

It's time to check before you burn

By Chhun Sun

Turlock Journal, Tuesday, November 11, 2008

It's that time of the year.

No, not only Thanksgiving and Christmas.

It's also that time of the year to check before you burn, for the sake of the environment, which in turn will help you breathe easier. Check Before You Burn season started when the calendar rolled to November - and it orders people to make a phone call or send an e-mail to the Valley Air District before throwing wood into the fireplace. The organization also has a Web site where people can go to see the wood-burning forecasts.

And in order to better protect the public health from harmful effects of particulate matter, the Valley Air District made changes to the residential wood-burning curtailment rule and lowered the threshold for declaring curtailments.

The ban includes solid wood, wood pellets and manufactured fire logs.

There will be just two levels of wood-burning forecast. It's either "Wood Burning Prohibited" or "Please Burn Cleanly," depending on the day's air quality. These changes occurred to increase the level of protection of public health from particulate matter, which has been linked to bronchial infections, chronic lung disease and lung cancer. Residential wood burning can put as much as 24 tons of the particulate matter into the air on a typical winter day in the Valley.

People who burn on "no-burn" days - which is defined when air quality is forecast to be 26 to 35 micrograms per cubic meter - will be fined \$50 for first-time violations. The fines increase with additional violations.

Last year, 88 citations were issued in the Valley, as smoke from the chimney was the obvious sign.

There are exemptions to the wood-burning prohibitions, however: If you live in an area where there is no natural-gas service or if wood-burning is your only source of heat.

Last year, there were 15 no-burn days in the Valley. That number could triple this season.

"We have the most stringent protections in the state for exposure to particulate matter," said Seyed Sadredin, the Air District's executive director and air pollution control officer. "Our board continues to be aggressive on behalf of the Valley's residents."

Tom Duncan, owner of Duncan Wood Products in Modesto, said the best kind of wood to burn during the winter is almond, since it can last up to four hours and produces small amounts of ashes compared to mountain oak wood, which burns for five hours but produces about 10 times as much ashes.

Daily wood-burning forecasts are available every day at 4:30 p.m. by visiting www.valleyair.org/qaqinfo/WoodBurnPage.htm, or calling 1-800-766-4463. Wood-burners can also subscribe to www.valleyair.org/lists/list.htm.

For more information, call the District office for the San Joaquin Valley at (209) 557-6400.

Allergies strike when seasons change

By Hillary S. Meeks

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Monday, Nov. 10, 2008

If the sneezy, sniffly, eye-scratchy, stuffy-nose symptoms are plaguing you, there's a good reason. Recent weather changes encourage mold growth, pollen release and other conditions that can irritate asthma and trigger allergies, said Dr. A.M. Aminian, medical director of the Allergy Institute in Visalia and Fresno.

"People who have asthma have very hyper-reactive airways, which mean they get irritated easily by changes in temperature, barometric pressure and humidity," Aminian said.

Asthma is a condition that causes a person's bronchial tubes to be overly sensitive, which can lead to a spasm that obstructs airflow.

If it is diagnosed and treated, asthma sufferers can find relief and the condition can be reversed, Aminian said. But, exposure to irritants makes it more difficult. Untreated asthma can lead to long-term respiratory problems.

This time of year, the wind also picks up and blows dust around the Central Valley, adding another irritant to the already-polluted air.

"The type of air pollution we get now compared to summer is a little different because we get particulate matters," Aminian explained. "And because of the cold air, the particulates stay closer to the ground."

Asthmatics aren't the only ones who are adversely affected by the bad air. Many people in this area develop vasomotor rhinitis, which is an irritation and inflammation of the respiratory tract that imitates allergic reactions.

"This is the time of year when our patient volume goes up," he said.

Indoor allergies often increase when the temperatures drop because everyone stays inside with windows and doors closed shut. Turning heaters on only stirs up whatever irritants are in the house, Aminian said, which is why keeping the home clean is important.

Some precautions asthma and allergy sufferers can take to prevent any flare-ups include:

- Washing your hair.
- Cleansing the nose with a saline solution.
- If it's outdoor conditions causing the problem, don't go outside unless necessary.
- Use medications according to your doctor's advice.
- Avoid using scented cleaning supplies.
- Avoid burning incense.
- Keep the humidity at about 40 percent, but don't over-humidify your home. Having bowls of water out, or even vases with fresh flowers can help bring humidity up.
- Change air filters regularly, and use air filters that have a 12 rating.
- Vacuum and dust regularly.
- When Christmas comes, opt for a fake tree over a real one.
- Keep pets outdoors.

Five questions: Why Kern is good for distribution centers?

By Jenny Shearer, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, Nov. 12, 2008

Distribution centers are big business in Kern County, and costs to operate them here are among the lowest in the nation, according to a new study.

Location consulting firm The Boyd Co. of Princeton, N.J., ranked Bakersfield No. 8 of 30 cities surveyed. It would cost \$17 million per year to operate a new 500,000-square-foot-facility with 225 hourly employees in Bakersfield, the study found.

Ahead of Bakersfield are Mohave Valley, Ariz.; Salt Lake City/Provo, Utah; Tucson, Ariz.; Albuquerque, N.M.; Phoenix/Mesa, Ariz.; Boise, Idaho; and Reno/Sparks, Nev.

The firm monitors business climates, labor conditions and cost trends, among other factors.

The Californian met with consultant John Boyd Jr. Tuesday. Responses were edited for length and clarity.

Q: Why visit Bakersfield?

A: Distribution will continue to be the next big generator of jobs in Kern County. Last year, the industry grew by 10 percent. We project that to grow. Target is doing an enormous expansion; it's a great endorsement for the county.

Among the big issues we discussed today is the idea of competition. Historically, (California) competed and lost projects to Las Vegas, Salt Lake City, Phoenix and, to a lesser extent, Albuquerque. My last visit here, I spent the whole time talking about Mexico and Las Vegas. The reality today, those markets have been victims of their own success. Land costs have skyrocketed in those markets. Labor costs have increased dramatically. We like to position our clients ahead of trends; companies are always looking for what's next.

Q: Can you say more about that?

A: Indian reservations are where smart companies are beginning to contemplate putting distribution center facilities. And this is true for a few reasons. No. 1, one of the big issues not talked about or written about is the cost of water.

Reservations have priority when it comes to water rights. Water's cheaper. And the other, this is interesting, too, there's tax credits that make investing on reservations very pro-business. It's a logical extension of what's happened with the gaming industry. Google is regarded as a pioneer with their site-selection decisions — their newest information warehouse is in Pryor, Okla., on land that has an Indian designation.

Q: Bakersfield doesn't have reservations. Why is it a good place for a distribution center?

A: For a company that wants to be in California, Bakersfield is a premier choice. You're within four hours of (the majority) of the population. California's the eighth largest market in the world. Industrial vacancy rates here are very low. For the past decade, everyone's been talking about outsourcing of manufacturing to China. There's good news here.

Good jobs are washing back ashore, distribution jobs. Each year, the U.S. imports \$44 trillion of goods from China, much of that from the port of LA ... The reality of 21st century warehouses are different than how warehouses used to be

The overall industry trends are for a company to first invest with a warehouse. Land is inexpensive in Kern County. You have enough acreage where you can do a back office facility, you can consolidate. The trend in warehousing is to house multi-functions.

Q: Your study mentions a port in Baja, Mexico — Punta Colonet.

A: It might take a decade or so to reach capacity. A lot of business groups in the U.S. act as if this thing is 20 years away. Within the next decade, the port of Punta Colonet will have some competition. Even in this awful economy, state governments and city governments are positioning themselves to get ready for funding for this new port. Mohave (Valley, the lowest-priced location to operate a distribution center, and it's on a reservation) rests along the Cali-Mex corridor.

Q: What about environmental concerns and distribution centers?

A: [Clean diesel is the next big issue](#). (Gov. Arnold) Schwarzenegger is smart to pick issues where it's easy to be pro-environment. Gas prices have come down; clearly, they're going to go back up again, because of all the big macro trends. Clean diesel, for industry survival and to be viable, you need clean diesel.

3 groups file suit to protect clean trucks plan

The Associated Press

Tri-Valley Herald and Modesto Bee, Tuesday, November 12, 2008

LOS ANGELES—Three environmental groups are suing the Federal Maritime Commission over the clean trucks program at the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach.

The suit filed Monday alleges the agency violated environmental laws when it sought a court order to halt parts of the program that could lead to the replacement of about 18,000 older trucks.

The two ports began the \$1.6 million effort last month, hoping to reduce diesel truck emissions by 80 percent within five years.

The Natural Resources Defense Council, Sierra Club and Coalition for Clean Air filed the suit in U.S. District Court, claiming the commission failed to consider public health and environmental damage.

The commission says the new rules will reduce competition and either increase transportation costs or reduce service at the port.

Climate change effect on oceans causing sea change

By Douglas Fischer - Daily Climate

Tri-Valley Herald, Tuesday, November 11, 2008

The most pressing example of climate changes impact is not monster hurricanes, retreating glaciers or water wars. Its the humble swimming sea snail.

The tiny pteropod has difficulty growing a shell in a warmer planet's acidified ocean waters. Given the snails' role at the base of the cold-water food chain, its struggle threatens the entire polar ecosystem, through salmon to seals and whales.

The problem is one of many associated with ocean acidification. That change is well underway - a consequence of warming that has already happened and fossil-fuel emissions that have long since been dumped into the atmosphere.

In absorbing those emissions the oceans have buffered humanity from the worst effects of climate change. But in doing so ocean chemistry has changed, acidifying to levels not seen in 800,000 years.

The result, according to a new report issued today by Oceana, is that today's ocean chemistry is already hostile for many creatures fundamental to the marine food web. The world's oceans — for so long a neat and invisible sink for humanity's carbon dioxide emissions — are about to extract a price for all that waste.

The effects are not local: Entire ecosystems threaten to literally crumble away as critters relying on calcium carbonate for a home — from corals to mollusks to the sea snail — have a harder time manufacturing their shells. Corals shelter millions of species worldwide, while sea snails account for upwards of 45 percent of the diet of pink salmon.

To avoid the most serious problems associated with acidification, Oceana and other scientists warn, society must hold atmospheric carbon dioxide levels at 350 parts-per-million, roughly 25 percent higher than the pre-industrial mark.

The rub is that the globe has already passed 385 ppm. And many economists and climatologists figure the peak will lie somewhere north of 570 ppm before society figures out how to curb emissions.

"Climate change has been happening for a long time," said Jackie Savitz, Oceanas senior director of pollution campaigns and co-author of the report, *Acid Test: Can we save our oceans from CO2?* "The oceans are so big, so vast, and everyone thought they were untouchable. But the fact is we've been touching them all along."

What alarms scientists most is the rate of change: The transformation has happened over 250 years, faster than anything in the historical record. And if emissions remain unchecked, Oceana warned, the oceans in 40 years will be more acidic than anything experienced in the past 20 million years.

Over the next several centuries the pH changes may be larger than any inferred from the geologic record of the past 300 million years, with the exception of a few rare extreme events, scientists predict.

The process is fairly simple. For eons prior to the Industrial Revolution, oceans were at equilibrium with the atmosphere, absorbing as much carbon dioxide as they released.

As humanity started burning fuel, atmospheric carbon dioxide levels started to rise, and the oceans responded, taking in more and more carbon each year and increasing acidity by nearly 30 percent.

The oceans so far have absorbed some 30 percent of the carbon dioxide that humans have added to the atmosphere since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution and nearly 80 percent of the heat generated by those gases, according to Oceana.

Today the world's oceans absorb some 30 million metric tons of extra carbon dioxide every day, according to scientists — roughly twice the amount of carbon dioxide emitted each day by the United States.

The ocean has a number of natural buffers to help with change — ocean sediments and deep water represent two enormous potential reservoirs — but they all work on vastly slower time scales, said Richard Zeebe, associate professor of oceanography at the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

"It's very difficult to find a nice analogue in the past that's going to show what were going to experience over the next 200 to 300 years," he said. "It's pretty much outrageous what we've done."

"We are overwhelming the system," he added. "The system is not quick enough to react. It takes thousands of years to do this."

Scientists are already seeing harm as the ocean's acidify. Reefs are struggling in many parts of the world, shell growth rates are slowing, life phases — particularly reproductive maturity — are being thrown out of whack.

Even the healthiest reefs in the most optimum conditions today face a daily struggle to grow faster than reef dwellers and the ocean can erode them, and the effects grow more dire as atmospheric carbon dioxide levels rise.

Somewhere between 450 ppm and 500 ppm atmospheric carbon dioxide, for instance, lies a tipping point where, scientists suspect, reefs become rapidly eroding rubble banks. Much beyond that, Oceana reported, reefs as we know them would be extremely rare. Current projections show that by the end of this century no adequate conditions for coral will remain in the world's oceans.

But the chemistry is complex and the variables myriad. Atmospheric carbon dioxide alone does not determine acidity.

"We cannot look into the past and say atmospheric carbon dioxide was highest in the Cretaceous (65 to 145 million years ago), therefore this is what the ocean is going to look like," Zeebe said. "Time scale is key. Rate of change is key."

A frequently touted example of rapid change in the geologic record is the so-called Paleocene-Eocene Thermal Maximum. About 55 million years ago the Earth abruptly warmed 6C, the oceans acidified, atmospheric and oceanic circulation patterns shifted and a large number of bottom-dwellers died off.

That change happened over perhaps 10,000 years — not even close to today's pace.

"This is hard for many people to understand," Zeebe said. "You need to separate the different time scales."

Oceana maintains that holding atmospheric carbon dioxide at 350 ppm would prevent the most dire problems but still represents a concentration above the safe threshold for today's ocean life.

But for many scientists, that mark is history; in fact current industrial emissions exceed even the highest scenario — 850 ppm by century's end — mapped by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, said Stanford University climatologist Stephen Schneider.

There's no question 350 ppm represents the safest level, Schneider said. But society will be lucky to peak at 450 ppm, he said, with a more likely crest north of 550 ppm before emissions stabilize.

"We're going to have an overshoot," he said. "The only question is how bad is that overshoot going to be."

Our objective has to be to prevent a much worse, rather than pretend we can roll the clock back to an impossibility."

The question then becomes how much acidification can reefs handle before they start to crumble. Unfortunately as scientists learn more, the threshold keeps dropping.

"We're pretty sure that 560 is too high and were almost certain that 700 is too high, but we just plain don't know much about whether 350 or 450 would be OK," said Joanie Kleypas, a marine scientist studying coral at the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colo.

Marine scientists have gradually concluded that world carbon dioxide levels will eventually peak at some higher-than-desired threshold no matter what happens, Kleypas said, and hold hope that some technology or solution will bring concentrations back down to the threshold level or lower.

There are hazards with this approach, of course, notably the increased likelihood of passing dangerous tipping points in climate, ocean circulation or general ecological response.

That's why Oceanas Savitz believes the line must be held at 350 ppm. It is a realistic goal, she said. The good news is it's from lack of trying. We really haven't done the obvious things or picked the low-hanging fruit.

Conservation, for instance, can erase big chunks of projected emissions.

The Oceana report outlines five approaches that together would help drop atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations to 350 ppm and preserve coral, including stopping deforestation and overfishing, promoting energy efficiency and low-carbon fuels, and regulating carbon releases.

"The better job we do at limiting ourselves, the less (harm) we'll see," Savitz said. "But we're going to see some impacts. We're not going to get out of this unscathed."

[Merced Sun-Star Editorial, Wednesday, November 12, 2008:](#)

Our View: A high-speed future awaits

Passage of rail bond will mean an economic bonanza for Merced, the Valley.

The passage of Proposition 1A on Election Day means the future of high-speed rail in California has really begun.

A new business report released Friday by the California High-Speed Rail Authority shows us the outlines of that future.

The plan estimates that when the first leg of the system is up and running -- between Southern California and the Bay Area, by way of Merced and the Valley -- the high-speed trains will generate more than \$1 billion annually in excess revenue.

That money can be used to repay construction bonds, expand and improve the system or to pay dividends to the private investors who will help build it.

It will also help fund the second phase of the project, running south to San Diego and north to Sacramento from Merced.

The first phase is expected to cost around \$33 billion by the time it's finished. The second phase will add another \$12 billion or so to the final cost of construction.

It will take about two years before actual construction starts. Detailed plans must be finalized and right-of-way acquired along the 800-mile route. Rail officials are limited in the amount of bond money from Proposition 1A that can be spent before federal and private funding sources are identified.

Prospects for that funding are good, despite the gloomy economic situation we currently face. There is a growing bipartisan consensus in Congress that favors passenger rail development, including high-speed rail. President-elect Barack Obama is an outspoken supporter of high-speed rail.

Public infrastructure projects such as high-speed rail are sure to be at the forefront of any economic stimulus efforts out of Washington in the coming weeks. Putting people to work is the best way to stimulate spending, and thus recovery, when economies are in recession.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein, a powerful voice in Washington, said Wednesday that "There is legislation that will set up 11 regional systems in the U.S. for high-speed rail, and we will qualify as one of them. I think we've now got our ducks in order to be No. 1 on that list, and as an appropriater, that will be a job of mine."

In addition, some 40 companies, many of them worldwide giants, responded to the the rail authority's Request for Expressions of Interest last spring. Some of that interest, no doubt, has waned since the global economic meltdown began, but there are sure to be private companies willing to follow where state and federal funds lead.

The Valley stands to prosper most from this project. Many of the 160,000 construction jobs generated by high-speed rail will go to Valley workers.

The first track is expected to connect Bakersfield and Merced, and will be used to test and certify the trains and cars that are chosen for the system.

Air quality improvements -- the trains will reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 12 billion pounds per year and the state's reliance on fossil fuel by 12.7 million barrels of oil per year -- will be felt most in the Valley.

The trains will induce growth, but it will be the sort of growth we need: clustered around the downtown station, not sprawling out toward the horizon in every direction.

Voters may have taken a leap of faith in approving Proposition 1A, but in a few years it will seem like a sure bet.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses President Elect Obama will allow California to activate its own environmental law. For more information on this and other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

El presidente electo, Obama permitirá a California activar su propia ley ambiental

Manuel Ocaño, Noticiero Latino
Radio Bilingüe, Wednesday, November 12, 2008

El presidente electo, Barack Obama autorizará a California poner en vigor su propia ley ambiental estatal, considerada la más estricta contra la contaminación en el país, en el marco de la ley federal Acta de Aire Limpio.

Al anunciar su decisión el presidente autoriza por expansión a otros 17 estados que han aprobado leyes réplicas de la de California.

La administración del presidente saliente de George Bush impidió que entrara en vigor esa ley.

Los estados con leyes ambientales en espera planean complementar sus esfuerzos entre sí.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses Dr. Henry Forman, an expert in respiratory diseases joins the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.](#)

Experto en enfermedades respiratorias se une a autoridad contra la contaminación

Manuel Ocaño, Noticiero Latino
Radio Bilingüe, Monday, November 10, 2008

Un experto en enfermedades pulmonares, el doctor Henry Forman, de la Universidad de California en Merced forma desde ahora de la Oficina Distrital de Control Unificado de Contaminación del Aire en el Valle de San Joaquín en California.

El nuevo miembro se integra por decisión del senado de California de agregar un médico y un científico a esa oficina.

Forman es experto en investigaciones sobre la manera en que los pulmones se defienden de enfermedades como el asma.

Sus análisis son especialmente importantes en el Valle de San Joaquín, con alto índice de asmáticos por la contaminación.