

Get a real charge out of mowing the grass

By Alex Breitler

Stockton Record, Tuesday, November 9, 2010

It may not be the sexiest purchase of the year, but for a cool \$25 - or \$50, for big spenders - San Joaquin Valley residents can land a new cordless electric lawn mower.

Unlike cutting the grass, however, don't put this task off.

"It's such an amazing deal, the likes of which have never been seen. We may finish up in a few days," said Anthony Presto, a spokesman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

How to sign up

- First, call the air district at (559) 230-5800 and ask for a voucher. Don't delay, officials say; there are only 1,600 mowers to distribute.
- When the voucher arrives in the mail, you have 30 days to take the voucher and your old gas mower — drained of fluids — to the recycling business listed on the voucher.
- Once the old mower has been dropped off, you can call Vermont-based Neuton, which will ship an electric mower to your house within a few days.

For years, the district has offered electric lawn mowers at a trimmed-down price. The gas-powered clunkers, they say, can produce as much pollution in a single hour as 40 late-model cars.

Thousands of gas mowers already have been replaced. But this year, a \$400,000 grant from the state Air Resources Board allowed the Valley district to lower prices even more.

Consider: The Neuton mowers are valued at \$350 or \$400, depending on blade size. And that's a sale price listed on the manufacturer's website.

Snagging the mowers at \$25 or \$50 would equate to savings close to or better than 90 percent.

What's the catch? You've got to trade in a gas-powered lawn mower to be eligible.

And be aware that batteries on electric mowers might last five years. Then you'd have to buy a replacement battery, for which Neuton charges \$80 or \$110.

Still, you won't have to change the oil, and you'll never need gas. To recharge, pull the battery out of the lawn mower and plug it in. It should cost about 10 cents in energy usage.

One lawn mower dealer said Monday that most folks are still leery about going electric.

"It's just very hard to talk people into buying something where the battery is only going to last an hour," said Robert Kishi, owner of Andy's Mower & Saw in Stockton, which sells electric and gas-powered models.

But an hour should be long enough to cut most any lawn you'll find in the city, Kishi added.

While Kishi wishes the air district would partner with a manufacturer that sells mowers at local stores, Presto said Vermont-based Neuton has earned high scores with Valley customers.

"As a government agency, one of the things most important to us is using public funds wisely, and that means being able to get the best high-quality lawn mowers for the lowest price," he said.

Gas-powered mowers tend to have more power, but electric mowers will do the job if you keep your lawn in check, Presto said. And you might appreciate the quiet.

"People have called me back and said they're able to have a conversation with their neighbor while they're mowing their lawn," he said.

To learn more, call (559) 230-5800.

Cutting prices to cut lawns

Hoping to reduce pollution caused by gas-powered lawn mowers, Valley air officials for years have offered rebates on battery-operated electric mowers. But the deal announced Monday may be the best yet. Here's what you should know about the Neuton mowers available for \$25 or \$50 to those willing to trade in an old gas-powered mower.

Some facts:



- Push-button start; no cord to yank
- Can mow up to 1 hour on a single charge
- Before discounts, the mowers cost \$350 for a 14-inch blade, or \$400 for a 19-inch blade. With discounts, the mowers are \$25 and \$50.
- The \$25 mower is good for lawns up to one-quarter acre; the \$50 mower can handle one-third acre.
- To recharge, the 24- or 36-volt battery is removed from the mower and plugged in
- Cost to recharge is 10 cents
- Battery lasts up to five years and then must be replaced. But unlike gas-powered mowers, no tune-up is required.

Source: Neuton; San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District

PHIL HUDOCK/The Record

Valley Air district cuts prices on trade-in program for nonpolluting electric lawn mowers

Sun-Star Staff

Merced Sun-Star and Sacramento Bee, Tuesday, Nov. 9, 2010

The Valley Air District's said it cut prices on its popular electric lawn mower trade-in program for nonpolluting, cordless, electric lawn mowers.

Clean Green Yard Machines is now offering the Neuton cordless, electric lawn mower – in two blade sizes – for less than \$100, according to a news release.

Because of funding from the state Air Resources Board, the 14-inch Neuton cordless, electric mower will now cost consumers \$25. The larger, 19-inch model costs \$50. Vouchers and trade-in of an older, gas-powered mower are required.

“This has been our most popular consumer incentive for many years, and with this new funding, we’re excited that many more Valley residents will be able to participate,” Samir Sheikh, director of the District’s Strategies and Incentives program, said in the news release.

The new round of funding will replace about 1,600 older, gas-powered mowers with clean, nonpolluting Neutons. A single gas-powered mower running for an hour produces about as much pollution as 40 late-model cars.

To participate, residents must call the Air District and obtain a voucher (limit one voucher per household, three per business), and turn in a gas-powered mower at a participating recycler. Vouchers are valid for 30 days from issue date. The program will be open until funds are exhausted.

For complete details about the program, visit www.valleyair.org or call the Strategies and Incentives program at 559-230-5800.

For more information about the Valley Air District, call a regional office: in Fresno, 559-230-6000; in Bakersfield, 661-392-5500; and in Modesto, 209-557-6400.

Air district slashes cost of non-polluting mowers

The Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Nov. 9, 2010

The valley air district's popular electric lawn mower trade-in program may have become even more popular.

Through funding from the state Air Resources Board, the air district has slashed prices on nonpolluting, cordless electric lawn mowers, the district said in a release Monday.

Clean Green Yard Machines is now offering the Neuton cordless, electric lawn mower -- in two blade sizes -- for \$50 or less.

The 14-inch Neuton cordless electric mower will now cost consumers just \$25, while the larger 19-inch model goes for \$50.

Vouchers and a trade-in of an older, gas-powered mower are required.

"This has been our most popular consumer incentive for many years, and with this new funding, we're excited that many more valley residents will be able to participate," Samir Sheikh, the director of the district's strategies and incentives program, said in the release.

The new round of funding will replace approximately 1,600 older, gas-powered mowers with clean, nonpolluting Neutons. A single gas-powered mower running for an hour produces about as much pollution as 40 late-model cars, according to the district.

To participate, residents must call or visit an air district office and obtain a voucher (limit one voucher per household, three per business), and turn in a gas-powered mower at a participating recycler. Vouchers are valid for 30 days from issue date. The program will be open until funds are exhausted.

For complete details about the program, visit Valleyair.org or call the Strategies and Incentives program at 559-230-5800.

Cement firm fighting violation decision

Attorney for Central Valley Concrete files objection to judge's ruling.

By Victor A. Patton

Merced Sun-Star, Tuesday, Nov. 9, 2010

An attorney for Merced-based Central Valley Concrete has filed an objection to a judge's recent determination the company violated state hazardous waste laws and concealed its conduct from regulators.

Merced County Superior Court Judge Ronald Hansen issued an Oct. 19 statement of decision in a civil action brought by the state against CVC for operating an illegal paintshop at its 3823 N. Highway 59 location, among other violations.

Hansen issued an injunction prohibiting CVC from failing to comply with the state's hazardous waste control laws, and ordered CVC to pay \$300,000 in civil penalties. Attorneys for the state claimed CVC was illegally painting at least 50 cement trucks a year, resulting in emissions from the spray and sandblasting.

James Betts, CVC's attorney, filed an objection to Hansen's statement of decision Nov. 3. According to the objection document, while CVC acknowledged the operation of the unpermitted paintshop, the company denies ever hiding the shop. As a result, the company is requesting a more "conservative award" than the \$300,000 in civil penalties ordered by Hansen.

In the objection document, CVC provided several examples how Merced County officials were fully aware of the paintshop. Case in point, in the years before CVC received a notice of violation, the company even contracted with Merced County to paint a Merced Irrigation District crane. During the early 2000s, CVC had been approached by the county to paint fire engines and vehicles. And in 1995, CVC worked closely with the Merced County Fire Department to install a large red water tank next to the paintshop for fire response.

Despite allegations CVC violated hazardous waste laws and was accused of widespread environmental contamination, there were several soil and water tests at the companies' facilities

in Merced, Madera and Stanislaus counties -- and none revealed a single instance of contamination, according to the court documents.

The documents also claim the whistleblower in the case was a former CVC employee fired for alleged sexual harassment. That employee wasn't criminally charged.

Betts said he didn't want to elaborate on specific aspects of the case while it's still pending. "We have filed our objection to the statement of decision and look forward to the opportunity to discuss it with Judge Hansen," Betts said.

The state filed a suit against CVC after the whistleblower contacted the [San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District](#) in early 2007 about the unpermitted paintshop.

CVC maintained even the state's own witness, a Merced County inspector, testified that the company was working to achieve compliance after inspections in 2007. Some violations were resolved immediately, while others took longer.

Matthew Maclear, the statewide circuit prosecutor for the California District Attorney's Association who is handling the case, said all of the points raised by CVC were already brought up during the civil trial, which began in April.

"We are confident in the court's ruling. We believe Judge Hansen (already) considered all the evidence that was raised in the objection, all those points were duly raised at trial and there's nothing new in there," Maclear said. "We believe the court made the correct ruling."

Maclear is handling the case with Deputy Attorney General Brett Morris.

Now that CVC has filed its objection to Judge Hansen's statement of decision, the state will have an opportunity to file a response. Hansen has the option of scheduling an oral hearing before making a final judgment in the case.

CVC primarily produces, sells, and delivers sand, gravel, asphalt and concrete. The company operates three facilities in Merced County, two sites in Stanislaus County and one in Madera County.

Federal EPA cracks down on Valley air quality

By Mark Grossi

In the Fresno Bee, Sacramento Bee, and Modesto Bee Monday, Nov. 8, 2010

Federal officials on Monday announced they would reject part of the Valley's air cleanup plan for deadly soot, raising the possibility that federal road-building funds could be frozen.

Though the Valley would suffer the consequences in the next few years, only the state Air Resources Board can fix the plan. The state needs to submit rules for diesel trucks, buses and off-road equipment, such as tractors, accounting for about half of the Valley's projected soot reductions.

"We agree these rules are critical to achieving federal air-quality standards," said ARB spokeswoman Gennet Paauwe.

She said the board in December probably will take final action on the rules, which may include some delays in cleanup deadlines. The rules are expected to be submitted to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency before the end of the year.

Valley air activists say the federal announcement Monday is the result of their lawsuit last summer, demanding federal action on the rules.

Lawyer Brent Newell of the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment, representing the Association of Irrigated Residents, said the state should have submitted the rules to the EPA a long time ago.

"It's a real travesty when the state fails to show urgency on these rules when people are dying," he said.

Diesel soot, a known carcinogen, is linked to lung problems, heart disease and early mortality -- more than 9,000 people die prematurely each year because of it, according to state figures.

The state ARB passed the off-road equipment regulation in 2007 and the truck and bus regulation in 2008. But the state has not yet submitted them to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for approval. The ARB has been working on the complex problem of enforcing the rules on industries.

Next month at their governing board meeting, ARB officials will consider delaying diesel cleanup deadlines because of the downturn in the economy.

The South Coast Air Basin also would suffer sanctions if the rules are not submitted, said Jared Blumenfeld, EPA regional administrator.

Although both the South Coast district and the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District included the state's diesel reductions in their own cleanup plans for soot, neither district has the authority to pass the rules.

"The diesel rules account for 20% of the pollution reduction statewide," Blumenfeld said. "Our action today is signaling that ARB needs to have both of these rules."

The proposed rejection of the plan wouldn't become final until after a 60-day comment period. If the rules are not submitted, federal sanctions would begin 18 months after the EPA officially rejects the plans for the Valley and South Coast. New and expanding businesses would have to pay higher fees in both places, officials said.

The freeze on federal road-building funds would begin in two years, but it would not affect projects now under construction.