

Get fire ready

Sierra Star, Thursday, June 4, 2009

When summer rolls around people think of barbecues, beaches, swimming and boating, but in the Mountain Area, a foremost thought should also be fire safety and awareness.

Every year CAL FIRE receives around thousands of calls to fires -- many of which could have been prevented by taking proper precautions and preparing for fire season.

Creating a defensible space of 100 feet around homes is key -- and it's required by law. The first 30 feet immediately around your home creates a safety zone. The next 70 feet should be cleared of brush and other fire hazards.

Keep all construction and wood piles 30 feet away from structures and keep vegetation cut down around them.

CAL FIRE gives 10 reasons why clearing brush with a minimum of 100 feet of defensive space around each structure on your property is necessary.

1. To save lives, the lives of firefighters, yourself and your neighbors.
2. To reduce and prevent property loss and damage.
3. To save your tax dollars that pay for emergency fire suppression.
4. To reduce your insurance bill.
5. To protect wildlife and their habitat.
6. Because it is the law.
7. To reduce [air pollution](#).
8. To reduce the accumulation of leaves, limbs and plant litter that provide hiding space for unwanted and harmful insects and plant species.
9. To increase ground water supplies; spring flow and pond water.
10. Aesthetics.

CAL FIRE says defensible space works and that it has been a proven safeguard many times, saving homes and outbuildings from the devastating effects of wildfire.

Here are some additional fire safety tips to follow:

- Clear all needles and leaves from your roof, eaves and rain gutters.
- Remove tree limbs within 10 feet of your chimney and all dead tree limbs hanging over your house or garage.
- Cover your chimney outlet or stovepipe with a spark-arresting screen of half-inch or smaller mesh.
- Install and maintain spark arresters in all chain saws, portable equipment, tractors and motorcycles.
- The following additional fire safety tips are also strongly recommended:
- Maintain a minimum water storage supply of 2,500 gallons for use in emergency situations. (This guideline is mandatory for all new construction, but is recommended for existing homes.)
- Your address should be displayed in plain view on your property and your driveway. If you live in a rural area, your address should be posted at every turn or Y in your road.
- Use directional arrows if necessary. The numbers and letters should be a minimum of 3 inches and be of reflective material on a contrasting background.

- We can not help you if we can not find you.
- Ensure adequate access to your home and property to enable firefighters and their equipment to quickly reach a fire outbreak. Identify two escape routes from your property.
- Remember lawn mowers were made to cut living grass, not dry, dead grass. Instead, use a weed trimmer.
- All mowing should be done before 10 a.m. because even metal hitting a grass-covered rock can ignite a fire.
- Spark arrestors are required in some areas on portable, gasoline powered equipment.

Even when following these fire safety rules, a fire can still occur. Summer lightening increases the chances of wildfires.

Remember to always call 911 the moment a fire is spotted.

For more information about fire preparedness and safety, log on to www.fire.ca.gov/.

Judge deals setback to Chevron refinery plan

By David R. Baker, staff writer
S.F. Chronicle, Tuesday, June 9, 2009

Chevron Corp.'s long-planned, highly contentious project to revamp its Richmond oil refinery has been thrown into doubt, with company executives and local officials unsure what will happen after a recent court ruling.

Judge Barbara Zuniga of the Contra Costa County Superior Court has thrown out a key environmental report on the project, siding with activists who sued to stop the project after the Richmond City Council narrowly approved it last year.

In her brief ruling, Zuniga said the report was too vague on a key question: whether the project will allow the 107-year-old refinery to process heavier grades of crude oil than it currently does. The report, she said, also did not analyze a significant piece of the project - new hydrogen pipelines.

Finally, Zuniga criticized the city for giving Chevron a needed permit before the company submitted a plan for limiting greenhouse gases after the upgrade.

The judge's ruling did not, however, say whether work on the project must stop. After winning the City Council's approval in July, Chevron started the renovations in September.

The project has long been the subject of protests and heated debate. Environmentalists and community activists call it a major expansion of a refinery that already sickens Richmond residents.

Chevron representatives call the project an upgrade, one that will modernize the aging plant. The refinery, one of California's largest, will process the same amount of oil after the renovations are finished, said company spokesman Sean Comey. But the changes will allow Chevron to make more gasoline from that oil, increasing gasoline production by roughly 7 percent.

Environmentalists who have fought the project for years want work halted immediately.

"My understanding is they're supposed to stop and dismantle any construction built so far," said Jessica Tovar, a community organizer for Communities for a Better Environment. The organization was one of four groups that sued to stop the project.

A Chevron spokesman, however, said the San Ramon company is still studying the ruling and isn't certain that construction must stop. And Richmond's city attorney said the city is awaiting clarification from the judge.

"I presume there will be a further order from the court that addresses that issue," City Attorney Randy Riddle said.

Critics say the project will allow Chevron to process heavier grades of crude oil, containing higher levels of toxins such as mercury, that could increase air pollution.

Chevron insists that the refinery will still use the same types of crude oil that it does now. Once the four-year upgrade is finished, however, the refinery will be able to process larger amounts of the heavier grades of crude already used there, Comey said.

But that distinction wasn't clear in the project's environmental report, Zuniga wrote in her decision released Friday. The report "is unclear and inconsistent as to whether (the) project will or will not enable Chevron to process a heavier crude slate than it is currently processing," she wrote. As a result, the report does not adequately assess the project's effects on the environment and "fails as an informational document," she wrote.

At a glance

What happened: A Contra Costa County Superior Court judge threw out a key environmental report on Chevron's project to revamp its Richmond oil refinery.

What it means: The decision throws the project into doubt. Opponents say must Chevron stop and dismantle any construction built so far. The company says it isn't sure construction must stop.

What's next: Richmond's city attorney expects a clarification from the judge.

Fuel-storage company pleads guilty in smog case

Bob Egelko, staff writer

S.F. Chronicle, Tuesday, June 9, 2009

Shore Terminals, which runs an oil products terminal in Selby, north of Rodeo on San Pablo Bay, has pleaded guilty to lying to air-quality regulators to conceal emissions of smog-causing chemicals, federal prosecutors said.

Prosecutors said emissions-control devices on the company's fuel trucks malfunctioned and were shut down for a year starting in December 2005, allowing the release of organic compounds that turn to ozone in sunlight.

The company admitted submitting false reports to the Bay Area Air Quality Management District and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency claiming it was complying with the Clean Air Act, prosecutors said.

The crime is punishable by a fine of up to \$500,000. Sentencing is scheduled for Aug. 14.

[Bakersfield Californian Commentary, Monday, June 8, 2009:](#)

Fixing polluting vehicles is a win-win

The Tune In and Tune Up program operated by the nonprofit organization Valley Clean Air Now does a lot more for Kern County and the San Joaquin Valley than just fixing polluting vehicles. The program also contributes significantly to the region's economy.

As the owner of Rosedale Automotive in Bakersfield, I have worked with Valley CAN since 2008 to help implement Tune In and Tune Up in our area. The program provides free on-site emissions testing and repair vouchers worth up to \$500 for drivers of high-emitting vehicles. This has been shown to be the most cost-effective method ever tried in California to reduce vehicle emissions.

This successful program is dedicated to making significant improvements in the valley's severe air pollution problem by reducing tailpipe emissions from older, out-of-tune vehicles.

One of the additional benefits is that Tune In and Tune Up gives an economic shot in the arm to every community when events are conducted. Since 2006, Valley CAN has spent over \$600,000 in nine valley cities repairing high emitting vehicles. Many of those who receive the repair vouchers live on modest incomes and thus have been affected by the economic downturn. If not

for this program, they often could not afford to make these important repairs but would continue to run their heavily emitting vehicles.

Every time an event is conducted, there is more than the direct benefit of the free smog repairs. There is also an economic ripple effect in the community when as many as 500 people bring their vehicles for testing in a single day, like they did recently in Bakersfield. Surrounding businesses, like mini-markets, gas stations and restaurants around the event location benefit from the crowds that come to the event.

The most recent Tune and Tune Up at Bakersfield College, on March 28, helped 500 participants from Bakersfield, Arvin and surrounding communities. Tune In and Tune Up events often brings in about 350 vehicles for emissions testing, but the growing concern for the air pollution and the widespread success of this program encouraged Valley CAN to test more vehicles at the Bakersfield event.

Valley CAN, through the Advanced Transportation Technologies and Energy Initiative at Fresno City College, provides each participating community college that hosts a Tune In and Tune Up event with an \$8,000 grant to purchase emissions testing equipment for their automotive programs. Most state-funded colleges are on tight budgets, so this type of donation is invaluable to pay for educational tools.

By repairing high-polluting vehicles, we can begin getting a real handle on reducing our emissions problems and improving the quality of life in Kern County. A typical Tune In and Tune Up event removes approximately 3,000 tons of carbon monoxide, 300 tons of hydrocarbons and 150 tons of oxides of nitrogen from the air in one year. This also has long-term economic value by making our region more attractive to new business and new residents that add to the vitality of our communities.

Bruce Sherley has owned Rosedale Automotive, a Gold Shield Certified Smog Shop in Bakersfield for nine years and has been in the automotive business for over 30 years.

[L.A. Times column, Tuesday, June 9, 2009:](#)

Plan to combat global warming? Pie in the sky

A cap-and-trade system to reduce carbon is too expensive, won't work and potentially rife with corruption.

Whenever you hear a politician start a sentence with, "If we can put a man on the moon ... ," grab your wallet.

For years, Democrats, enthralled by the cargo cult of the Kennedy presidency, have used the moon landing as proof that no big government ambition is beyond our reach.

The latest example of anthropogenic-lunar empowerment is global warming. Al Gore and Barack Obama routinely cite the Apollo program as proof that we can make good on the president's messianic campaign pledge to stem the rising ocean tides and hasten the healing of the planet.

The problem with the "if we can put a man on the moon, we can certainly spend trillions on this or that" formulation is that it sees political and scientific accomplishments as interchangeable. The moon landing was a daunting but nonetheless discrete challenge. Throw in enough brainiacs and blank checks -- and heroes willing to risk their lives -- and it was almost foreordained that someone would make that small step for man and that giant leap for mankind.

But politicians see things through a political lens -- every great accomplishment looks like a political accomplishment. Kennedy cultists seem to think that JFK's pledge succeeded in part because he was eloquent and inspiring and popular. No doubt all that helped. But if Kennedy had promised that by the end of the decade America would have a fully functioning perpetual motion machine, his grand challenge would be remembered as a joke.

Recall that Kennedy's successor, with far more political capital than Kennedy had, promised to defeat poverty. Historian Steven Hayward notes that, in 1966, Lyndon Johnson's commander in the War on Poverty, Sargent Shriver, told Congress that the White House believed poverty in

America would be eliminated within 10 years. "Why," Hayward wryly asks, "should social science be more difficult than rocket science?"

I don't know that one is more difficult than the other, but I do know that they are not interchangeable. Physics is good at figuring out how to split atoms. Sociology, not so much.

Obama seems to be on both sides of the lesson. The president says he wants to invest massively in scientific research, eventually spending 3% of gross domestic product on R&D on eliminating fossil fuels. Who knows? That might work.

But at the same time, the Democrats are pushing their cap-and-trade scheme -- the Waxman-Markey climate bill -- through Congress, and it surely won't work.

The Apollo engineers' motto was "Waste anything but time." Waxman-Markey seems to do that one better, promising to waste everything, including time. It's a legislative blunderbuss that fails any remotely honest cost-benefit analysis, as Jim Manzi painstakingly demonstrates in the current issue of National Review. Under the bill, the government would sell or give away waivers - - call them ration cards -- for carbon emissions, worth tens of billions of dollars. The system is destined to become politicized. Waivers will be granted to favored industries and donors in states with political clout.

If everything worked exactly according to plan, it would cost the economy trillions of dollars over the coming decades. Meanwhile, climatologist Chip Knappenberger -- administrator of the World Climate Report, an avowedly global-warming-skeptical blog -- uses standard climate models to show that the payoff would be to reduce global temperatures by about 0.1 degree Celsius by 2100. Sponsors of the legislation haven't offered a competing analysis.

"The costs would be more than 10 times the benefits," writes Manzi, "even under extremely unrealistic assumptions of low costs and high benefits." All the while, China, India and other countries are simply scoffing at the suggestion they curtail their carbon emissions.

Now, I am more skeptical about the threat of global warming than Manzi is, never mind the Al Gore chorus. But let us assume the chorus is right and it is the moral equivalent of a war for our very survival as a civilization. The question remains: Why? Why this approach? Why see global warming as an excuse to expand government regulation and taxation rather than invest in problem-solving?

The U.S. government could spend trillions on research into scrubbing carbon from the air, bioengineering organisms to eat greenhouse gases or crafting substances to reflect more heat back into space. We could establish prizes for development of long-life batteries or clean coal technologies. And if any of these investments paid off, decades from now, the benefits would still dwarf Waxman-Markey at a fraction of the cost. It hardly takes a rocket scientist to see that.

[MediaNews editorial in Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald, Tuesday, June 9, 2009:](#)

Editorial: Port of Oakland should adopt truck rules

AN ESTIMATED 2,000 trucks pass through the Port of Oakland every day. Many of them are older diesel vehicles or newer trucks without proper filters to reduce air pollution.

As a result, the air quality in and around the port is a health threat for thousands of Oakland residents. A 2008 report by the California Air Resources Board determined that 20 percent of the children in West Oakland had asthma. Even more alarming, the study found that the life expectancy of West Oakland residents was 10 years less than that of other residents of Oakland.

Pollution from diesel trucks is believed to be a significant contributor to the health hazard, That is why CARB wants to ban trucks older than 1994 models from the port and to ban trucks from 1994 to 2006 that do not have filters by Jan. 1, 2010.

Unfortunately, the Port of Oakland Commission rejected the ban at its meeting on June 2. The decision threatens to undermine the comprehensive truck management program, which is designed to conform to CARB's rules.

The rejection of the ban leaves the Port of Oakland behind the Port of Los Angeles, which adopted a truck ban and registry last October.

According to Los Angeles port officials, air quality has improved 25 percent to 35 percent.

Both Los Angeles and Long Beach ports have adopted freight container fees to fund clean-air measures as well as implementing bans on older trucks ahead of CARB's Jan. 1 deadline.

At least some of the comprehensive truck management program is under way in Oakland. A truck retrofit project was approved in April in which the port is spending \$5 million to help finance retrofitting trucks. It is supplemented with another \$5 million from the Bay Area Air Quality Management District.

CARB is expected to kick in up to \$10 million more to assist with retrofits and replacing older trucks.

The truck management program also has the support of the Teamsters union.

There are other efforts at the Port of Oakland to improve air quality, such as new docks and facilities that will allow ships to shut down polluting engines while they are loading and unloading their cargoes.

But the new truck regulations are a critical element in efforts to clean up the air at shipping ports.

With the retrofit financing and the documented health dangers from diesel pollution, there is no good reason why the Port of Oakland should lag behind other California ports in cleaning the air.

The port has done an excellent job of dredging shipping channels and attracting new businesses and state-of-the-art facilities even in a poor national and state economy.

Fortunately, the port commission has not closed the door on the truck regulations and has agreed to reconsider the bans and the comprehensive truck management program at its June 16 meeting.

We hope that the commission will reverse its June 2 decision and will go ahead with all of the efforts needed to make sure the economic benefits of a growing port are not clouded by pollution that risks the health of thousands of Oakland residents who live and/or work near the waterfront.