

Flag gives air quality level at a glance

By JEFF BENZIGER / Editor

Ceres Courier Thurs., Dec. 28, 2006

Ceres residents will be able to whiz down Whitmore Avenue and be able to tell the level of air quality for that day. That's because different colored flags representing different levels of air quality will be posted outside of the Sutter Gould Medical office.

The idea was developed by Tracy Fiddler, a medical assistant to Ceres pediatrician Dr. Lynette Grandison. Her daughter is asthmatic and she felt that others could benefit from the information.

The color is determined by the air quality forecast on the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's Web site. <http://www.valleyair.org/aqinfo/forecast.htm>

The district's Air Quality Index (AQI) is an index for reporting daily air quality. It tells how clean or polluted the air is, and what associated health effects might be a concern for persons. The AQI focuses on health effects people may experience within a few hours or days after breathing polluted air. EPA calculates the AQI for five major air pollutants regulated by the Clean Air Act: ground-level ozone, particle pollution (also known as particulate matter), carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, and nitrogen dioxide. For each of these pollutants, EPA has established national air quality standards to protect public health.

The green color means the air quality is good, with an AQI of 0 to 50.

Yellow means air quality is moderate, or between 51 to 100.

Orange means the air quality is unhealthy for sensitive groups. When AQI values are between 101 and 150, members of sensitive groups may experience health effects. This means they are likely to be affected at lower levels than the general public. For example, people with lung disease are at greater risk from exposure to ozone, while people with either lung disease or heart disease are at greater risk from exposure to particle pollution. The general public is not likely to be affected when the AQI is in this range.

Red is considered "unhealthy" as the AQI is between 151 and 200. Everyone may begin to experience health effects when AQI values are between 151 and 200. Members of sensitive groups may experience more serious health effects.

Purple means "very unhealthy" as AQI values between 201 and 300 trigger a health alert, meaning everyone may experience more serious health effects.

Maroon is equivalent of hazardous. AQI values over 300 trigger health warnings of emergency conditions. The entire population is more likely to be affected.

Arsenic concerns school officials

By Seth Nidever

Hanford Sentinel, Thursday, Dec. 28, 2006

As plans for a potential water treatment plant in northwestern Armona unfold, one group of people is watching intently: The staff of the Armona Union Academy, the school right next to the proposed site.

The Armona Community Services District wants to use 19 acres of private property east of the school to build a filtration system for removing arsenic from one of its wells. The problem is, that well is located on school property - on land that is currently being leased to the community services district.

The planned location for the filtration plant on Locust Street, west of 14th Avenue, would put evaporation ponds right next to the playground for elementary school kids at the private, K-12 Seventh-day Adventist school.

School officials are concerned that the ponds would be only 40 feet from ground where kids play.

"We're worried about any of this material becoming airborne or leaking into the soil or in any way harming the children," said Kenneth Pierson, president of the school board.

"I don't think we have all the answers yet. That's probably our main concern," said Rod Kerbs, the school's principal.

The well that needs to be purified occupies the northeast corner of the school grounds. The Armona Community Services District has been leasing the land for decades for one of two wells that satisfy the water needs of the small, low-income community of 1,100 homes.

Armona needs to make improvements so that the well water meets the federal arsenic standard of fewer than 10 parts per billion.

Armona's other well is already in compliance. A third well currently under construction is slated to meet the needs of new housing tracts planned for Armona.

As for the planned project to remove arsenic, the proposal calls for 19 acres of evaporation ponds that would hold water that had been backwashed from a series of filters designed to remove the arsenic and other mineral contaminants.

The particles of arsenic, clumped together with other elements, would be washed out of the filters and sink to the bottom of the evaporation ponds.

Raymond Carlson, a lawyer for the community services district, said Tuesday that arsenic-laced sediment wouldn't blow in the wind.

"The intent is never to let those (ponds) dry out," Carlson said.

But doubts about the project remain, and they aren't coming only from the school staff.

At a meeting earlier this month to discuss district plans to seize the property through eminent domain, neighbors and the property owners complained about a lack of knowledge of the environmental impact of the project.

The California Environmental Quality Act gives the district the option of doing "at least one" of the following: publishing notice in the lead newspaper in the area, posting a notice at the site or notifying all contiguous property owners.

Carlson, the community service's district's attorney, said officials followed the law when it ran a notice on the project this summer in *The Sentinel*. The notice was for a public hearing to discuss the district's conclusion that the treatment plant didn't require an environmental impact report.

The full report is required for projects that have significant unavoidable environmental impacts in areas such as air pollution, groundwater pollution or noise.

However, the law doesn't require a public hearing unless somebody requests it.

School officials did not receive official phone or mail notification of the project from the district. Kerbs, the school's principal, said he learned about the project through a neighbor.

Lawsuit over Tracy's General Plan settled

By [Jake Armstrong](#) - Record Staff Writer

Stockton Record, Thursday, December 28, 2006

TRACY - The city and a little-known environmental group agreed to settle a lawsuit the group filed to block the City Council's approval of an environmental study supporting adoption of the city's General Plan.

No money will change hands as part of the settlement signed Tuesday. The city will be responsible for its costs to defend the case - about \$22,000 - and the Urban Environmental Affairs Council will pay its costs accrued in the suit, which was never argued in court and will now be dismissed, City Attorney Debra Corbett said.

The Urban Environmental Affairs Council, operated by Sacramento lobbyist Steven Hamilton, in late August sued to reverse the council's approval of the environmental impact report for the General Plan, the document that serves as a blueprint for the city's growth in the next 20 years. The group claimed the city did not adequately study the impacts future growth would have on population, traffic, air quality and municipal services, and failed to find ways to alleviate those impacts.

Hamilton did not return a call requesting comment Wednesday.

The City Council unanimously approved the group's settlement offer Dec. 5.

Mayor Brent Ives said the group's specific claims against the General Plan EIR were never made clear.

"We agreed to them walking away from the lawsuit," Ives said of the council's unanimous decision.

The settlement comes as city staff prepares to ask the council to lay out its priorities to carry out the General Plan. Corbett said the city can now proceed with that without unresolved legal challenges.

"It wasn't preventing us from doing that, but there's certainly a different energy for doing that when you don't have the cloud of litigation hanging over," Corbett said.

Creating a healthy city by design

Richmond: General plan may link public welfare, outdoors

By John Geluardi

Contra Costa Times, Thursday, December 28, 2006

Richmond will be the first city in the state to take a public health approach to forge planning policies for the coming century.

The city is in the process of developing its general plan, an overarching document that will shape the city's future by guiding features such as housing development, urban design, traffic patterns and the establishment of parks and open space.

Every city and county in California is required to have an updated general plan. Richmond will consider public health as it makes plans for walkable communities, safe bicycle routes and a clean environment, said Daniel Iacofano, a principal of Moore Iacofano Goltsman, which is overseeing the planning process.

"In Richmond we have an opportunity to fundamentally change the way cities plan for the future by showing the link between our physical environment and public health," Iacofano said. "Where you live, work, play and go to school has an effect on your health."

The California Endowment, a private health foundation that provides grants to community health organizations in the state, has given Richmond \$255,000 to help facilitate the health-based planning concept.

General plan elements that will be developed within the context of public health include nutrition, bicycle and pedestrian safety, hazardous materials ordinances, air and water quality, homelessness and violent crime.

Since the early 20th century, cities have planned for aesthetic amenities such as parks, tree-lined streets and walkable neighborhoods. However, never before have city planners actually identified associated health benefits, Iacofano said.

"City planners knew intuitively that city design has an impact on health, but they didn't have the data to back it up," he said. "But now, 100 years later, planners are actually gathering that data."

Richmond is fractured by railroad lines, freeways and the BART line. One goal of the general plan will be to find ways to reconnect divided and isolated communities.

"Richmond has 32 miles of shoreline, but we have whole parts of the city that are literally cut off from that," Iacofano said. "These communities don't have access to fresh air, views and opportunities to understand one's environment."

Another goal will be to create thriving neighborhoods that radiate from community centers and education facilities.

"An example of that is the Martin Luther King Community Center, which is adjacent to the Nystrom Elementary School," Iacofano said. "There are many uses for these facilities, and the general plan can encourage getting the maximum potential from them."

Since spring, the Richmond Planning Department has held a series of public meetings to hear suggestions from residents for the plan. The General Plan Advisory Committee meets Jan. 17 to discuss the best ways to incorporate those suggestions into the general plan's first draft.

The City Council plans to adopt the final general plan in January 2008.

Reach John Geluardi at 510-262-2787 or jgeluardi@cctimes.com.

To learn more

- www.cityofrichmondgeneralplan.org
- 510-620-6869

GENERAL PLAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING:

WHEN: 6 p.m. Jan. 17

WHERE: City Council chamber, 1401 Marina Way South, Richmond

No framework for spending bond money

To start building infrastructure, Legislature needs to establish guidelines during next 6 months

Greg Lucas, Chronicle Sacramento Bureau
San Francisco Chronicle
Thurs., Dec. 28, 2006

Sacramento -- When voters approved a \$40 billion bond package in November, they essentially wrote blank checks for more than \$5 billion in proposed spending to be determined by programs that don't yet exist.

Scattered throughout the package of five bonds are pots of money -- one as large as \$2 billion -- that lack spending guidelines, eligibility criteria or any other spending controls.

Backers of the bonds, led by Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata, D-Oakland, say they will create programs within the next six months so money can flow when the new fiscal year begins July 1.

"I hope by the time the budget comes around, we have legislation spelling out how best to spend this money and some preliminary allocations to go with it," Perata said. "We don't want to miss a budget cycle if we want to prove to voters that what we asked them to do is worthy of doing."

Decisions on how these programs are structured will have a major impact on the Bay Area. The new programs will dictate how much BART and Muni receive to tighten security as well as the size of state investment to reduce emissions and renovate the Port of Oakland, among other things.

The Legislature has at times set aside money without establishing spending specifics, but several lawmakers doubted that it has ever been done on such a large scale.

Creating new programs when money already exists for them can be a thorny legislative task. Potential recipients of the funds often lobby to design programs that deliver the greatest amount of money to them at the least expense -- not always the best policy for taxpayers or the state.

"One of the reasons we were critical of the bond package is borrowing money for unspecified purposes is risky. You can end up using a 30-year loan to buy a security camera that lasts five

years. That's crazy," said Adrian Moore, vice president for research at the Reason Foundation, a libertarian think tank.

"It's a \$5 billion blank check, and when the Legislature starts giving out the money, it's going to go to whoever has the best connections with the right legislator," Moore said.

While most of the bond package channels money through existing state programs, several new spending areas were created. Here are the most significant ones:

-- \$2 billion to improve public works on "trade corridors" along which goods move from California's ports. The California Transportation Commission says it will begin creating spending guidelines in January and hopes to complete the program before the start of the next fiscal year.

The Port of Oakland wants to target its share of the funds on two traffic corridors -- Interstate 80 through Donner Pass, and Altamont Pass down into the Central Valley. The port has already created a wish list, focusing on improving rail access.

-- \$1 billion to reduce emissions and improve [air quality](#) at ports and along trade corridors. Once the Legislature creates a program, the money will be distributed by the Air Resources Board, which estimates the full price tag of ratcheting down port-related emissions at \$6 billion.

-- \$1 billion to beef up security and disaster preparedness on transit systems such as BART.

Although no state program exists to divvy up the \$1 billion, the California Transit Association has proposed a plan that would spend half the money on systems facing the highest risk -- most likely the state's urban transit operators -- with the other half divided on a per capita formula.

"The Legislature, house to house and party to party, just couldn't decide on some of these spending issues while the bonds were being debated," said Josh Shaw, executive director of the transit association. "Our job is to make sure details get fleshed out on this and something gets into the budget."

In Proposition 1C, a \$2.85 billion housing bond, \$850 million is earmarked to encourage infill development, the use of land within a built-up area for further construction.

Perata says his goal is to create a program that makes infill more attractive for developers by either fast-tracking projects or streamlining environmental review.

Proposition 84, a \$5.4 billion water and natural resources protection bond, contains \$90 million for cities and counties to better plan for growth rather than reacting to developer proposals.

The \$90 million is one of the few areas in Prop. 84 in which its money is not channeled through existing programs.

"Our organizing principle was to not make new policy but use existing programs," said Joe Caves, the architect of the ballot measure.

Creating new programs can be difficult -- different interest groups sometimes have diametrically opposed priorities.

Lawmakers have yet to approve any meaningful bills on infill because the issue pits two traditional Democratic allies against each other -- trial lawyers and environmentalists.

Trial lawyers won't back measures making it easier to build infill projects because a key incentive sought by would-be developers and some environmentalists is relaxing the liability standard that makes a new purchaser responsible for mitigating damage on the site caused by all previous owners.

"We're going to have to get some cooperation between the environmental interests and the trial lawyers," said Perata, admitting that will not be an easy task.

In some cases, state officials have already moved quickly and efficiently to develop spending guidelines. The state Transportation Commission, for example, has crafted a program to spend \$4.5 billion from the transportation bond dedicated to congestion relief projects.

The bond instructed the Transportation Commission to have a congestion relief program in place by Dec. 1. The commission began work on a program in May.

"We knew we couldn't meet the deadline unless we had the program pretty well put together before the election," said David Brewer, the commission's chief deputy director.

[Opinion piece in the San Francisco Chronicle, Thursday, December 28, 2006](#)

OPEN FORUM

Bringing carbon buyers and sellers to market

David Sunding

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's executive order to begin implementation of a market-based compliance program encouraging businesses to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions is clearly a step in the right direction toward cleaning our air of harmful carbon particulates. The next step is to make it financially attractive enough for businesses to comply with the program.

Ask any inventor: Thinking up a workable idea is one thing. Marketing it in a meaningful way is another. It's the difference between, say, having the blueprints for the internal combustion engine and an assembly line ready to roll out a fleet of Model Ts.

The carbon market is in a similar situation. We know that sustainable forestry can help lower atmospheric carbon levels, a stated goal for those concerned with global climate change. Well-managed forests flush with rapidly growing trees remove (or "sequester") carbon quite efficiently. But we don't know yet whether markets can be established in this country to provide any economic incentive to do so. In Europe, carbon trading has been practiced since January 2005.

Trading carbon credits might work to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions in an economically viable way. If a company wants to build a new power plant that would result in X amount of carbon emissions, for example, it could offset those emissions by buying credits from another company with the means of sequestering the same amount of carbon in trees or other sources.

Components of the Kyoto agreement, the first multinational attempt to limit carbon emissions, established protocols for companies in ratifying nations to openly trade carbon credits. And while the agreement has proved controversial in the United States and elsewhere, interest in developing domestic carbon markets is gaining momentum.

Why the challenge? Complexity is the main culprit. Markets require established definitions, baselines and enforcement mechanisms -- features missing from the relatively new practice of commercial carbon sequestration. Much of the accepted science in the field comes with margins for error as high as 40 percent. Truth is, carbon sequestration is difficult to measure. The amount of carbon being sequestered is not obvious, nor is the length of time the carbon is being sequestered. Exactly what level of credit to grant for various activities isn't obvious, either. One school of thought says that credit should be given for actions that decrease net carbon emissions. But what about companies that already sequester carbon efficiently? They would receive no reward for their actions under such guidelines. The same is true for energy producers using comparatively "clean" technologies.

No company that helps reduce net carbon emissions should be ignored. California companies that practice sustainable forestry, for example, sequester tremendous amounts of carbon -- and do so very efficiently -- by optimizing tree-growing conditions on their lands. Unless these companies are "grandfathered" into any market agreements, they would forgo any benefit for what are extremely positive actions. If you are already sequestering carbon efficiently, your potential to provide a significant difference over "business as usual" is very slim.

These challenges, however, shouldn't prove insurmountable. Markets, once established, ultimately bring efficient solutions, and are preferable to more government regulation and mandates, which will likely increase costs.

California may have sufficient economic clout to be a leader in establishing domestic carbon markets. While high real-estate values and costs of doing business may put California companies at a disadvantage, there are advantages to taking a leadership role and encouraging markets to develop sooner rather than later. Once markets are established, the expertise companies develop becomes marketable, transferable knowledge. If the cost of sequestering carbon in forests or through other means provides a financial incentive to other methods of reducing net emissions,

carbon markets could flourish. It's too soon to tell for sure, but forestry and other land-based sequestration possibilities look promising.

David Sunding is a professor of environmental and resource economics in the College of Natural Resources at UC Berkeley and served as a senior economist at the White House Council of Economic Advisors during the Clinton administration.

[Modesto Bee, Letter to the Editor, Thursday, December 28, 2006](#)

A Red flag about bad-air days

I read how one day scientists may have to spray a shield of pollution over our heads to combat global warming. Funny, but if my eyes don't deceive I believe this is already in the test phase at Lawrence Livermore Laboratories.

Then I read about how kids are obese because they're not getting enough exercise. Soon after this, I read that on what seemed to me to be one of the sunniest days of the year children at schools in Salida were quarantined inside the gym on what was deemed to be a bad air day. Lo and behold, there was the proof, flying right below Ol' Glory and the Golden Bear flag, the new, color-coordinated bad air day flag. I hope no one confuses this with homeland securities flags.

Soon we could see such newsworthy items as: "How to rat your neighbor off for burning firewood" (last time I checked, wood was a natural derivative of fire and vice versa); or "When to place the farmer under citizen's arrest for driving his tractor too long." Who knows, there may even be a reward offered on the red flag days.

JOHN LOURO, Hughson