

Fresno air district has own 'cash for clunkers'

Written by Business Journal staff

The Business Journal, Monday, 06 July 2009

San Joaquin Valley residents can receive either \$1,000 in cash or \$5,000 toward a new car by participating in the local air district's own "cash for clunkers" program.

Through the Polluting Automobile Scrap and Salvage (PASS) program, owners of older, polluting cars can receive the funds for getting them off the road. The fund currently has \$2 million and applications are being accepted. The goal is reducing the amount of emissions from the Valley's least fuel-efficient vehicles.

Last month Pres. Obama signed a national "clunkers" bill called the Car Allowance Rebate System (CARS) that would give the owners of gas-guzzling vehicles a \$3,500-\$4,500 credit for trading the car in for one with better gas mileage.

To be considered for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District PASS program, cars must:

- Have been continuously registered in the air basin for 24 months (including San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings and Tulare counties).
- Be in drivable condition.
- Have passed the most recent smog check.

To find out if a car is eligible, call 1-(877) 900-JUNK or visit www.valleyair.org/PASS.htm

For more information about the federal CARS program, visit www.cars.gov

Air district offers cash for clunkers

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Tuesday, July 7, 2009

Owners of older, polluting cars may receive \$1,000 in cash or \$5,000 toward the purchase of a newer, cleaner vehicle through the Valley air district's Polluting Automobile Scrap and Salvage program.

Applications will be taken until the \$2 million available through the program runs out. To be considered for the program, vehicles must:

- Have been continuously registered for 24 months in Tulare, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings or portions of Kern counties.
- Be drivable.
- Have passed the most recent smog check.

Eligibility for replacement will be determined by vehicle history, age and emissions. To find out if a car is eligible for the program, call 877-900-5865 or go to www.valleyair.org/PASS.htm.

Dealers optimistic about cash for clunkers program, but want details

BY COURTENAY EDELHART, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, July 7, 2009

Just about every car dealership in town is excited about a federal cash for clunkers program designed to get older, smoggy gas hogs off the streets, but as they say, the devil's in the details.

Even though financial incentives to trade in less fuel efficient cars for cleaner ones technically kicked off July 1, the California New Car Dealers Association is advising members to hold off on finalizing deals for another two or three weeks.

That's because the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, which is overseeing the Cash Allowance Rebate System, or CARS, is still sorting out how to implement the program President Obama signed into law last month.

"We're cautioning our dealers because of the substantial penalties for turning in a voucher for a car that doesn't qualify," said the association's director of government affairs, Brian Maas.

"I know everybody's chomping at the bit to get the program out there as soon as possible, but we just want to make sure all the logistics are worked out, first."

Taft Chevrolet Buick Pontiac is among many local dealers holding off for now.

"It's going to be a great program," said owner Devinder Singh. "We're just waiting for the details on how to do it."

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says that's understandable, and insists all the details should be worked out by about July 23, said spokeswoman Ellen Martin.

"It takes a while to get something this big up and running," she said. "We can't just do this by fiat."

Under the program, consumers get a trade-in value of \$3,500 to \$4,500 to put toward the purchase of a new, more efficient vehicle, depending on the type of car, truck, SUV or van they are turning in.

Eligible cars must actually work and meet a long list of criteria including gas mileage and age.

The CARS Act requires that the trade-in vehicle be crushed or shredded so that it cannot be driven again.

Also, the replacement vehicle can't cost more than \$45,000.

But logistics such as, for instance, who is authorized to destroy the old cars, have yet to be made clear.

Consumers who heard about the widely publicized program were angry when North Bakersfield Toyota told them it wasn't up and running yet, said general sales manager John Puryear.

"I have eight or nine customers waiting who are upset because it's been approved and signed but it's not in place," he said. "But for now, we're on hold."

Dealers have good reason to be skittish. There's a penalty of \$15,000 per transaction for dealers who try to get Uncle Sam to pay for a car that isn't eligible.

And since the true market value of such clunkers is far below what the government is paying for them, dealers don't want to get stuck with cars they can't get reimbursed for or sell.

Jim Burke Ford's strategy is to encourage consumers to come in and get pre-qualified now, with the understanding that the deal won't close until closer to the end of the month.

"We've had quite a bit of traffic on it, so there is interest," said president and general manager Dan Hay. "Sometimes they find out their car isn't eligible and end up working with us, anyway, to trade in for a used car."

Dealerships would very much like to see the program succeed. They could use the help.

Local dealers sold 708 vehicles in May, down 62 percent from May 2008, according to Cross-Sell Reports, a national auto data service.

In April, local dealers' new vehicle sales totaled 1,391, which was 37 percent fewer than in April 2008.

"It's going to be a good thing when they finally get it going," said Mo Hosseini, director of operations for a group of eight local dealerships, including Chrysler and Nissan.

"It will help us, because next to homebuilders we're probably the hardest hit by this recession. And we're also among the biggest generators of tax revenue for the state, so in a way it's just moving money from one pocket to another."

If you're too impatient to wait for the feds, there's one other option.

The PASS (Polluting Automobile Scrap and Salvage) program allows owners of older, polluting cars to receive either \$1,000 in cash or \$5,000 toward the purchase of a newer, cleaner car.

Note that's newer, not necessarily brand new. And if you're low-income, the rules are more lenient on the age of the upgraded vehicle.

The PASS program is available now, and will continue until its \$2 million funding cap is reached.

Only residents of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District are eligible to participate. That includes western Kern County.

The federal CARS program ends Nov. 1 or when its \$1 billion funding runs out, whichever comes first.

- For information about the federal government's Cash Allowance Rebate System, or CARS, go to: www.cars.gov/faq.html
- For information about The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's Polluting Automobile Scrap and Salvage, or PASS, go to: www.valleyair.org/PASS.htm

S.J. air district drafts emissions mandate

By Zachary K. Johnson, Record Staff Writer
Stockton Record, Tuesday, July 7, 2009

STOCKTON - A proposed rule to limit emissions would require employers to take steps to reduce the number of miles driven by their employees on the way to and from work.

In draft form, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District rule would mandate that businesses employing 100 or more workers adopt strategies to cut down on vehicle trips.

"At the end of the day, it's about reducing emissions ... by assist(ing) employees to make the decision to not drive a single-passenger vehicle to work every day," district spokeswoman Jaime Holt said.

The proposed rule has not been approved by the air district's governing board and would not go into effect until mid-2010. Agricultural, seasonal and other types of workers aren't counted toward the 100-or-more number. Local business owners who want to weigh in on the new rule can participate in a public workshop today via video teleconference at the downtown headquarters of the San Joaquin Council of Governments.

"This is an opportunity for employers to get involved and assist the rule's development," said Yvette Davis, a planner at the Council of Governments, the local transportation authority. The agency also has programs to reduce vehicle emissions and could be a resource for employers, she said. "We don't have to reinvent the wheel, and we can help them to get themselves started."

The proposed rule sets goals for employers to create strategies such as providing incentives, providing services and marketing changes.

Work schedule flexibility is one way to meet goals under the proposed rule. Cramming two work weeks into nine days of work would eliminate one commute, and flexibility would also make it easier to schedule carpools. To cut down on lunch-hour trips, employers can cover the delivery cost for dry-cleaning services, make sure employees can buy lunch at work or organize lunch delivery.

How businesses can help reduce air pollution will also be one of the topics on the agenda for a business summit Wednesday morning with the Valley Air District hosted by the Greater Stockton Chamber of Commerce.

Communication between the air district and the businesses affected by its rules are important, Chamber CEO Douglass Wilhoit said.

"If things are going to be jammed down people's throats, they're going to have to hold their nose and they're not going to like it," he said.

Individuals and employers alike can reduce air pollution by making air quality a priority in daily decision making, said Anthony Presto, an air district spokesman. And employers can find savings by increasing efficiency, he said. "We're looking for win-win situations."

Where to go

Today

Workshop to discuss new San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District rule for businesses employing 100 or more workers will be held via video teleconference at 10 a.m. at the San Joaquin Council of Governments offices, 555 E. Weber Ave., Stockton. For more information, visit www.valleyair.org/Workshops/public_workshops_idx.htm.

Wednesday

The Greater Stockton Chamber of Commerce is hosting a business summit with the air district at 9 a.m. at 445 W. Weber Ave., Suite 220, Stockton. To reserve a space, call (209) 557-6472.

Fresno could be home to biofuel producer

Written by Business Journal Staff

The Business Journal, Monday, 06 July 2009

Fresno is among many locations under consideration by expanding Van Nuys-based US Biofuels, Inc.

As demand for alternative energy increases, US Biofuels has been researching cities around California to build 12 additional photobioreactor greenhouses by 2010.

Along with the Fresno location, other areas that have been researched are Imperial Valley, Angels Camp and Palmdale.

The enclosed greenhouses that US Biofuels operates will eventually produce over 50 million gallons of biodiesel fuel per year, according to a statement released by the company. The fuel can be used for a myriad of purposes, including powering automobiles and jets and heating homes.

The photobioreactors used by the company create fuel from algae grown in the greenhouses, which will spread across eight acres each. No further information was available on where in Fresno the greenhouses would be located.

California solar-power subsidy program approaches its limit

A bill seeks to quadruple the amount of electricity consumers with roof panels may sell. The solar industry pushes to pass it. PG & E, Southern California Edison and San Diego Gas & Electric oppose

By Marc Lifsher

Los Angeles Times, Monday, July 6, 2009

Reporting from Sacramento -- Lis Sines of Hermosa Beach loves watching her electric meter run backward.

When that happens, she knows that the 20 solar panels on her roof are producing more power than she needs to run her 3,800-square-foot home. The excess electricity flows to the electric company's grid, and she gets its full retail value credited to her utility bill.

Sines' electric bill has plunged since she and her husband, William, installed a photovoltaic system on their roof three months ago. In June the bill totaled just \$1.26, compared to about \$100 a year earlier.

But the Sineses' subsidy may not be available to future solar-power users for long.

The state's \$3.3-billion solar subsidy program has become so popular that the state utilities are approaching the legal limit for how much power they can buy from customers.

The limit could be reached in parts of northern and central California served by Pacific Gas & Electric Co. by the end of this year. The state's other two investor-owned utilities, Southern California Edison Co. and San Diego Gas & Electric Co., are proceeding somewhat more slowly.

Eager to keep the program growing, the solar industry is pushing for approval of legislation in Sacramento that would quadruple the amount allowed. The state's for-profit utilities oppose the higher cap in the bill AB 560 by Assemblywoman Nancy Skinner (D-Berkeley).

A key Senate utilities committee vote on the measure is expected this week. Currently, utilities are limited by state law from buying from its customers more than 2.5% of a utility's maximum generating capacity. Skinner's bill would lift the cap to 10%.

All three companies oppose Skinner's bill. They do not want lawmakers to raise the limit until next year at the earliest, after the California Public Utilities Commission tallies up the program's costs and benefits.

Utilities say they strongly support solar power but want more information about whether it's fair to further increase financial incentives for solar-panel ownership.

Such incentives, they point out, would come at the expense of most of the utilities' other customers, who don't want or can't afford to invest in the costly panels.

"We want to make sure there isn't an unfair level of cost-shifting," said Jennifer Briscoe, a spokeswoman for San Diego Gas & Electric.

Fairness issues were also raised in a report on Skinner's bill by the staff of the Senate Energy, Utilities and Communications Committee, which will review the bill this week.

The report pointed out that California solar-panel owners already benefit from a variety of subsidies approved in recent years -- even without this "net metering" program, which allows people to sell power to the utilities.

Solar power users get a state subsidy of about 20% of the purchase and installation cost and a federal income tax credit of 30%. Adding more incentives could be going too far, the committee staff analysis suggested.

The staff report also takes issue with the amount of credit that solar users get when they sell power to the utilities.

"By compensating the solar or wind customer at the full retail rate" for energy sold to the grid, "the utility is using ratepayer funds to pay the solar or wind customer at a rate well above the value of the generated power, which is about one-third of the total cost of a typical residential customer's bill," it said.

The other two-thirds of the bill covers utilities' fixed expenses for building power plants and transmission lines, buying electricity from independent generators and meeting a variety of state mandates, including the cost of subsidizing low-income customers and solar-power system owners.

Supporters of solar-power systems say the net metering program and other subsidies are essential. And many would like to see no caps at all.

"Without net metering we're not going to see a lot more people" buy expensive solar systems, said Adam Browning, executive director of the Vote Solar Initiative, a San Francisco advocacy group. "If we hit the net metering cap, the California solar industry grinds to a halt."

Caps are an impediment to fully developing solar power's potential and its ability to provide clean energy that can be tapped in urban areas, where it is most needed, during peak demand on hot summer afternoons, Browning said. Eighteen states allow net metering without any caps, he noted.

The appeal of lower electric bills appears to be persuading more people to go solar.

Legislation, approved in 2007 and known as the Million Solar Roofs program, has spurred the production of solar-generated electricity to rise 78%. That's equivalent to the power generated by a modern power plant, the Public Utilities Commission reported last week.

Consumer demand continues to grow despite the recession. Applications for state subsidies hit a record high in May, the commission said.

The commission's first solar program assessment recommends raising the net metering cap "to prevent a stall in the solar market," and the commission endorses the Skinner bill.

One solar booster is Harry Pope, a retired Edison executive who bought a large system for his Long Beach home after the energy crisis of 2000-01. He said he needs the state's incentives to make his investment pay off.

"I probably put in \$30,000 and got half back. Maybe over 15 years I might achieve total payback," he said.

Without people like him, Pope said, the state will have to build more power plants. "I'm preventing the utilities from having to build that next-generation power plant . . . the most expensive power plant you ever saw."

Obama officials urge Senate to act on climate

By Dina Cappiello, Associated Press Writer

In the San Francisco Chronicle, Tuesday, July 7, 2009

The heads of the Energy Department, Agriculture Department, Interior Department and Environmental Protection Agency told a Senate panel Tuesday they should pass a bill similar to one the House narrowly cleared late last month. That legislation would impose the first limits on greenhouse gases, reducing them by 80 percent by mid-century.

The hearing before the Environment and Public Works committee starts the Senate's work on a climate bill. Senate leaders want a vote on the measure this fall, in advance of talks on a new global treaty to reduce heat-trapping gases.

Limits on energy futures to be aired

By Marcy Gordon - AP Business Writer

Fresno Bee, Tuesday, Jul. 07, 2009

WASHINGTON Federal regulators will examine whether the government should impose limits on the number of futures contracts in oil and other energy commodities held by speculative traders, the head of the Commodity Futures Trading Commission said Tuesday.

The agency will hold a public hearing later this month to gather views from consumers, businesses and market participants on the idea of new limits for energy futures contracts, CFTC Chairman Gary Gensler said in a statement. It will be the first in a series of hearings in July and August on various topics to determine how the commodities agency "should use all of its existing authorities to accomplish its mission," he said.

The move comes against a backdrop of concern in Congress and complaints by traders over speculation in the oil futures market.

By law, the CFTC sets limits on the amount of futures contracts in some agricultural products that can be held by each market participant to protect the market against manipulation. But for energy

commodities - crude oil, heating oil, natural gas, gasoline and other energy products - it is the futures exchanges themselves that set the position limits if they desire to do so.

"This different regulatory approach to position limits for agriculture and other physically delivered commodities deserves thoughtful review," Gensler's statement said. "It is incumbent upon the CFTC to ensure a fair and transparent price discovery process for all commodities."

Oil traders and brokers have griped that funds traded on exchanges, such as the United States Oil Fund, have pumped billions of dollars into energy commodities - enough to artificially prop up energy prices.

For example, benchmark crude oil prices have roughly doubled since March even though government reports show U.S. supplies brimming with surplus oil. Investors have been buying oil barrels not because of traditional supply and demand, but on the expectation that the economy will eventually improve. Some are also buying crude oil as a hedge against inflation, betting that the dollar will get weaker and push the price of energy commodities even higher.

Merrill Lynch estimates that investors are currently plowing \$125 billion into commodity indices like the S&P GSCI Commodity Index, up from \$80 billion in February. However, much of the increase is due to a rebound in commodity prices, Merrill Lynch analysts said.

In Congress, the House approved measures last fall aimed at curbing excessive speculation and trading abuses in oil and other commodity markets, despite a threatened veto by President George W. Bush. The bipartisan legislation called for giving the CFTC broader authority and limiting the size of the position that traders can hold in certain markets. It stalled in the Senate, however.

The CFTC twice last year took the unusual step of disclosing investigations into the possible manipulation of prices - of crude oil and cotton futures.

Gensler also said the agency will make improvements to its weekly report on the futures contracts positions held by commercial and noncommercial traders that will provide fuller disclosure of the market data.

Pittsburg approves environmental plan for eBART transit-oriented development

By Paul Bugarino, East County Times

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Tuesday, July 7, 2009

Though some mitigation measures would be required, the maximum amount of transit-oriented development will be allowed around a planned Pittsburg eBART station.

On Monday, Pittsburg leaders certified an environmental report for the Railroad Avenue Specific Plan, a planning tool to make about 97 acres around Railroad Avenue and Highway 4 complement a future station.

Pittsburg's goal is to create high-density housing, shops, parks and public space around the station in an area currently used for light-industrial business. The plan would also improve pedestrian, bus, bicycle and other transportation links between the station and surrounding community, said Leigha Schmidt, a city planner.

The Metropolitan Transportation Commission requires 2,200 housing units be built within a half-mile of the eBART station, which will use diesel-powered trains to connect riders to the Pittsburg/Bay Point BART station. Guidelines set by the current draft plan would exceed that amount.

Currently, there are about 1,600 units in the Pittsburg study area.

Some council members expressed concerns about pedestrian safety along where people would walk to the station platform on Railroad Avenue. They also wondered if individual developments would be subject to environmental scrutiny.

Vice Mayor Sal Evola asked about a possible land bridge to the BART platform. Assistant city manager Joe Sbranti said the required clearance would put such a bridge too far east.

Developers of future projects would also need to reduce impacts on air quality, noise and historical and environmental resources. The plan changes development standards only by the transit village area near Bliss Avenue, around the Civic Center and for some areas near the high school.

The city has held several public meetings on the plan since 2006. Concerns raised included traffic flow during commute hours, parking and relocation of some older existing businesses.

In late 2006, Pittsburg offered to fund the eBART station using redevelopment funds. The city and BART are still negotiating terms for a possible agreement, City Manager Marc Grisham said. The station's cost is estimated around \$21 million, said Ellen Smith, an eBART project manager.

The eBART project is expected to be finished by 2015.

Groups seek to block new boating facilities at Lake Tahoe

Bay City News Service

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Tuesday, July 7, 2009

Two environmental groups represented by the Oakland-based Earthjustice law firm have asked a federal judge in Sacramento to halt any placement of new buoys, piers or boat ramps at Lake Tahoe.

The League to Save Lake Tahoe and the Tahoe Area Sierra Club filed a request last week for a preliminary injunction that would block new projects until an environmental review of a shoreline development plan by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency is completed.

U.S. District Judge Lawrence Karlton is scheduled to hold a hearing on the request in Sacramento on Aug. 3.

The groups claim new boating facilities will increase water and air pollution and could increase the chances of quagga mussels entering the lake.

If granted, the injunction would be issued in connection with a lawsuit the groups filed in November.

Rochelle Nason, executive director of the League to Save Lake Tahoe, said, "This is no time to be adding more buoys and piers and ramps along the shore of the lake."

"Lake Tahoe is still very much in jeopardy of losing its famed clarity," Nason said.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses from tradition to pollution. Large amounts of particles are emitted into the air every 4th of July due to fireworks. For more information on this Spanish clip, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

De tradición a contaminación

Grandes cantidades de tóxicos emanan de fuegos pirotécnicos cada Cuatro de Julio

Isaías Alvarado

La Opinión, Saturday, July 04, 2009

Cuando el cielo del Sur de California se ilumine con miles de fuegos pirotécnicos hoy 4 de julio, Día de la Independencia, quienes padecen enfermedades respiratorias y ésta, una de las regiones más contaminadas del país, pagarán el costo de esa tradición.

"Cada ligero aumento de contaminación puede dañarnos", advirtió Martin Schlageter, director de campaña de la Coalición para el Aire Limpio, una de las organizaciones ecologistas preocupadas por la polución que emana de los fuegos artificiales detonados en esta celebración.

"Tenemos una crisis de salud pública por la contaminación ambiental", insistió el activista. "Los explosivos no deben ser la única manera de celebrar".

La región de Los Ángeles- Long Beach- Riverside mantiene los más altos niveles de polución de ozono y hollín de Estados Unidos, según un informe de la Asociación Americana del Pulmón.

Long Beach, en particular, es considerado como uno de los mayores centros de contaminación causantes del asma infantil.

Si a esto se suma una ráfaga incesante de fuegos artificiales durante varias horas, el resultado es aún peor para los residentes y la naturaleza, indica el Distrito para el Manejo de la Calidad del Aire de la Costa Sur (AQMD).

Un estudio de la publicación Environmental Science & Technology expone que el perclorato potásico, un material que proporciona el oxígeno necesario para quemar los cohetes, es un contaminante ambiental que causa daños adversos en las personas y la vida silvestre.

Del análisis de la calidad del agua de un lago de Oklahoma antes y después de los fuegos artificiales en 2004, 2005 y 2006, se comprobó que la polución aumentó considerablemente. En un período de 14 horas después de las explosiones, los niveles de perclorato aumentaron de 24 a 1,028 veces por encima de los niveles anteriores. El punto máximo se alcanzó 24 horas después, y disminuyó a su nivel anterior en un plazo de entre 20 y 80 días.

Según datos de AQMD, durante un espectáculo de fuegos artificiales en Indio, California, en 2004, las mediciones de partículas alcanzó un máximo de 847 microgramos por metro cúbico de aire, 600% por encima del estándar federal de salud.

Esta noche, los vecindarios más afectados del Sur de California serán donde se realicen grandes espectáculos de pirotecnia, advierte esta agencia encargada de la inspección de la calidad del aire.

Aquí, la contaminación aumentaría hasta 100 veces, al grado de alcanzar un nivel de alerta roja, que significa un riesgo para la salud.

La recomendación es no realizar actividades al aire libre, tales como ejercicio, andar en bicicleta, practicar yoga o efectuar trabajos pesados en el patio.

El período de alerta roja podría extenderse hasta el domingo 5 de julio.

"Es importante que atiendan esto los residentes que padecen enfermedades respiratorias, como asma", alertó Sam Atwood, vocero de AQMD.

La Sociedad Americana de Química recomienda a los fabricantes de fuegos artificiales desarrollar explosivos amigables con el medio ambiente, pues las regulaciones federales no limitan las emisiones de perclorato en la pirotecnia.

Asimismo, la agencia AQMD no se opone a dicha tradición norteamericana, argumentando que en ocasiones el clima ayuda a mejorar la calidad del aire.

La Coalición para el Aire Limpio, mas que criticar el modo de celebración del Día de la Independencia, pide atender fuentes más grandes de contaminación en Los Ángeles, tales como vehículos, camiones, barcos y aviones.

"Necesitamos encontrar la manera de convertir en más saludable a esta área", manifestó Schlageter.

Otros que por igual pagan los platos rotos del constante estallido de cohetes son las mascotas.

De acuerdo con la organización Adopt A Pet, el 5 de julio es la fecha en que más perros terminan en los refugios para animales. Como su población aumenta, el plazo para sacrificarlos disminuye de un mes a cinco días.

"Los perros no saben qué hacer por el ruido y las luces, y hasta pueden brincar la cerca por las explosiones", indicó Katya Lidsky, representante de ese grupo.

Encerrar a los animales dentro de la casa, colocarles una identificación y estar atentos de ellos durante los estallidos son las recomendaciones que hace Adopt A Pet.

"No sé porqué a la gente le gusta celebrar así", expresó Lidsky sobre los fuegos pirotécnicos cada 4 de julio. "Es malo para la economía, para el aire y para los perros".