

Wood burning is out again tonight

Steve Rubenstein, staff writer

S.F. Chronicle, Wednesday, November 26, 2008

SAN FRANCISCO -- Fireplaces will be dark again in the Bay Area tonight after the third Spare the Air alert for the winter season was announced.

The alert bans indoor and outdoor wood burning and applies to fireplaces, wood stoves, pellet stoves, fire pits and fire logs, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District said.

Air pollution levels were predicted to be moderate around the Bay Area through Friday, and additional Spare the Air fireplace bans could be called for later in the week.

Earlier forecasts of possible smoke-dampening rain tonight and Wednesday have largely fizzled out, and now the National Weather Service is talking of possible record-breaking heat this weekend, which at least would minimize people's desire to burn logs.

The limited Bay Area fireplace ban took effect this season for the first time and is expected to be declared for 20 or more days through February, when the winter season ends. On Monday night, district inspectors continued their patrols, checking for fires and chimney smoke and issuing warnings by mail.

On Monday, a district spokeswoman said 11 warnings had been issued so far. Repeat offenders could be fined \$2,000.

Winter air pollution is caused primarily by small particles in wood smoke and can cause asthma, bronchitis and lung disease.

Wood-burning ban in force for 3rd day

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S.F. Chronicle, Wednesday, November 26, 2008

Fireplaces of all law-abiding people were dark again in the Bay Area on Tuesday night after the third Spare the Air alert for the winter season was announced.

The alert bans indoor and outdoor wood burning and applies to fireplaces, wood stoves, pellet stoves, fire pits and fire logs. It will be in effect until at least noon today, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District said.

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Wood fires banned for another 24 hours in Bay Area

By Denis Cuff - Contra Costa Times

In the Tri-Valley Herald, Wednesday, November 26, 2008

No-burn day again: Wood fires are banned in fireplaces and stoves in the Bay Area from noon today to noon Wednesday during the third Spare the Air alert of the winter season.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District issued the burning ban for the nine-county region because of weather conditions that trap smoke near the ground. Children, seniors, and people with lung and heart ailments are especially vulnerable to health problems from fine particle pollution during this period.

Violators can be fined after getting one written warning.

To sign up for e-mail notifications of no burn alerts, contact www.sparetheair.org. To get automatic phone notifications, call 1-800-430-1515. To report burn violations or check whether a 24-hour no burn alert is in effect, call 1-877-4-NO-BURN

The winter burn season lasts through February.

S.F. considers congestion tolls on cars

Michael Cabanatuan, Staff Writer

S.F. Chronicle, Wednesday, November 26, 2008

Drivers could pay \$3 to enter, leave or pass through parts of San Francisco during morning and evening commutes under a proposal designed to push motorists out of their cars.

The San Francisco County Transportation Authority, which has been studying the idea of imposing congestion-based tolls on city streets for nearly two years, released some of the details of its study Tuesday at a meeting of its board, which is made up of the 11 members of the Board of Supervisors.

The board won't consider recommending a congestion toll plan until February, but members nodded their heads during the report, and at least three, Jake McGoldrick, Tom Ammiano and Ross Mirkarimi, offered words of support.

"Clearly, I like where this is going," said Mirkarimi.

The congestion toll, if implemented, would be the first in the nation. Similar tolls, also known as cordon tolls, have been used in London and Stockholm, where they're credited with reducing traffic congestion, air pollution and miles driven. They also have raised tens of millions annually for public transportation improvements.

While many of the details are still being studied, Zabe Bent, principal planner for the authority, said a \$3 toll was chosen because it would probably influence how many people choose to drive versus walking, biking or taking transit.

However, the actual toll price will be determined by the mayor and Board of Supervisors if they choose to move the plan ahead, said Jose Luis Moscovich, executive director of the authority.

Long process ahead

"There's going to be a long process of determining the toll," he said. "There are many variables, including social variables. The amount we arrive at may be very different."

The \$3 toll would be collected on weekdays between 6 and 9 a.m. and 4 and 7 p.m. - meaning the average car commuter would pay \$6 a day in congestion tolls. The fees would be collected using FasTrak transponders and a network of cameras. Motorists would be able to pay via phone, the Internet or retail outlets.

Drivers interviewed downtown Tuesday said having to pay an additional \$6 probably would prompt them to take public transit, drive when the tolls aren't charged or skip San Francisco altogether.

"I won't come here," said Chris Concepcion, who is retired and lives in Pleasanton. "I'll go somewhere else. There's nothing unique about some of the things in San Francisco. You can find them elsewhere."

But for those occasions when he really wants to come downtown, Concepcion said, he'd probably take BART.

Brian Gigliotto, a financial adviser who lives and works in San Francisco, wasn't sure if it would affect his commute to downtown.

"I'd either suck it up and pay it if it were a small amount," he said. "Or I'd take public transit."

Selecting a route

Planners are still considering where to collect the tolls. Initially, they considered establishing a downtown zone - a twin triangle area bounded by Washington, Jones, Turk and Harrison streets and Van Ness Avenue.

Then they looked at charging fees at the city's major gateways: the Bay and Golden Gate bridges, Highway 101 and Interstate 280.

But the downtown zone was too small, and drivers would just avoid it, causing problems in adjacent neighborhoods, Bent said. And charging at the gateways would reduce traffic from outside San Francisco but might end up encouraging more driving among city residents, she said.

So the study is focusing on two other scenarios:

-- The "double-ring," which would charge a toll at gateways and another toll at the downtown zone. Tolls at one of the areas would be higher than the other - perhaps \$1.50 at the gateways and \$3 downtown, or vice versa.

-- The northeast cordon - a larger toll zone that would include downtown and Civic Center but also Fisherman's Wharf, North Beach and a number of other neighborhoods. The boundaries would include the waterfront on the north and east, Divisadero and Castro streets on the west and 18th Street on the south.

The congestion toll could raise between \$35 million and \$65 million a year - money that could be invested in transportation improvements, with an emphasis on boosting service and capacity on Muni, BART and other transit agencies that serve San Francisco.

Tolls pay for improvements

Transit improvements that could be funded with the toll include bus rapid transit on the Van Ness Avenue and Geary Boulevard corridors, more frequent local and regional service, more regional transit parking, electrification of the Caltrain line, bicycle lanes and a bike-sharing program.

Drivers interviewed said better transit service will be necessary if the plan is to work. Tom Radulovich, a BART director from San Francisco, told the board that trains are already crowded and urged investments in BART and Muni Metro as part of the plan.

"We've already reached our design capacity," he said, "and are going to need to make investments in expanding rail capacity."

He also suggested the city consider a free-transit zone downtown - something offered in Seattle and Portland - to entice commuters.

Moscovich said the transit improvements are likely to focus on increasing the amount of transit available and the frequency of service "to be competitive with the auto."

The congestion toll plan would also offer discounts to some drivers - including taxi drivers, who would not have to pay. Low-income and disabled drivers and residents of the toll zone would pay half, and drivers who paid bridge tolls would get a \$1 discount. Commercial vehicles, rental cars and car-sharing vehicles would pay a lower fleet rate.

The authority will hold public meetings on the plan in December, narrow down the options being studied in December and January, and issue its final recommendations to the Board of Supervisors in February. If the plan moves forward, environmental studies would need to be done - a process that would take two to three years.

"This is not something we're doing tomorrow," said Moscovich. "But we need to think about it today in the middle of warnings of a recession because we need to plan it today to be ready for tomorrow."

Few discuss city's future plans

Weak showing for General Plan Update

By The Madera Tribune - Keith Pendleton

Madera Tribune, Wednesday, November 26, 2008

Only a handful of Maderans showed at a General Plan Update meeting that focused on the city's policies for conserving resources and maintaining health and safety.

Conservation, which includes air quality and water resources, must include city effects on climate change according to Senate Bill 375, which mandates that 17 regional transportation planning agencies around the state adopt a "sustainable communities strategy" by Sept. 30, 2010, to outline how an area will reduce greenhouse gas emissions from automobiles and light trucks.

Audience questions ranged from air quality monitoring to the difficulty of joining the city water system, and about half were deemed outside of the city's intended focus for the meeting.

A Maderan asked about policy for moving residents from well-dependence to the city water infrastructure. City representatives took the matter under advisement and said the specifics of that particular case made joining the city water system expensive due to the length of pipe needed for an abnormally large property frontage and distance from city tie-in.

White House Prods Allies to Oppose Limits on Greenhouse Gases

By Juliet Eilperin, Staff Writer

Washington Postm Wednesday, November 26, 2008

As the Bush administration prepares to issue its ruling on whether to limit greenhouse gases, it's sending out a message to some of its allies: Tell us how much you don't want us to regulate emissions linked to global warming.

Last week, the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs sent an e-mail to mayors reminding them that time was running out if they wanted to comment on the proposal the administration issued in July, which laid out how the government might curb greenhouse gases under the Clean Air Act. A 2007 Supreme Court decision required the Environmental Protection Agency to issue such a ruling, but the White House made it clear in its e-mail that it does not think that is a good idea.

"At the time, President Bush warned that this was the wrong way to regulate emissions. [House Energy and Commerce Committee] Chairman John D. Dingell called it 'a glorious mess,' " Jeremy J. Broggi, the office's associate director, wrote in the e-mail, obtained by The Washington Post. "And many of you contacted us to let us know how harmful this rule would be to the economies of the cities and counties you serve."

The e-mail notes in bold, underlined text that the comment period for the rulemaking "closes on November 28" and provides a link to a U.S. Chamber of Commerce blog post that warns that a federal cap on greenhouse gases "will operate as a de facto moratorium on major construction and infrastructure projects."

White House spokesman Tony Fratto said the White House sent the missive to "a lot of mayors" because many of them had warned the administration that a mandatory limit on carbon dioxide would hurt their constituents.

"What this e-mail is doing is reminding them that they said this rule would be bad for them, there's a deadline for the public comment period and they should get their comments in," Fratto said. "It's not enough to call us; they need to get their public comments in."

But S. William Becker, executive director for the National Association of Clean Air Agencies, questioned why the administration would actively marshal support for blocking federal action on climate change.

"It appears there is no bottom to the administration's pit of disdain for regulating greenhouse gases," Becker said. "On the eve of the comment deadline on one of the most important environmental issues of our time, the White House is resorting to scare tactics, including rhetoric from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, to incite opposition among elected county and city officials."

William L. Kovacs, the chamber's vice president for environment, technology and regulatory affairs, said that his office had nothing to do with the White House's e-mail -- "I wish we had that kind of influence" -- and that his group had generated close to 10,000 negative comments on the proposal.

Advocates of regulating greenhouse gas emissions got one piece of good news Tuesday: A federal judge in Rhode Island ruled that General Motors, Chrysler and the Association of International Automobile Manufacturers cannot challenge that state's adoption of California's rule limiting automobile tailpipe emissions to combat global warming.

Government backs off drilling near national parks

By PAUL FOY, The Associated Press
in the Washington Post, Tuesday, November 25, 2008

SALT LAKE CITY -- Drilling leases on and near the border of Utah's scenic national parks have been pulled from an auction block.

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management announced its decision late Tuesday after negotiations with National Park Service officials who objected to noise, lights and air pollution near Arches National Park, Dinosaur National Monument and Canyonlands National Park, all in Utah.

Some of those parcels were within 1.3 miles of Delicate Arch, a freestanding span of 33 feet that is the signature landmark at Arches near Moab, Utah.

Hundreds of thousands of acres throughout Utah will still be auctioned off Dec. 19 for oil and gas drilling.

In all, the Park Service objected to 93 parcels where drilling could drown out the sounds of wind, water and wildlife for visitors, possibly contaminate nearby springs and worsen ozone levels, Mike Snyder, the Denver-based regional Park Service director, wrote Monday in a protest letter to the bureau.

BLM maps showed the agency will remove 34 parcels from the December auction, including those bunched along park boundaries.

That was little more than a third of what the Park Service wanted eliminated.

Snyder, however, showed no disappointment. "Working with Selma Sierra, the BLM Utah state director, has resulted in the kind of resource protection that Americans want and deserve for their national parks," he said in a joint statement.

Snyder couldn't be reached for comment late Tuesday.

The BLM left some drilling parcels -- including parts of three tracts near Arches park -- on the auction list which critics say could still ruin park views.

"I don't know why we're that desperate to compromise the extraordinary values of the national parks. Any industrialization of areas adjacent to park creates irreparable damage," said Dave Nimkin, a regional director for the National Parks Conservation Association.

The BLM, he said, "would burn the Rembrandts to heat the castles."

Other leases include parcels on high cliffs along whitewater sections of Desolation Canyon, an area explored by John Wesley Powell in 1896, and plateaus populated by big game atop Nine Mile Canyon, home to thousands of ancient rock art panels.

Environmental groups push green now

By Renee Schoof

Modesto Bee and Sacramento Bee, Wednesday, November 26, 2008

WASHINGTON – Don't wait until the financial crisis is over to attack global warming because cleaner ways to produce and use energy will lead to a stronger economy, leaders of environmental groups said Tuesday as they outlined their wish list for President-elect Barack Obama.

The recommendations from 29 of the nation's most prominent environmental and conservation groups emphasized a clean-energy approach to economic revitalization but also included detailed suggestions for Alaska's Arctic region and for conserving land and water resources nationwide.

Leaders of the groups who helped develop the recommendations to Obama's transition advisers rejected the idea that fighting global warming and protecting the environment would be too expensive in an economic downturn.

"Our economy is suffering and so is our environment. The solutions to both go hand in hand," said Larry Schweiger of the National Wildlife Federation.

The country needs to reduce global warming emissions and protect its water, fisheries, forests and wildlife, which are all stressed by climate change, Schweiger said.

He also said that environmental protection will affect the quality of life "for Americans everywhere for generations." And he argued that outdoor recreation creates many American jobs.

"The engines that drive our economy," he said, "are not only in Detroit."

Obama has asked Congress to pass a stimulus plan quickly so that he can sign it soon after taking office. The report said the stimulus plan was an opportunity to invest in things such as mass transit, renewable energy and weatherization – all of them sources of new jobs.

"There's economic opportunity if we do this right," said Kevin Knobloch, president of the Union of Concerned Scientists.

The report also argued that a green plan for the economy would "provide a path out of poverty and a more just society."

It argued that many people can't afford some of today's more expensive global warming solutions – such as hybrid cars or solar panels. But it said that they'd benefit from new jobs and less pollution.

A few of the recommendations in the nearly 400-page report:

- Pass a law in 2009 that sets up a sale of global-warming pollution permits and uses the money for clean energy, green jobs, consumer relief – especially for those most in need – and protection for vulnerable ecosystems.
- Grant California and other states a waiver under the Clean Air Act to enforce their own tougher standards for pollution from vehicles. The Bush EPA denied the waiver.
- Start a legal review of all Arctic-area Chukchi and Beaufort Sea oil and gas leases made during the Bush administration. Revoke, suspend or limit as many as legally possible to give time for an environmental review. Halt further planned lease sales in the Arctic Ocean, Bristol Bay and conservation priority areas of the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska.

Judge: Automakers cannot block RI emission rules

By RAY HENRY, Associated Press Writer

In the S.F. Chronicle, Washington Post and other papers, Tuesday, November 25, 2008

PROVIDENCE, CA (AP) -- Automakers cannot sue to block Rhode Island from enforcing tighter standards on tailpipe emissions first adopted by California because the industry has already lost similar lawsuits elsewhere, a federal judge has ruled.

U.S. District Judge Ernest Torres dismissed General Motors Corp., DaimlerChrysler Corp. and two automakers associations from the case, but his ruling permits several local car dealers to pursue the lawsuit for now. The automobile manufacturers have lost similar lawsuits in California and Vermont.

Daimler AG divested its Chrysler unit to Cerberus Capital Management in 2007 but still retains a 20 percent stake in the newly created firm, Chrysler LLC.

In his ruling, Torres said allowing another lawsuit would be a waste of court resources.

"It is difficult to see what interest the public has in permitting the plaintiffs another bite of the apple in challenging regulations limiting the emission of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere," Torres said in the ruling, which was signed Monday and made public Tuesday.

Although Torres allowed the auto dealers to continue with the lawsuit, the judge said lawyers for the state could still make arguments to have the firms dismissed from the case.

Similar lawsuits are pending in New Mexico and two federal appeals courts. W. Michael Sullivan, director of Rhode Island's Department of Environmental Management, said the decision was a victory for the state. He said automakers could use existing technology to meet the clean air standards.

"This decision is going to allow us to reinforce the message of, 'Stop fiddling around and do it,'" Sullivan said.

The ruling in Rhode Island prompted several environmental advocates to call on the auto industry to cease its lawsuits over the air pollution standards.

"It's time for the automakers to read the handwriting on the wall," David Doniger, policy director for the Natural Resources Defense Council's Climate Center, said in a written statement. "Lock up your lawyers and unleash your engineers."

Charles Territo, a spokesman for one of the plaintiffs, The Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, said his organization was pleased the local auto dealers can continue the lawsuit in Rhode Island. He said the association intends to pursue similar cases outside the state.

"Automakers are committed to enhancing energy security and reducing carbon dioxide emissions and believe the best way to do so is through a single national standard set by the federal government," Territo said.

California's proposed restrictions would force automakers to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 30 percent in new cars and light trucks by 2016.

The federal Clean Air Act gives California the unique ability to create its own vehicle pollution standards because it started regulating air pollution before the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency was created. But the EPA denied California's application last year to enforce its new rules.

California officials are appealing that decision in court. They expect that President-elect Barack Obama will support the state's stricter standards. If California prevails, other states would be free to enforce California's standards as their own.

Rhode Island and 11 other states — Connecticut, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Vermont and Washington — have adopted California's tailpipe standards. The governors of Arizona, Colorado, Florida and Utah have said they plan to adopt the regulations. The rules have been under review elsewhere.

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[MediaNews Editorial in the Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald, Wednesday, November 26, 2008:](#)

Air board needs to give more, better notice

THE BAY AREA Air Quality Management District last Wednesday issued its first winter spare the air alert, which is a 24-hour ban on burning wood to keep warm, with hopes of making the air just a little bit cleaner.

Those who violate the alert the first time can be subjected to a written warning and subsequent violations can result in fines as much as several thousand dollars.

The problem with the first alert was the air board's timing. While the agency claimed it issued the alert around noon, public notice didn't come over regional news wires until after 3 p.m., approximately two hours before sundown.

Unless the public is really paying attention, many Bay Area residents were probably unaware that an alert was taking place. Meanwhile, 60 inspectors, who probably had better things to do, wandered the streets looking for illegal smoke emitting from homes, ready to pounce with written warnings that would be mailed to unsuspecting residents.

What is significant here is that unlike the summer spare the air days where people wouldn't be fined for driving their cars, there are fines involved in burning wood in fireplaces and elsewhere when cold air and low winds produce a weather cap.

This is one reason why we originally opposed subjecting people to these unfair penalties; the air board has no reliable way to get the word out to properly give enough notice to residents who have fireplaces.

Our major complaint is that smoke from fireplaces is a very small percentage of emissions, not comparable to automobiles, and it's easier to hit average residents than carmakers.

If the air board fines people for burning wood, it must inform the public much sooner in the day so information can, for instance, be carried by morning and midday newscasts along with Web sites of local news organizations. A second alert came out Monday and, while it came in the morning, some news organizations carried it and some didn't, or the information was buried. It's inconsistent.

Simply posting the alert on the air district's Web site is not the answer, nor is a service where you can be alerted on your cell phone. Not everyone has a computer or cell phone. There is a phone service between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m., but now the burden is on the public to call, and how do we anticipate the exact weather conditions that would spark a spare the air situation? It's easier to see a smoggy day in the summer than on a cold, cloudy day. So does this mean we have to call the air board on a daily basis? We don't expect the majority of the Bay Area to do that.

The burden should be on the air board. Weather reports are reliable enough where a potential spare the air alert can be anticipated, and giving at least 12 hours widespread notice is fair. It probably wouldn't hurt to partner with Caltrans to post alerts on message boards along our roadways.

Since the air board has implemented this burden on Bay Area residents, it is only fair to ask that proper notice is given in return.