

Valley air district fires up wood stove program

By Alex Breitler, Record Staff Writer
Stockton Record, Friday, February 6, 2009

San Joaquin Valley air pollution cops hope to stoke renewed interest in an annual program that gives wood burners a discount to replace their dirty wood stoves or upgrade their fireplaces.

That means more value - \$750 per residence, or \$1,500 for lower-income residents - and a simpler application process.

More than 500 people have switched to natural gas stoves or inserts, or installed federally certified wood or pellet stoves, since the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District started the Burn Cleaner program in 2007. And yet, not all of the money allocated the first two years was used.

Thus the bigger reward for this year's program, which began this week and will continue until the \$150,000 in incentive funds runs out.

"It's definitely a very large discount," said district spokesman Anthony Presto. "It could be more than 50 percent off" of a new stove or insert.

Officials also felt the need to focus on low-income residents.

"A wood stove or a natural gas stove is a large enough investment that those with lower incomes might not be able to purchase and make that investment," Presto said.

Smoke pollution is a serious health hazard in the Valley; tiny particles known as PM2.5 are inhaled into the lungs and enter the blood stream, causing heart damage. A recent California State University, Fullerton, study estimated 812 premature deaths each year in the Valley because of PM2.5.

Steve Kutsch, owner of Stockton Screen Window & Door Co., one of two area businesses participating in the program, said earlier this week that he'd already gotten about 10 calls from interested residents. On average, a new wood stove or insert might cost \$3,000 to \$3,500, he said.

"(The discount) helps people pay for a good portion of that," he said. "It's a big deal."

To get started

Here's how the Burn Cleaner program works:

- Go to either of two local retailers that are participating in the program, Stockton Screen Window & Door Co. or Top Quality Insulation & Fireplaces, Inc. in Valley Springs. (While Calaveras County residents are not in the air district and cannot participate in the program, that business serves the Valley as well.) Or check www.valleyair.org for a list of stores in other counties. Only residents of a Valley county may participate;
- Fill out an application form. To qualify as low-income, you'll need a copy of your utility bill showing that you receive a reduced rate.
- If enough money is available, the district will issue a voucher for \$750 or \$1,500 (low-income). You'll then buy the stove or insert.
- If you need help, call (559) 230-5800.

Smog: Wood or gas furnace? Which is better for indoor air?

By Mark Grossi, FresnoBee.com, Thursday, Feb. 5, 2009

This comment was just posted on an older blog item, and we need help on it, folks:

"I know this is going to sound like a stupid question but can you tell me what type of furnace produces cleaner indoor air quality. A wood furnace or a gas furnace? I have someone telling me

the indoor air quality is the same with either one. Gas is just as clean as wood. I find this hard to believe. Please educate me."

I don't think this is a stupid question. It's right on. I wish I had thought of it. Inside air quality is pretty crucial. So, does anyone have the answer out there?

Saying it's a bargain, Merced renews lobby deal Lobbying firm will represent city's interests in Sacramento and Washington

By Scott Jason

Merced Sun-Star, Friday, Feb. 6, 2009

It may be the best return on investment, or simply evidence of how complicated government, even at the state level, has become.

Merced this week renewed its \$65,000 contract with Townsend Public Affairs, the lobbying firm it hired two years ago to represent its interests in Sacramento and, when warranted, Washington, D.C.

In a report to the City Council, city administrators touted Townsend with helping them land \$21.5 million in grant funding for three projects.

While state and federal leaders work on behalf of the areas they represent, it's often the lobbyists -- and their relationships with behind-the-scene players -- who grease the wheels of government.

"It's so large, and there are so many nuances," city spokesman Mike Conway said. "Even a city the size of Merced needs the help."

So does the county. It has a state lobbyist on a yearly \$45,000 contract. It pays \$56,700 to a federal lobbyist.

"It should be money well spent," county spokeswoman Katie Albertson said. "(Lobbying the government) is very competitive these days. It's the way it works."

City leaders credit Townsend with helping land \$9 million from Proposition 1B for the G Street undercrossing, another \$12 million for the first phase of the Campus Parkway and \$500,000 from the federal government to study how to keep Black Rascal Creek from flooding.

The Irvine-based firm, with offices in Sacramento, Oakland and Washington, includes a transportation expert who knows how to tweak grant applications so they're more likely to be approved, Conway said.

With the G Street underpass project, for example, the city touted how it would improve air quality and help commerce because delivery trucks wouldn't be stalled at train crossings. It won approval last year.

The city's also hoping its lobbyist can help it get a piece of the federal government's economic stimulus package as its details are hashed out, Conway said.

Christopher Townsend, president of the firm, likened lobbying to hiring an attorney to deal with a court case. People can represent themselves, but it doesn't always result in the best outcomes.

His firm mainly represents cities, including Oakland and Fresno, as well as nonprofit agencies.

This year, his staff is trying to secure park funding for Merced from Prop. 84, a \$5.4 billion bond measure passed in 2006. It has also set up meetings between Mayor Ellie Wooten and key state decision-makers, he said.

His staff is also talking with state and federal officials in case more foreclosure aid becomes available.

Merced's state representatives are always fighting for their districts, but don't always know the back-channels of government, such as the California Cultural and Historical Endowment, which gave \$1.9 million to the Merced Theatre restoration effort.

As government revenue shrinks, the knee-jerk reaction might be to cut lobbyists in the face of City Hall layoffs, Townsend said.

However, the federal government is set to send out billions of dollars. Even the state, despite its massive budget shortfall, has billions more in bond money to hand out.

"The smart cities, including Merced, are gearing up for that," he said. "There's going to be a lot at play."

Air quality said to be 'good' today

L.A. Daily News, Friday, Feb. 6, 2009

DIAMOND BAR - The South Coast Air Quality Management District predicted air quality that will be in the good range in the South Coast Air Basin today.

The forecast released by the AQMD lists the highest expected Air Quality Index level -- for ozone unless otherwise noted -- in each area of the South Coast Basin for today.

Area AQI Forecast for Today GOOD IN THE: Coastal Area AQI: 49 PM10/PM2.5 Metropolitan Area AQI: 49 PM10/PM2.5 San Fernando/Santa Clarita Valleys AQI: 45 PM10/PM2.5 San Gabriel AQI: 45 PM10/PM2.5 Inland Orange County AQI: 49 PM10/PM2.5 Riverside Valley AQI: 49 PM10/PM2.5 San Bernardino Valley AQI: 49 PM10/PM2.5 Hemet/Elsinore Area AQI: 49 PM10/PM2.5 Temecula/Anza Area AQI: 49 PM10/PM2.5 San Gabriel Mountains AQI: 39 PM10/PM2.5 San Bernardino Mountains AQI: 34 Ozone Big Bear Lake AQI: 32 Ozone Banning Pass Area AQI: 45 PM10/PM2.5 Coachella Valley/Low Desert AQI: 39 PM10/PM2.5 Antelope Valley AQI: 35 Ozone Victor Valley AQI: 34 Ozone Northern Mojave Desert AQI: 32 Ozone Central Mojave Desert AQI: 33 Ozone

The AQI measures the amount of pollutants in the air, whether ozone, carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide or PM10 (particulate matter).

Conditions are considered "good" when AQI levels are between zero and 50. No health impacts are expected when air quality is in this range.

When AQI levels are 51 to 100, air quality is deemed "moderate," which means that unusually sensitive people should consider limiting prolonged outdoor exertion.

Air quality is designated "unhealthful for sensitive groups" when AQI levels are from 101 to 150. At this level, active children and adults, and people with respiratory disease, such as asthma, should limit prolonged outdoor exertion.

When AQI levels are between 151 and 200, air quality is deemed "unhealthful." At this level, active children and adults, and people with respiratory disease, such as asthma, should avoid prolonged outdoor exertion. Everyone else, especially children, should limit prolonged outdoor exertion.

"Very unhealthful" air quality is declared when the AQI registers between 201 and 300. Active children and adults, and people with respiratory disease, should avoid all outdoor exertion when the AQI is at this level. Everyone else, especially children, should limit outdoor exertion.

EPA begins greenhouse gas waiver review

Modesto Bee and Tri-Valley Herald, Friday, February 6, 2009

WASHINGTON — The Environmental Protection Agency is beginning its review of the controversial 2007 decision denying California the right to regulate greenhouse gas emissions from cars and trucks.

New EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson made the announcement Friday. It follows an order from President Barack Obama last week to revisit the waiver denial issued by the Bush administration.

Obama has supported letting California and other states set stricter standards for vehicle emissions than the federal government's - something the auto industry and the Bush administration opposed.

Jackson's statement said Obama's EPA believes the waiver denial was "a substantial departure from EPA's long-standing interpretation of the Clean Air Act's waiver provisions."

NY state says sewage plant is a rotten neighbor

By Marcus Franklin, Associated Press Writer
Contra Costa Times, Friday, Feb. 6, 2009

NEW YORK—A sewage processing plant that nearby residents say produces a stench variously described as raw sewage, feces, manure and burning flesh was sued Thursday by the state attorney general.

The odors emanating from the privately run New York Organic Fertilizer Co. in the Bronx violate state air pollution laws, according to the lawsuit filed by Attorney General Andrew Cuomo in state Supreme Court. The lawsuit seeks to force the company to stop the smell.

"The stench has plagued the community, making simple activities like opening windows, walking to school or enjoying a local park not only unpleasant but an actual health risk," Cuomo said in a statement. "NYOFCo's owners have blithely allowed the facility to continue to spew noxious odors into the community."

The plant and its parent company, Houston-based Synagro Technologies Inc., on Thursday denied violating pollution laws, describing the plant as a "good neighbor."

"The facility has taken, and will continue to take, proactive measures to ensure that it is in compliance with its permits and applicable law and is a good neighbor in the community," they said in a statement released through lawyer Christopher J. McKenzie.

For years Hunts Point residents have blamed the odors for their headaches, vomiting, nausea, and asthma attacks.

"By treating South Bronx as its own private dumping ground," resident Cerita Parker said, "NYOFCo has denied our community the basic satisfaction of enjoying a walk in the park, a Sunday backyard barbecue or even a summer's breeze from an open window."

Parker, a member of Mothers on the Move, which filed a nuisance lawsuit in 2008 with the help of the Natural Resources Defense Council, hoped the odor would be eliminated with the "weight of (Cuomo's) office behind our cause."

The sewage processor, which opened in 1991, accepts sludge from the city's sewage treatment plants and turns it into fertilizer pellets, which are sold to out-of-state agricultural operations.

On Tuesday, state Department of Environmental Conservation officials announced they were trying to tighten controls at the Bronx plant by amending its air pollution permit, said Suzanne Mattei, a DEC regional director.

The DEC's proposals include testing additional chemicals coming from the plant's stack and putting tougher standards in place for the plant's pollution control equipment.

The public has a month to comment on the proposals.

Report: US, China must cooperate on climate change

By Anita Chang, Associated Press Writer
Modesto Bee, Friday, February 6, 2009

BEIJING — Cooperation between China and the United States is crucial to successfully addressing the climate change problem, said a report released Friday that was co-produced by the U.S. energy secretary prior to his nomination.

The world's two leading emitters of greenhouse gases have long been at odds over how to handle climate change. China has insisted that developed nations bear the main responsibility for cutting emissions. But the U.S. under former President George W. Bush refused to sign an international pact requiring cuts in emissions, saying developing nations should not be exempt.

"If these two countries cannot find ways to bridge the long-standing divide on this issue, there will literally be no solution," said the report, jointly issued by the Asia Society's Center of U.S.-China Relations and the Pew Center on Global Climate Change.

It called on leaders of the countries to take immediate action and collaborate on developing technologies for clean use of coal, enhancing the use of renewable energy sources such as solar and wind, and creating new mechanisms for financing clean energy.

"We are in uncharted water that will beg an unprecedented effort from both the world at large and the United States and China in particular," the report said.

Environmentalists have welcomed steps on the part of President Barack Obama to address climate change, including the nomination of Steven Chu to the post of energy secretary. Co-chair of the project that produced Friday's report until Obama's December nomination announcement, Chu has vowed to develop clean energy sources and said scientific research is key to tackling climate change.

The global economic crisis has been an opportunity for both the U.S. and China to spur improvements in energy efficiency. A proposed U.S. stimulus package includes grants, tax breaks and loan guarantees to promote solar and wind energy development and to cut energy use in everything from government buildings to schools and homes.

China says it will subsidize investment in energy efficiency and technology as part of a 4 trillion yuan (\$586 billion) stimulus package.

"China's economic development is now at a stage where the development must be sustainable and there must be protection of resources and the environment. Therefore, the issue of climate change cannot be avoided," said Liu Deshun, a professor with the Institute of Nuclear Energy and New Energy Technology at Tsinghua University in Beijing.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton plans to address climate change on a visit to China later this month.

And China, whose leadership the report praised as "increasingly well-informed," has been winning kudos for its changing role in recent climate talks. Beijing has agreed that developing countries could help contain carbon emissions - as long as the wealthy industrial countries gave them the needed technology and finances.

In comments to the Financial Times earlier this month, Premier Wen Jiabao said China supports the Copenhagen climate conference scheduled for late 2009, which aims to ink a global agreement on reducing emissions. But he also said it was "difficult" for China to agree to any set emission reduction target.

"This country is still at an early stage of development. Europe started its industrialization several hundred years ago, but for China, it has only been dozens of years," he told the paper.

China, which is heavily dependent on coal to fuel its growing economy, rivals the United States as the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases. But it has said its economy should not be penalized by binding cuts in emissions of carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases when their per capita emissions are much below those in developed countries.