

## **Monitoring equipment stolen**

by Brenda Huang

Tracy Press, Thursday, Oct. 6, 2005

Thieves have plundered two stations that monitored air pollution in Tracy and got away with equipment worth more than \$150,000 in the past year, leaving regional air quality officials with fragmented data.

Burglars busted the lock off of a trailer parked on Patterson Pass Road in August last year and made away with a computer and parts of an instrument that tested temperatures at different altitudes, San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District officials said.

That equipment cost \$150,000 and the station was shut down after the theft, said Warren LeLeaux, who oversees the district's 17 stations.

Then two months ago, a 32-foot-tall meteorological tower worth about \$3,200 was stolen from the Tracy Municipal Airport, where the district was building a new station to monitor air quality, LeLeaux said. The pole would have tested the strength and direction of winds.

The district's insurance company reimbursed \$137,000 for the Patterson Pass Road break-ins and the contractor that builds the airport station also received insurance money to cover the costs to buy a new tower.

The replacement tower will arrive around the end of the year, said Mike Howell, owner of Howell Communications, Inc.

The district has not received information on winds and temperatures at different altitudes in Tracy for a year, said Evan Shipp, the district's supervising meteorologist. With the information, weather forecasts would have been more accurate.

But essential data, such as the amount of ozone in the air, has been available except for a break after the Patterson Pass Road station was closed, Shipp said.

LeLeaux said the district planned to shut down the old station because the site they leased was sold to a developer, who could evict them any time after a 60-day notice. But officials had wanted to run the two stations at the same time for a year after the airport tower started to operate.

They were forced to close the Patterson Pass Road station well ahead of schedule because of the thefts, LeLeaux said.

He said he believed whomever broke into the old station three times was desperate to make some money, but probably got nothing.

The meteorological tower could have been stolen by some amateur radio operator, who might use it to install an antenna to broaden his radio's scope, said Howell.

Representatives of the San Joaquin County Sheriff's Department didn't return calls for comment on the Patterson Pass Road thefts Wednesday.

Tracy Police Chief David Krauss said the trail for the police to follow in the wake of the airport burglary was ice cold since the contractor didn't report the case until weeks later.

## **Proposed Rail Yard Angers Residents of Nearby Long Beach Community**

**Foes say diesel-spewing trucks carrying cargo to the site would worsen air pollution.**

**Railway promises a 'green' facility.**

By Deborah Schoch, staff writer

L.A. Times, Thursday, Oct. 6, 2005

Long Beach residents are protesting plans by the Port of Los Angeles to build a 153-acre rail yard just upwind of a working-class neighborhood with five public schools, a day-care center and a homeless veterans' center.

Critics said the 1 million diesel-belching trucks that would carry cargo to the yard each year would worsen air pollution in an area of west Long Beach and Wilmington that they called a "sacrifice zone" for the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, the nation's two largest seaports. "They're trying to treat us like a third-world country. It's just a dumping ground over here," said Patti Sramek, who has lived for 60 years in Long Beach immediately east of the project site.

The proposed \$175-million yard would be operated by BNSF Railway, which promises to use cleaner-burning equipment to reduce diesel emissions and to make it a model of green technology. The yard would feature such innovations as electric cranes and switching locomotives that are fueled by liquefied natural gas, said BNSF spokeswoman Lena Kent.

Thousands of trucks daily carry cargo along the congested Long Beach Freeway from the ports inland to the rail yards of Los Angeles and Commerce and the warehouses of the Inland Empire. Their diesel pollution has worried residents along the 18-mile route through such cities as Compton, Bell Gardens and South Gate.

The proposed yard would allow containers now hauled by those trucks to be transferred to rail cars and moved north on the Alameda Corridor, reducing air pollution along the Long Beach Freeway.

But cargo would still travel by truck from the Los Angeles docks to the proposed rail yard, producing 1 million more truck trips a year close to west Long Beach homes.

That is 1 million trips too many, said residents, who plan to pack an initial environmental review meeting hosted by the Port of Los Angeles at 6 tonight at Silverado Park in Long Beach. A second meeting will follow Oct. 13 at Bannings Landing in Wilmington.

S. David Freeman, president of the Los Angeles Board of Harbor Commissioners, said Wednesday that he had not known about tonight's meeting until told about it by a reporter. Because of a scheduling conflict, he said, he can attend only the meeting in Wilmington.

The port is accepting written comments on the project until Nov. 4 and will then prepare an environmental report. BNSF hopes to begin construction in 2007 or 2008 and finish in 2009.

The notion of taking trucks off the Long Beach Freeway is appealing, Freeman said.

"It does seem that to the extent we can get the traffic off the trucks and onto rail, we're striking a blow for cleanliness," Freeman said. But he added that he needed to learn more about the project.

The highway that would carry those trucks flanks a neighborhood of modest one-story stucco homes in which live an ethnically diverse group of people.

Some residents question why the port is not building an on-dock rail yard so that cargo containers can be moved directly from ships to the trains.

But port officials said available space is extremely limited.

"Looking around the port, I don't know where we could put this facility," said David Mathewson, director of planning and environmental affairs.

The prospect of increased diesel fumes next to west Long Beach residential areas will be addressed during the environmental review process, he said.

BNSF is aware of residents' concerns, Kent said.

"We've really tried to get out there and talk to people and learn what their concerns are," she said. "There may be ways to mitigate the trucks. That is something we need to study."

Port-area residents said their children were already suffering from asthma that they believe is linked to the large amount of diesel fumes. To ask them to endure more pollution for the sake of port growth and international trade, they said, is unacceptable.

"How many more children have to suffer?" said Nicholas Sramek, Patti Sramek's husband and a Long Beach planning commissioner. "What is the greater good? So that everyone in Iowa can have their Nintendos on time?"

Five public schools are east of the proposed yard, with Hudson Elementary School and Cabrillo High School next to the Terminal Island Freeway, which already is heavily used by truckers.

"Obviously we have concerns," said Carri Matsumoto, executive director of facilities development and planning for the Long Beach Unified School District.

But district officials need to study the project further, she said.

The neighborhood also contains a center for 500 homeless veterans operated by US VETS, a national nonprofit organization. The center offers housing, a drug and alcohol program, and career counseling.

Stephen Peck, US VETS community development director, said he learned only recently about the rail yard proposal from a flier distributed by a neighborhood group.

"I know very little about it," Peck said.

The Los Angeles port notified people of the two meetings by mailing postcards to more than 70,000 homes, businesses and post office boxes, spokeswoman Theresa Adams-Lopez said. The port also advertised the meetings in local newspapers and mailed notices to area organizations, she said.

Peck said he saw a positive side to the rail yard.

"From our point of view, we're serving homeless veterans here, and a bunch of them need jobs," he said. "Anything that opens up new jobs is appealing to us."

He said planners must also examine any possible environmental and traffic impacts.

Diesel fumes are a carcinogen and can exacerbate asthma and lung and heart diseases. A draft study issued Tuesday by the California Air Resources Board found that diesel fumes from the Los Angeles-Long Beach port complex were increasing potential cancer risk as far as 15 miles inland.

The 53,000 residents closest to the ports are most affected, with a potential cancer risk of 500 additional cases per 1 million people.

[Letter to the Modesto Bee, Thursday, Oct. 6, 2005](#)

### **Tallow exec doesn't care about our air**

The parent company of Modesto Tallow is the Modesto Holding Co., which is controlled by a group of investors from Dallas. This group is led by William A. Shirley Jr., who has made significant campaign contributions to President Bush and who has done his part to slacken tough environmental laws. Do you think Shirley is concerned with the Central Valley environment? Don't hold your breath, hold your nose - this issue stinks in more ways than one.

Sean McGowan, Salida

