supervised release. He is currently released on his own recognizance and will begin serving the sentence on Dec. 1.

Health center gets green honor

Carpooling, potlucks and other efforts pay off for Golden Valley.

By CAROL REITER
Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, Sept. 4, 2008

It's working.

The effort that Golden Valley Health Centers has put in to become a green company has paid off. They were named as a Clean Air Champion by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The health center participated in the Healthy Air Living Week in July. It was the only business in the county to receive the award.

Mike Sullivan, chief executive of Golden Valley, said that the change to being an environmentally conscious business started about a year ago.

"We responded to a call for companies to do something about air pollution," Sullivan said. His staff and employees stepped up and worked hard to be green.

One of their approaches was to convince people to carpool. Sullivan said sharing a car with other employees did more than just save gas. "I rode in a car with two other employees and got to know them better," Sullivan said.

The issue of carpooling at Golden Valley is major because there are a lot of employees and few parking spaces.

Mary-Michal Rawling, program manager for the Asthma Coalition Program, said the company did a lot to help the air -- and not just during the one week. "We have been working with Golden Valley for the past 18 months," Rawling said. "Golden Valley took it to heart."

Along with carpooling, employees also participated in a series of potlucks all week. Rawling said that having potlucks at the center cuts down the number of trips in cars for lunch breaks.

"We also encouraged people to ride bikes, use the bus, and we are putting up signs that say 'no idling' in the parking lots," Rawling said.

Going green wasn't expensive, either. Sullivan said they have taken steps that cost almost nothing, such as switching from Styrofoam cups and not using bottled water.

"This world that we live in is getting smaller and smaller," Sullivan said. "I think we have to take care of it."

Groups protest unhealthy air quality

By Martin E. Martinez / Vida En El Valle
Wednesday, Aug. 27, 2008

SACRAMENTO -- Five years ago, Socorro Gaeta, 44, was diagnosed with a severe case of chronic asthma, which came as a surprise to her.

Gaeta had always led a healthy life and rarely got sick. After several visits to the doctor, she finally learned the reason for her misfortune: In the Fresno farming area where she lives, vast quantities of chemicals are used in agriculture.

But the saddest part for Gaeta is that her 18-year-old son also suffers from asthma, despite the fact that he's always been a dedicated athlete.

"The problem is that here in Fresno nothing is done to regulate agricultural chemicals. We're all exposed to them, and that's why a large part of the population suffers from this disease," Gaeta explained.

Motivated by that awareness, Gaeta formed the Central Valley Air Quality (CVAQ) organization, which last week held its second annual Clean Air Action Day. People from around the Central Valley gathered outside the Capitol to protest unhealthy air quality in their areas.

The coalition also met to support three legislative proposals that are now being heard on the state Senate floor.

The first proposal is AB 2522, from Assemblymember Juan Arámbula, D-Fresno. It seeks to authorize the San Joaquín Valley Air Pollution Control District to increase the surcharge on motor vehicle registration fees up to \$30 per vehicle per year to reduce surplus emissions.

The second is SB 1548, from state Sen. Dean Flórez, D-Shafter. The bill would create a special city selection committee to appoint city councilmembers to the San Joaquín Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District with the mission of exploring solutions to the region's pollution problems.

The third is SB 974, from Alan Lowenthal, D-Long Beach. It would improve air quality and reduce health-related problems in port communities by funding pollution relief and other needed improvements. SB 974 would also impose a nominal \$30 fee on each shipping container that

enters the ports of Los Angeles, Long Beach and Oakland -- \$15 each for pollution mitigation and for rail improvements.

"We all deserve air that's clean and free of contaminants, like any other part of California. The Central Valley is the most polluted area in the state, and home to the greatest number of asthma cases. So we ask for your help in approving these proposals for the good of our people," said Flórez.

According to the California Air Resources Board, nearly one in three children in Fresno has asthma problems.

Rey León, vice president of the air quality group, reinforced the message that the Central Valley pollution problem is very serious and that very little has been done to lower pollution levels.

"Often in cities like Fresno, we exceed permissible levels of pollution, due to the constant flow of trucks on the freeways and to the use of chemicals in agriculture. Today Fresno is considered the most polluted city in the country," León said.

Former Fresno Assemblymember Sarah Reyes said everyone in the area needs to support these bills because they directly address the pollution problem.

"These proposals mean a higher quality of life for all Central Valley residents. We should support them to fight scourges like asthma and other pollution-related diseases for the good of ourselves and our children," Reyes said.

Last year, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger approved SB 719, directing the state to appoint a doctor and a scientist to provide information and assistance for cases of disease related to pollution.

A hot day ahead, and please - spare the air

By William Brand, Oakland Tribune

Tri-Valley Herald and Contra Costa Times, Thursday, Sept. 4, 2008

The Pacific high pressure ridge is doing its work this morning and the National Weather Service says temperatures are going to soar around the Bay Area.

Smog levels are rising as well and the Bay Area air board has issued a "Spare the Air Day" warning today. There is no free transit, the air board says.

Even on the normally chilly San Mateo coast the Weather Service predicts highs in the 70s and 80s and inland spots like Livermore and Concord can expect to bake in upper 90s to 100 degree temperatures.

"Along the coast, the marine layer has died away, it's very shallow or non-existent," Weather Service meteorologist Brian Tentinger says.

In the East Bay, Oakland can expect highs close to 90, San Francisco and the Peninsula will see temperatures in the 80s and it should reach the low to mid-90s in the South Bay, Tentinger says.

The Weather Service says it will remain warm tonight and Friday. The only relief ahead is on the weekend when temperatures should drop at the most five to 10 degrees. It still should reach the mid-70s in San Francisco this weekend, Tentinger said.

The heat is bringing smoggy air as well. The Bay Area Air Quality Management District predicts unhealthy air in parts of the East Bay like Concord, Walnut Creek, Livermore, Dublin and Pleasanton.

This is the 11th Spare the Air Day so far this year, the air board says. Funds for free transit are exhausted, but the air board urges residents to limit auto trips and to take mass transit, if possible.

Controlled burns considered for American River Parkway

By Blair Anthony Robertson

Modesto Bee, Thursday, Sept. 4, 2008

A spate of recent fires in the American River Parkway, including one near Cal Expo on Monday that climbed dangerously into the trees and even jumped the river, has prompted some officials to wonder: Is it time to renew talk about prescribed burns?

The fires this summer have left patches of charred fields and singed trees in 10 or more places along the 23-mile parkway. This summer has been especially serious because the drought has left vegetation the driest on record, officials say.

Prescribed burns have long been controversial in the heavily used parkway, home to abundant wildlife and used by a million people annually. But proponents maintain that if fire experts don't do the burning under controlled situations, arsonists will have their way and cause untold damage.

The fire that began Monday, for instance, required 150 firefighters to control amid treacherous 30 mph winds. The blaze burned 16 acres of a grass field north of the river adjacent to Cal Expo.

Ember showers carried by the winds caused the fire to jump the river and burn 16 acres at Sutter's Landing Regional Park, the nature area that was once the city dump. It also jumped the Capital City Freeway and burned 6 to 7 acres in an orchard, according to Lloyd Ogan, a deputy chief with the Sacramento Fire Department.

Firefighters continued to spray water on the smoldering remnants of the fire Wednesday. The cause is under investigation. Officials say it could be as simple as a cigarette thrown from an automobile on the freeway overpass.

Ogan says prescribed burning and the prescribed thinning of scrub brush would clear so-called "ladder fuels" that carry blazes into the tree canopy.

"There are specific areas we would like to target," Ogan said.

"It would require an ongoing effort. It's a forestry management issue."

But he noted that prescribed burns have not been done for many years and that changing the policy would require cooperation from several different agencies. There are also air quality issues to consider.

"That's going to be a challenging task for us," Ogan said.

The Sacramento Metropolitan Fire District, which answers calls on the parkway east of Howe Avenue, does annual burns in a field in Rancho Cordova but only for training purposes.

"We did do some burning for weed abatement and training about a decade ago, but that was sort of a different world back then," said Capt. Jeff Lynch.

Lynch said his department has no plans to do prescribed burns.

"The American River is a pristine jewel of the Sacramento area and there are many citizens that utilize that area," he said.

"Other than training purposes, we do not want to intentionally blacken and take away the beauty of that area."

Some who work with wildlife and plant life say burning under controlled conditions may be the best answer, noting that arson fires can cause far more damage than prescribed burns.

"We are hoping to work Sacramento Metro Fire to have them develop some strategies to do some (prescribed burns," said Marilee Flannery, director of the Effie Yeaw Nature Center. "This area has suffered. There's too much non-native growth. It's taking over where the native plants have been."

Flannery noted that American Indians, long before settlers arrived in California, routinely performed a version of prescribed burns for the health of wild vegetation.

Guy Galante, a nature photographer and the education director of Soil Born farm, which borders the parkway in Rancho Cordova, says a fire in mid-July could have wiped out the farm if not for the quick thinking of staff members who grabbed water hoses and rushed to douse the grasses along the perimeter.

Regarding prescribed burns, Galante, who is working on a photo book about the parkway's wildlife, said, "From an aesthetic standpoint, it doesn't look good, but from an ecological standpoint, it's probably necessary. I don't really see them as bad."

BAY AREA

Today declared a Spare the Air Day

Chronicle staff

S.F. Chronicle, Thursday, September 4, 2008

The latest round of hot, still weather has prompted Bay Area air quality officials to declare today a Spare the Air Day.

Forecasters for the Bay Area Air Quality Management District called a Spare the Air Day because of the forecast of minimal winds and inland temperatures in the 90s. Such conditions contribute to elevated smog levels in the interior valleys.

Air quality today is expected to be unhealthy in central and eastern Contra Costa, Alameda and Solano counties for what the air district calls sensitive groups. Active children and adults, and people with respiratory diseases such as asthma, should take it easy outdoors, the district says.

During Spare the Air days, residents are asked to take transit, minimize driving, turn up the thermostat on their air conditioners and avoid using aerosol sprays or gas-powered lawn mowers.

[S.F. Chronicle commentary, Thursday, Sept. 4, 2008:](#)

Legislature needs to ease CFL disposal

By Terry Nagel

Swapping incandescent lightbulbs for compact fluorescent lightbulbs is one of the easiest things you can do to help the environment. CFLs last about 10 times longer and quickly pay for themselves. If every household replaced one incandescent bulb with a CFL, we would prevent pollution equal to the removal of 800,000 cars from the road, according to the federal government.

Sounds good, but there's a big problem with CFLs: Getting rid of them.

Since February 2006, state law has prohibited disposing of them in your residential trash, and most cities require you to drop them off at a recycling center. When you consider that each gallon of gas you burn puts 20 pounds of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, it doesn't make sense to chauffeur lightbulbs to a recycling facility.

Recycling long fluorescent tubes is even harder. Recycling centers have different policies about how many they will accept. If you want to dispose of more than a few, you may have to make an appointment with your county's household hazardous waste collection center. One recycling expert told me I would need a commercial transportation permit to carry more than six long tubes in my car.

The state Department of Toxic Substances Control says there is no limit, as long as the tubes are eventually recycled. However, bulbs must be properly wrapped for transport, the department spokeswoman said, and if they break, you're responsible for cleaning them up. Cleanup of fluorescent lamps is no small feat; the Environmental Protection Agency's guidelines run close to 800 words and urge disposal of any materials that come in direct contact with the lamp contents, including rugs and fabrics.

With disincentives like these for recycling fluorescent lamps, my guess is that most people are sneaking them into the garbage, which is a very bad idea because they contain mercury. When they break in your trash can or the landfill, that poison leaks into our soil, water and air. And there it remains forever, because humans are unable to destroy mercury.

It's a much better idea to recycle lightbulbs, but our state legislators have further complicated the issue with passage of AB1109, which forbids the manufacture and sale of *any* general purpose lighting containing dangerous metals above limits in use by the European Union after Jan. 1, 2010, unless certain collection and recycling conditions are met.

A task force of 21 members from various sectors assembled by the toxics control department recently submitted recommendations for collecting and recycling bulbs to the state Legislature. A bill to implement those recommendations would be introduced during the 2009 session; if passed out of both houses and signed by the governor, it would take effect Jan. 1, 2010.

That's a long time for wait for an easier way to recycle lightbulbs. We might even have a new state budget before then.

Before loading up your car, be sure to contact the facilities listed here (see box) to find out the types and quantities of fluorescent lamps they will accept.

When so many consumers are eager to help solve the climate crisis, it's ridiculous to make recycling lightbulbs so difficult. Let's hope our legislators see the light soon.

Recycle CFLs, please

They contain mercury, and if they get into the garbage, they can poison the soil, water and air. The EPA says mercury exposure can harm the brain, heart, kidneys, lungs and immune system of people of all ages. If it gets into the bloodstream of babies in the womb or young children, it may harm their ability to learn.

To find disposal sites, go to:

-- Home Depot or IKEA stores.

-- www.lamprecycle.org.

-- California Integrated Waste Management Board's Web site, links.sfgate.com/ZESG.

Terry Nagel is a member of the Burlingame City Council. The opinions expressed in this commentary are her own.

Reedley Exponent editorial Wed., Sept. 3, 2008:

In my OPINION

By Fred Hall

Excerpt from a weekly column:

Mitigation Fees and Big Brother

I really need the help of the public in understanding how—when the A.Q.M.D. slaps big environmental mitigation fees on a local project and spends the money elsewhere—it is helping improve conditions here in the Valley.

It just seems to me that The Air Quality Management District is overseeing a huge redistribution of wealth instead of making Reedley air better for all of us. Mitigation money should be offered to any builder who will use his own money to make that project “greener” rather than using it in Modesto, or some other city, to refit city buses. Obviously, some of the builders money goes to make the A.Q.M.D. even bigger and more grandiose. Such is the action of almost every bureaucracy. Everything is about power for the little minions who run them.

But, as always, that’s only one man’s opinion!

[Letter to the Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, Sept. 4, 2008:](#)

Support SB 974

Valley residents and elected officials should strongly support SB 974 because it will provide an ongoing source of new funds to clean up dirty diesel trucks, trains and other vehicles that deliver and pick up containers from our busy ports.

We have all experienced the black soot and health consequences from truck traffic traveling up and down Highway 99, Highway 58 and Interstate 5.

SB 974 would provide much needed funding to clean up those trucks and reduce the hazardous particulate matter that we all breathe.

With 117,000 people with asthma and 90,000 people with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease in Kern County, and the potential for lung damage to all of us, the call is urgent for action to address diesel soot, a major contributor to particulate matter.

Opportunities to raise new funds for diesel cleanup do not happen every day.

Please join with the American Lung Association of California and help pass this important legislation.

Sharon Borradori, American Lung Association, Bakersfield