

Air board simplifies no-burn guidelines

Visalia Delta Times, Tulare Advance-Register, Saturday, November 1, 2008

Burn-prohibition guidelines will change this year as of today, officials of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District announced Friday. Starting today, the daily wood-burning forecast as issued by Tulare County, will be either "wood burning prohibited" or "please burn cleanly," depending on existing air quality, the district announced.

Wood-burning forecasts will be available each day at 4:30 p.m. by calling 1-800-766-4463, or by going online at: www.valleyair.org.

New forecast method for burning wood

Lodi News Sentinel, Monday, November 3, 2008

This year, there is a new system for notifying the public as to whether wood burning is allowed or prohibited, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Each county will announce a wood-burning forecast daily. The public will either be informed that "wood burning is prohibited," or to "please burn cleanly," depending on the expected air quality for that day. Previously, there were three levels to the forecast. The new forecast method began Saturday.

Wood-burning forecasts will be available at 4:30 p.m. daily by calling 1-800-SMOG-INFO, by visiting www.valleyair.org/aginfo/WoodBurnPage.htm, or by subscribing to the forecast at www.valleyair.org/lists/list.htm.

New wood-burning rules start today

By Jane Kay

S.F. Chronicle, Saturday, November 1, 2008

Starting today residents of the nine counties in the Bay Area come under strict provisions of a new law banning wood-burning on spare-the-air days.

Before people light up fireplaces, wood stoves, outdoor fire pits or pellet stoves, they should call a toll-free hot line or view the Web to check air quality. Automatic e-mail alerts are also available.

Air experts estimate that one-third of the harmful wintertime particulate air pollution in the Bay Area comes from 1.4 million fireplaces and wood stoves.

First-time violators will receive written warnings. A second violation could result in a fine ranging from several hundred to several thousand dollars. Residents and businesses that burn wood as their only source of heat may be exempt and can check the Bay Area Air Quality Management District Web site for detailed information.

The ban will remain in effect until Feb. 28, and is expected to affect about 20 days.

Fireplace ban, fines effective today

By Denis Cuff - Contra Costa Times

Tri-Valley Herald and Contra Costa Times, Saturday, November 1, 2008

Bay Area residents who violate a new ban on burning wood fires on chilly Spare the Air nights could face some of the toughest fines in California — hundreds or even thousands of dollars per violation.

Effective today with the start of the burn season, the new Bay Area rule bars people from burning wood fires in fireplaces and wood stoves on bad air nights. The rule also bars excessive smoke from indoors fires any time of year.

Offenders — to be identified largely by neighbors phoning in complaints — will get written warnings for the first offense. But subsequent violations can be punished with fines of hundreds

or even thousands of dollars, said managers at the nine-county Bay Area Air Quality Management District.

Fines in the Bay Area are not fixed, unlike in Sacramento, Fresno, Stockton and Los Angeles where the initial penalty is \$50 or attendance at a smoke education class.

Bay Area pollution regulators said they expect their fines likely will be significantly higher.

The exact amount will be determined on a case-by-case assessment of several criteria set out in the state health and safety code. Those include the severity of the smoke, the impact on neighbors, the number of complaints and a violator's ability to pay fines — the same issues weighed in fining an oil refinery for a chemical release.

"We're not out to catch people by surprise," said Brian Bunger, the air district's general counsel, "but we want to protect people's health from the health effects of wood smoke on a few very cold nights when the problem is most severe."

The Bay Area typically gets about 20 nights a year on average when cold weather temperature inversions trap smoke near the ground, triggering Spare the Air alerts not to burn. Fires are allowed other nights.

Air district managers said a \$50 fine isn't enough to deter repeat offenders whose burning on bad air nights exposes neighbors to soot particles that can trigger asthma attacks, other lung and heart problems, and eye and throat irritation.

During air district public meetings the past two years, several Bay Area residents grumbled they could get no relief when neighbors persistently burned unseasoned wood, paper or other smoke-prone fuels.

"Smoke is a serious health issue," said Jack Broadbent, the air district's chief executive officer. The vast majority of people will follow the rule, but "a small percentage" may not, he said.

Critics of the rule say the air district should not regulate fires in homes. "In a time when people are being laid off, losing their homes and their 401(k)s, now they want to fine us for having a fire to heat our homes," said Bob Moore of El Sobrante.

Broadbent said the fines will be set to match the severity of the problem. If a homeowner burned while knowing the smoke aggravated a neighboring child's asthma, fines could be "in the thousands of dollars." On the other hand, some offenders might get little or no fine if the circumstances merited, he added.

The air district will rely heavily on public complaints to identify illegal burners, but the violations must be observed by district inspectors, officials said.

In Los Angeles, burning fines will be \$50 for a first offense, \$150 for a second and \$500 for a third. Fines in Fresno range from \$50 for a first offense to a maximum of \$1,000. In Sacramento, fines are \$50 for a first violation, but set on a case-by-case basis for subsequent violations.

Get \$125 to convert your wood-burning fireplace to gas

By Pat Brennan

O.C. Register, Saturday, November 1, 2008

It's a crackdown in slow motion. The region's smog agency says wood-burning fireplaces send too many fine particles to the atmosphere — tiny bits of soot that can work their way deep into the lungs to create a variety of health problems.

So the agency, the South Coast Air Quality Management District in Diamond Bar, is trying a combination of new restrictions and rebates to bring the public onboard.

First, the rebates. Beginning now, people who live in the South Coast Air Basin (including all of Orange County) can receive \$125 toward the purchase and installation of gas-log units. Visit the

smog agency's "Healthy Hearths Initiative" Web site to find a participating dealer near you, and to check your eligibility, all via ZIP code.

If you qualify, the dealer will subtract the \$125 from your purchase and installation price. You'll work out the installation details on your own.

Now, the restrictions.

As of last month, permanent indoor or outdoor wood-burning devices can be sold, or installed in existing homes, if they meet one of these conditions:

They're part of a dedicated gas-fueled fireplace.

They are U.S. EPA phase II-certified fireplace inserts or stoves.

They are pellet-fueled, wood-burning heaters.

They are masonry heaters that are not open-hearth wood-burning fireplaces.

And that's just for starters. In March 2009, permanent indoor or outdoor wood-burning devices will be banned from installation in new developments within the South Coast basin. Open-hearth fireplaces that don't use wood, such as gas-log sets, will be allowed.

Why are they being so hard on hearths? The air district says wood smoke from fireplaces contributes to a load of fine particles in the air that causes nearly 6,200 premature deaths a year.

American Lung Association cuts tie with NW chapter

By Gene Johnson, Associated Press Writer

Contra Costa Times, Saturday, November 1, 2008

SEATTLE—The American Lung Association has cut ties with its Northwest chapter, saying the affiliate veered away from its mission—and sold its multimillion-dollar Seattle headquarters for \$10.

The national charity said Friday that it sent a cease-and-desist letter to the American Lung Association of the Northwest, which represents the organization in Alaska, Washington and Idaho. The letter demanded that the regional affiliate stop using the American Lung Association name, turn over its financial assets and take steps to get the building back.

"We took these steps in order to protect these assets, which were intended for the purpose of advancing the mission of the American Lung Association," Carrie Martin, a Washington, D.C.-based spokeswoman for the national association, told The Associated Press in an e-mail.

The American Lung Association, founded in 1904, gave the Northwest affiliate notice in mid-September that it was in violation of several of the organization's policies. If those issues weren't fixed in 30 days, it said it would cut ties with the Northwest affiliate, which has been operating here since 1906.

The sides spent two days in mediation in Washington, D.C., this week, but failed to reach agreement. The alleged policy violations included that the Northwest affiliate had tried to change its mission statement and forbid its staff members from speaking with national staff, hindering day-to-day operations of both organizations.

Most troubling, the American Lung Association said, was that without permission, the regional affiliate's chief executive set up a separate corporation called the Pacific Northwest Lung Cancer Foundation.

Real estate records show that in August, the Northwest affiliate transferred its \$3.2 million Seattle headquarters to the new lung foundation for \$10. In addition, the American Lung Association of the Northwest then transferred \$600,000 to the new foundation in exchange for five years' rent in the building it used to own, Mike Alderson, president and chief executive of the affiliate, acknowledged in a court deposition.

In early October, the American Lung Association obtained a temporary restraining order in King County Superior Court, barring Alderson from violating the operating agreement that governs the relationship between the two organizations. The agreement says each organization must "hold all their funds and other assets in their own names."

In a court deposition, Alderson said he and two other "concerned community members" established the Pacific Northwest Lung Cancer Foundation in case the national organization tried to dissolve the operating agreement, but he didn't say why he thought that might happen. Court documents indicate that the Northwest affiliate was having financial problems and there was concern among some board members that the national organization might seize control of it.

Alderson repeatedly indicated in a court declaration that his chapter was not under the control of the national charity and could "operate its business as it sees fit." He has ignored recent requests for interviews, including an AP call for comment Friday night.

Laird Harris, chairman-elect of the Northwest affiliate's board, did not immediately return a message left on his cell phone Friday, but told the AP before entering mediation that he considered the dispute a "misunderstanding" and said there were "sound business reasons" for transferring the building.

Alderson started with the Northwest chapter in June, and according to Steve Nolan, chair of the American Lung Association, that's when things turned sour.

"The ALA and the ALA-NW have had a long, stable relationship covering a period of decades," Nolan said in a court declaration. "That changed abruptly ... when Mike Alderson took over."

Alderson directed that all calls from the national organization to staff in Washington, Idaho and Alaska be routed through his assistant; he said in his declaration it was to keep the national charity from "meddling." His assistant also sent out an e-mail declaring a new mission statement: instead of "preventing lung disease and promoting lung health," it was about helping individuals who have lung disease and helping prevent future lung disease. The Northwest affiliate's board never approved the change.

Eric Myers, a donor and volunteer for the American Lung Association in Alaska, said he was extremely troubled that after he provided \$3,000 to pay legal fees in defense of a smoke-free-workplace law in Juneau, Alderson never approved spending the money. As a result, the chapter did not file a friend-of-the-court brief in the case arguing as to why the law should be upheld.

Instead, Myers took his money back and gave it to the American Cancer Society.

"The ALA's goodwill, established over the last 100 years, is one of the ALA's most important assets," Nolan said. "When donors contribute to the ALA, or to its charter or constituent organizations, they expect their donations will go to support the mission as represented to those donors."

The national organization was founded to fight tuberculosis, but now works to prevent all forms of lung disease, focusing on asthma, smoking and air pollution. It has 14 affiliates around the country, and conducts direct-mail fundraising for those chapters. Money raised in each region stays in that region, with the national lung association keeping a slice for administrative costs.

Pennsylvania mill town remembers 1948 smog that killed 20

By Sean D. Hamill, New York Times News Service
San Diego Union-Tribune, Sunday, November 2, 2008

DONORA, Pa. – When the killer smog rolled into town here in late October 1948, 12-year-old Joann Crow thought it was an adventure.

"Dad couldn't drive us to school because it was so hard to see," said Crow, now 72. "He had to walk us to school that Wednesday with a flashlight, which we thought was fun."

But the next day, Oct. 28, her grandmother, Susan Gnora, 62, started coughing and experiencing chest pains. It was the same for many older residents of this Monongahela River valley mill town 24 miles southeast of Pittsburgh.

"She died the next day. That's when we all got worried," said Crow, now a retired child care worker. "They tried to blame it on asthma. But we knew that wasn't true. She was always so strong. It was that smog from the mills."

By the time a rain on Oct. 31 cleared the air, 20 people in Donora had died, and nearly half the town became ill in one of the worst air-pollution disasters in the nation's history.

After decades of largely remaining silent about the horrors of that week, Donora residents began to open up about it in recent years, placing a historical marker in town on the 50th anniversary.

Over the past two weeks, they marked the 60th anniversary with memorials for the families of those who died, discussions with experts about the lessons learned, and the opening of the Donora Smog Museum, with the slogan "Clean Air Started Here."

"It was the first time that people really understood that a lot of air pollution in a short period of time could kill people," said Devra Davis, director of the Center for Environmental Oncology at the University of Pittsburgh and author of "When Smoke Ran Like Water," about air pollution. She's also a Donora native who was 2 at the time of the killer smog.

The Donora smog gained national attention and helped lead to some of the first local and state pollution-control laws and, eventually, to the 1970 federal Clean Air Act.

"We want people to realize Donora was a big part of the environmental movement," said Don Pavelko, a Donora councilman who came up with the idea for the museum.

The two plants that caused the smog closed by 1966, and Donora today is a struggling town of 5,653.

After the deadly incident, U.S. Steel, owner of the plants, said it was "an act of God" and never admitted responsibility, even after the company settled lawsuits filed against it for \$250,000.

Smog museum a reminder of danger of pollution

Sean D. Hamill, New York Times

In the N.Y. Times, S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Sunday, November 2, 2008

Donora, Pa. -- When the killer smog rolled into town here in October 1948, 12-year-old Joann Crow thought it was an adventure.

"Dad couldn't drive us to school because it was so hard to see," said Crow, now 72. "He had to walk us to school that Wednesday with a flashlight, which we thought was fun."

But the next day, Thursday, Oct. 28, her grandmother, Susan Gnora, 62, started coughing and experiencing chest pains. It was the same for a lot of older residents of this Monongahela River valley mill town 24 miles southeast of Pittsburgh.

"She died the next day. That's when we all got worried," said Crow, a retired child care worker. "They tried to blame it on asthma. But we knew that wasn't true. She was always so strong. It was that smog from the mills."

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The Donora smog gained national attention and helped lead to some of the first local and state pollution control laws, and, eventually, the 1970 federal Clean Air Act.

"We want people to realize Donora was a big part of the environmental movement," said Don Pavelko, a Donora councilman who came up with the idea for the museum. "The smog in Donora over the years had been looked upon as a black eye. The older folks just didn't want to talk about it, because they thought it was bad publicity."

The museum, in a former Chinese restaurant, brings together photographs, old newspapers, maps and copies of studies of the smog. Brian Charlton, a high school history teacher, has been appointed archivist and is pursuing oral histories of that week.

Paul Brown, 81, who worked in the steel mills then, remembered going to work at the mill that Saturday.

"We all thought it would lift eventually, because we were used to the fog in the valley," he said. "Then I started to hear about people getting sick."

Smog was not unusual in Donora, a town of 14,000 then that was home to the American Steel & Wire Co. and the Donora Zinc Works plants - both run by the U.S. Steel Co. - that sat along the river and employed 5,000 people.

But this was different. The thick, yellowish, acrid smog was the result of an unusual weather inversion - a pocket of warm, stagnant air - that sat over the valley for five days.

Underneath what was essentially a lid on the valley were sulfuric acid, nitrogen dioxide and other poisonous gases, including fluorine, that would normally rise into the atmosphere. Most researchers blame the zinc plant, which had long been a source of complaints and was responsible for the denuding of almost all vegetation within a half-mile of the plant.

The actual toll from the smog has never been accurately calculated. Davis said Donora's mortality rate remained high for years afterward.

"There are still lessons to be learned," Davis said. "There are situations like Donora going on in India and Asia right now."

The plants both closed by 1966, and Donora is now a struggling town of 5,653.

After the deadly smog, U.S. Steel said it was "an act of God" and never admitted any responsibility, even after it settled lawsuits filed against it for \$250,000.

By the time legal fees were taken out and the money was spread among the hundreds of victims - both those who died and those who got ill - "My aunt said she had enough left to buy a TV," Crow said.

"I just hope the memory of it helps somebody else," she said. "I hope we never hear of something like this happening again."

Utilities putting new energy into geothermal sources Geothermal sources draw power firms in quest for renewables.

By Marla Dickerson

L.A. Times, Monday, November 3, 2008

Reporting from Reno -- Not far from the blinking casinos of this gambler's paradise lies what could be called the Biggest Little Power Plant in the World.

Tucked into a few dusty acres across from a shopping mall, it uses steam heat from deep within the Earth's crust to generate electricity. Known as geothermal, the energy is clean, reliable and

so abundant that this facility produces more than enough electricity to power every home in Reno, population 221,000.

Geothermal energy may be the most prolific renewable fuel source that most people have never heard of. Although the supply is virtually limitless, the massive upfront costs required to extract it have long rendered geothermal a novelty. But that's changing fast as this old-line industry buzzes with activity after decades of stagnation.

Billionaire Warren E. Buffett has invested big. Internet giant Google Inc. is bankrolling advanced research. Entrepreneurs are paying record prices for drilling leases in places such as Nevada, where they're prospecting for heat instead of metals.

"This is the new gold rush," said Mark Taylor, a geothermal analyst with the consulting firm New Energy Finance in Washington. He credits high fossil fuel prices and concerns about global warming with jump-starting the U.S. industry, along with federal tax credits and state laws mandating the wider use of renewable energy.

Global investment in geothermal was around \$3 billion last year, Taylor said. Although that's a blip compared with the estimated \$116 billion funneled into wind and solar, it's still a 183% increase over investment in 2006. In a difficult year for alternative energy funding, the industry snagged \$600 million through the first six months of 2008, Taylor said.

A lot of that new investment is in the United States, the world's leader in geothermal energy. More than 80% of the country's 3,000 geothermal megawatts lies in California. The Geysers, a network of 22 geothermal plants about 75 miles north of San Francisco in the Mayacamas Mountains, is the largest geothermal complex on the planet. Calpine Corp. owns the largest part of it.

The area around the Salton Sea in Imperial County is another hot spot. CalEnergy Generation, a subsidiary of Buffett's Mid-American Energy Holdings, owns and operates 10 plants there. It plans three additional facilities in the next few years, CalEnergy President Steve Larsen said.

In October, the Bureau of Land Management said it planned to open more than 190 million acres of federal land in California and 11 other Western states for new geothermal development.

Nevada, the nation's No. 2 geothermal producer, has 45 new projects underway, said Lisa Shevenell, director of the Great Basin Center for Geothermal Energy at the University of Nevada in Reno. An August lease sale of Nevada lands by the federal bureau brought in a record \$28.2 million.

"I've been at this 25 years, and I've never seen anything like it," said Shevenell, a research hydrologist. "Money is falling out of the sky."

Geothermal has been harnessed for industry since at least the 1820s. Operators tap natural reservoirs of scalding water and steam trapped thousands of feet underground, drilling wells to bring the heat to the surface to power turbines that feed electricity generators.

Costing about 4 to 7 cents a kilowatt-hour, Taylor said, geothermal is competitive with wind power and significantly cheaper than solar. Geothermal facilities occupy a fraction of the space required by wind and solar farms. The energy is also more reliable. Plants crank electricity around the clock, irrespective of whether the sun is shining or the wind is blowing.

This so-called baseload generation is coveted by power companies, which are under pressure to boost their use of green energy. California utilities must generate 20% of their electricity from renewable sources by 2010. Nevada utilities must hit that target by 2015. Geothermal is a cornerstone of that effort, accounting for about two-thirds of the renewable portfolio of NV Energy, Nevada's biggest utility.

"It's a 24/7 predictable supply," said Thomas Fair, the company's head of renewable energy. "That means a lot to a utility."

Greenhouse gas emissions are minimal in geothermal operations, and the size of the fuel supply defies imagination. There is 50,000 times more heat energy contained in the first six miles of the

Earth's crust than in all the planet's oil and natural gas resources, according to the environmental organization Earth Policy Institute.

The challenge is extracting it. Geothermal energy production requires three things: heat from the Earth's core, fractured rock to make it easy to get to and water to transport the heat to the surface.

Traditionally, developers have sought out pockets of hot water and steam hidden underground. Prime areas lie along continental plate boundaries, which is why California is such a hotbed.

Still, these reservoirs can be tricky to pinpoint. They're also expensive to reach. A geothermal well can cost \$5 million or more. The result: The U.S. currently derives less than 0.5% of its electricity from geothermal.

Some say the key to harnessing this energy source on a massive scale lies with a technology known as enhanced geothermal systems, or EGS for short. The idea is to engineer the necessary conditions by pumping water into the Earth's crust and fracturing the hot rocks below. Heat from the Earth warms the water, whose resulting steam is channeled back to the surface, powering turbines to create electricity. The water is then pumped back underground.

Though still in its infancy, EGS has the potential to open up much of the planet to geothermal development. Tiny plants are already online in France and Germany. More than 30 EGS firms are engaged in exploration and development in Australia.

Google.org, the philanthropic arm of the Mountain View, Calif.-based search engine company, is trying to push EGS in the U.S. It recently gave \$10 million to Southern Methodist University's Geothermal Lab to update the nation's geothermal resources map, as well as to two California companies -- Potter Drilling and AltaRock Energy Inc. -- that are working on EGS technologies.

Google is urging the U.S. government to spend big on geothermal R&D as part of the company's push to encourage utility-scale renewable energy that's cheaper than coal. About half the United States' electricity is generated by that dirty fossil fuel. China, already the world's largest emitter of carbon dioxide, is adding coal-fired plants at a swift rate.

EGS "is indeed the sleeping giant of renewable energy," Dan Reicher, director for climate change and energy initiatives at Google.org, said during a recent industry conference in Reno. "It's the killer ap."

Some industry veterans such as Shevenell are miffed that EGS has grabbed the spotlight when there's plenty of energy to be extracted quickly using conventional techniques. Still, she credits Google for helping pump life into a dormant sector.

"This country is in an energy crisis," she said. "We need energy now, and this is a proven way to get it."

[Fresno Bee editorial, Sat., Nov. 1, 2008:](#)

Fewer fires, cleaner air

Valley air district tightens the rules on fireplaces for this winter.

With cooler weather in the Valley and rain in the forecast, people are looking forward to throwing a few logs in the fireplace and lighting up a warm and cozy fire. But that's going to be illegal on quite a few more days this winter than in the past, beginning tomorrow. And the consequences of violations could be steep.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has tightened up the rules on wood burning for this winter. Officials predict that in some Valley areas there could be four times as many no-burn days called this winter than last year. And an exemption for those living in the foothills is history.

The only exemption still on the books is for those who have no access to natural gas in their homes. In an emergency or an outage, fireplaces may be used when other heating sources are cut off.

Some predict that there'll be a lot of scofflaws burning wood in their fireplaces anyway. That may be so, but it could be costly. The first offense carries a fine of \$50. That can be waived if the offender attends an air pollution class, but subsequent offenses could draw fines of \$150 and higher.

Not being able to burn wood in fireplaces means little more than forgoing a pleasant winter ritual for many. For those who struggle to pay utility bills, it can be a genuine hardship. But the cost is worth it -- wood smoke contributes much of the winter-time particulate pollution that is responsible for serious health risks in the Valley.

Particles from wood smoke can lodge deep in human lungs, and cause asthma and other lung diseases. They are also implicated in heart diseases. In the winter, when weather conditions often make wood smoke hug the ground, the impact can be exacerbated.

For some of those who face economic hardship, there may be help. The air district plans to revive a program that offers rebates to residents who buy and install pellet stoves or natural gas fireplaces, devices that don't pollute as badly as conventional wood-burning fireplaces.

Pacific Gas & Electric may also be able to help. Some residents could qualify for discounts, or other programs that spread the cost of energy bills evenly across the year.

As in the past, the air district will have some employees out looking for violations on the no-burn days. Complaints about violations will also be taken from the public. Some people are uncomfortable about "snitching out the neighbors," but that should not be a concern.

The Valley's air quality problems are real and very costly -- several billions of dollars each year in added health costs, and the premature deaths of hundreds of Valley residents. All of us have a responsibility to participate in the effort to clean the air, and that includes those who burn wood in fireplaces. They contribute a small part of the pollution problem, to be sure, but all those small parts add up to the mess we have above us -- and every little bit helps when it comes to cleaner air.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses new proposition to fight ozone pollution in regional areas. For more information on this and other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Proponen nuevo frente regional contra el ozono

Manuel Ocaño

Noticier Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Monday, November 3, 2008

La Asociación de gobiernos por el Aire del Oeste del país propuso el fin de semana abordar el problema del ozono regionalmente para cubrir nuevos requisitos federales.

Desde California hasta Utah y Washington al norte, y hasta Texas en el este, el ozono se esparce sin límites, cualquiera que sea su origen. El gobernador, Arnold Schwarzenegger en California sostiene que la contaminación llega inclusive desde remotas regiones en el Océano Pacífico.

La asociación sostiene que los estados podrían contribuir regionalmente para cumplir con el nuevo tope de la Agencia federal de Protección Ambiental (EPA) al ozono.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses UFW says "Yes It Can" on High Speed Train.](#)

UFW says 'Si Se Puede' on High-Speed Train

Noticiero Latino

United Farm Workers

Radio Bilingue, Wednesday, October 29, 2008

United Farm Workers of America (UFW), the nation's first successful and largest farm workers union founded in 1962 by Cesar Chavez, has endorsed California's Proposition 1A – noting that the high-speed train system it will fund is key to improving air quality and mobility for hardworking men and women throughout the Central Valley, increasing connectivity to family members living in Los Angeles, Inland Empire, Bay Area, and San Diego.

"The United Farm Workers of America stands behind Proposition 1A because a safe, reliable high-speed train will benefit Central Valley families greatly," said UFW President Arturo S. Rodriguez. "Farm workers are forced to work countless hours for little pay and with the rising cost of gas and other traveling expenses, too often, they are not able to visit - without a major financial strain - family members residing in areas like Los Angeles, Orange County and the Inland Empire. The UFW believes in addition to creating thousands of jobs and benefiting the environment, Proposition 1A will also serve as a better and more cost-efficient method of travel for the farm workers who toil our fields daily."

Proposition 1A is a \$9.95 billion bond that is on the Nov. 4 ballot. The initiative will fund the statewide high-speed train system, which will create more than 450,000 jobs, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, reduce U.S. reliance on foreign oil, and greatly improve mobility in California. This project is of particular interest to the UFW because it will provide increased mobility for California's farm workers, many of whom work in the heart of California's agriculture industry – the Central Valley – which has limited transportation options.

The electrically propelled steel-wheel system will also improve air quality in regions such as the Central Valley and Los Angeles. High-speed trains will eliminate nearly 12.7 billion pounds of the greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming each year. That's equivalent to removing more than one million vehicles from our roads annually. High-speed trains are part of San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's Fast Track Plan for Clean Air.