

Visalia's Vi-Cycle program expands from downtown to citywide

Written by Donna-Marie Sonnichsen

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Tuesday, Dec. 13, 2011

Three-piece suit on a bicycle? Two wheels instead of four to get to work? Don't knock it until you try it, say participants in the Visalia's alternative transportation project Vi-Cycle.

The project, now three-and-a half-years old, takes abandoned bicycles, makes them as good as new and sells them to businesses for \$25. Employees then buy the bikes at cost from their employer.

It takes the go-green Visalia slogan literally, painting the bikes a deep green with "Vi-Cycle" in white lettering.

"Employees stay healthy, you cut back on greenhouse gasses and it frees up parking. And you save on gas and it keeps waste out of the landfill," said project coordinator Nathan Garza, of the city of Visalia's Natural Resource Conservation Department.

But with only 102 distributed around town since the project began in June 2008, it just may be one of the best-kept secrets in town.

"They really should push the project more, make it more apparent. There's a huge bike culture here," said Mike Voyles, 27, who's had one of the green bicycles with the white Vi-Cycle lettering for about two years.

"I thought at first it would be a junker but they have some pretty nice stuff there," Voyles said.

They are so nice that employer Stephanie Dyer said some of her Brewbakers' employees are on a waiting list for their refurbished bike after picking it out at the city warehouse.

The majority of bikes are either mountain bikes or beach cruisers, and most were left behind on area Transit buses, Garza said.

They are refurbished by inmates of Corcoran State Prison as part of a training program, then checked over by professionals at a local bike shop to make sure they are good to go, said Garza, who added that the \$25 cost goes toward any parts needed during the refurbishing process.

He said otherwise they would have ended up being melted down for the metal.

"It's a win-win for everyone," Garza said.

Even the few Frankensteins, as Garza calls those that are put together with parts from several bikes, look like new when they end up in the new owner's hands.

"Some businesses aren't aware of this, but it's fantastic," Dyer said. "We like our employees to have safe, reliable transportation and it helps them show up for work on time. If they are successful, we are successful."

It also makes it easier to deal with bike theft, which several employees have faced, Dyer said.

"It gives them hope because it can be replaced. It's a lot easier to lose a \$25 bike than one that cost \$200, \$300, or \$400," she said.

Her employees agree.

"It's devastating to go outside after work and find it's not there or there's no seat. And it's nice to know your employer is so supportive," said Derek Artis, 28.

"It's amazing they're doing this. Just when you think the world doesn't care about the little things. And it's a brilliant way to wrap it up and package it by making it green," he said.

Melissa Rucker prefers her bike over her car, especially for short trips.

And that makes Garza happy.

It's the first 10 minutes after starting a vehicle that creates the most pollution while the catalytic converter heats up, so bicycles are especially ideal for quick errands, he said.

The program originally targeted just the downtown but has now expanded to the city limits and picked up buyers in large centers like the CIGNA call center on Akers Street.

Even businesses in the outlying industrial parks are beginning to express interest, Garza said.

What Is Your Child Breathing?

By Patric Hedlund

Mountain Enterprise (Lebec), Fri., Dec. 9, 2011

When El Tejon School was built in 1939 it was in a beautiful, healthy country setting. Since then, the Interstate 5 has been built less than 150 yards from the classrooms, right next to the children's playing fields. An average of 350,000 cars and big rig diesel trucks pass by every week—70,000 a day—spewing diesel soot and other exhaust into the air. One survey showed the presence of asthma and respiratory problems for El Tejon students may be twice the national average.

The TriCounty Watchdogs (TCW) won a \$25,000 grant last year to monitor what is in the air the children are breathing. But so far the El Tejon Unified School District Board of Trustees and the superintendent have not allowed air monitoring.

On November 18, TCW president Linda MacKay wrote an OpEd in The Mountain Enterprise, "We Need to Monitor Air Quality at El Tejon School," saying it is better to know—rather than not know—how our children are being affected. The newspaper invited all trustees to reply to the OpEd:

"You are invited to respond to this OpEd as an individual, speaking for yourself, sharing your thinking with the people who elected you. We are not seeking a spokesperson for a board position. We will make it clear in the introduction that you are expressing your personal point of view— which is what the public wants to hear."

Trustee Ken Hurst replied:

"I stated my position and reasoning on monitoring air pollution at El Tejon School clearly at the board meeting of June 8, 2011. At that time the vote was 2 "for" and 1 "against." Since our bylaws state that the vote must be a "majority vote of all of the membership constituting the board" and there are 5 members of the board, the motion did not carry."

Trustee Cathy Wallace had just resigned from the board that night and Paula Regan did not attend that meeting, so a quorum of 3 was present for the vote. Anita Anderson voted with Hurst to allow the air monitoring. John Fleming voted against it. Despite the quorum majority, the measure failed. The loophole in board policy effectively says a quorum cannot pass an item unless it is unanimous. The question was not placed on a subsequent agenda for reconsideration by the full board.

Trustee Stephen Kiouses replied:

"It is inappropriate for me as a board member to comment on issues brought before the board outside of a board meeting. The appropriate place for my comments are at board meetings, not in the newspaper. Therefore I will not individually comment on this OpEd or any other OpEd."

Trustee Kiouses has been invited to refer us to the state law or board bylaw used to guide that reply— considering that air monitoring is not an issue before the ETUSD board at this time and does not appear on any board agenda.

Back to an electric future for cars

By Daniel Yergin, Los Angeles Times

In the Sacramento Bee, Tuesday, Dec. 13, 2011

One day in 1948, Caltech chemistry professor Arie Haagen-Smit took a break from trying to decipher the mystery of the flavor of the pineapple. He stepped outside his lab for a breath of fresh air but instead found himself enveloped in what he called "that stinking cloud" of smog. At the time, there was a bitter debate as to what caused smog. So Haagen-Smit decided to put aside his pineapples (he had already worked out the taste chemistry of onions, garlic and wine and had identified the active agent in marijuana) to try to solve the source of smog.

What he discovered explains why plug-in electric cars - the Leafs, Volts, Teslas and all the other models that automakers will bring out in the next few years - are appearing on our roads. Or, to be more precise, reappearing.

In 1900, more battery-powered electric cars ran on the streets of New York City than cars with internal combustion engines, and over the next few years there was a fierce race for supremacy between them. But the arrival in 1908 of Henry Ford's Model T turned the gasoline-powered car into an affordable mass-market product and made the electric car a historical curiosity. The moment when Haagen-Smit exchanged his fascination with food for one for smog marked the beginning of a shift back.

It could only have happened in L.A., which in the decades after World War II was under continuous attack by a blue-gray cloud that stung the eyes, made breathing painful and suffocated the L.A. Basin. On bad days, L.A. schools canceled recess. Sometimes the smog was so dense that motorists had to pull over and wait for it to lift; flights had to be diverted from Los Angeles airport.

The city seemed defenseless. During one particularly bad attack, Mayor Norris Poulson was hauled in front of a grand jury that wanted action. The mayor said there was nothing he could do save issue a proclamation "to halt automobile traffic and to direct people to stay home."

A critical obstacle to doing more than that was the lack of agreement about what caused smog. Many thought the main culprit were the million and a half backyard trash incinerators. Using his great skills as a chemist, Haagen-Smit demonstrated otherwise. And he did so rather quickly; as he put it, "We hit the jackpot with the first nickel."

The source was primarily the emissions from the incomplete burning of gasoline in internal combustion engines, plus emissions from gas storage tanks and auto gas tanks. The automobile that was the basis of the Southern California way of life was also the scourge of that lifestyle. One citizen summed up the shock in a letter to the Los Angeles Times: "We have created one of the finest networks of freeways in the country, and suddenly wake up to discover that we have also created a monster."

From Haagen-Smit's decisive discovery came the first regulations of auto emissions, which led to the catalytic converter and other technical solutions. But it didn't happen right away. One smog attack in the 1960s was so bad that Gov. Ronald Reagan went on television to plead with the public "to limit all but absolutely necessary auto travel."

But Reagan did something else as well. In 1967, he signed into law a new agency - the California Air Resources Board. As its first chairman, he chose none other than Haagen-Smit, by then known as the "Father of Smog."

Because California was such a large car market and because other states adopt its regulations, the air resources board became the closest thing to a global environmental regulator of the auto industry. From the beginning under Haagen-Smit, it focused on solving the smog problem. It required automakers to come up with emission solutions, and the air quality in Southern California improved in response.

Then, in 1990, the board took a historic step. It ordered that 10 percent of new cars sold in California by 2003 had to be zero emission vehicles, or ZEVs. That required, in practical terms, electric cars.

The zero-emissions target had slipped into the regulations almost unnoticed, but carmakers set out to deliver as ordered. Remember the EV1? In the 1990s, GM spent a billion dollars on its development. And Toyota tried to sell an all-electric version of the RAV4, its small SUV. But while hybrid Priuses moved out of showrooms, there was little consumer interest in the all-electric model. The documentary "Who Killed the Electric Car?" names the automakers themselves as the main villain, but the real obstacle was the technology, or lack thereof.

"The true villain was the battery," said Daniel Sperling, director of the Institute of Transportation Studies at UC Davis and a current member of air resources board. "The batteries at the time were simply not capable of meeting the cost requirements and the performance expectations."

But California's zero-emissions requirement, even if a failure in the near-term, had laid down a marker for the return of the electric car. The air resources board revised its first ZEV order, but it did not back off, and other factors began to catch up with it to pave the way for the current generation of electric cars.

For example, new lithium battery technologies appeared, with more energy density and greater range than traditional lead-acid batteries. Climate change moved to the top of the environmental agenda, which meant more focus on tailpipe carbon dioxide emissions. Rising gasoline prices and concerns about energy security stimulated interest in diversifying transportation away from oil. Competition among the United States, China and Japan for manufacturing leadership in new industries focused on the electric car.

Still, it all started with smog. As Sperling put it, "The 1990 ZEV mandate emerged out of a debate about what to do about air quality, not from concerns over oil security, global warming or competitiveness with China."

The race that seemed to be definitively over a century ago has started again. But it is still very much the first lap in this latest heat. It will be half a decade, or even a decade, before the outcome is decided and we find out whether the electric car will be a truly mass-market product or, at best, a niche vehicle.

Whatever the haze over the future, what is clear is that a straight road clearly runs from Arie Haagen-Smit, his pineapples and "that stinking cloud" of smog in 1948 to the electric cars that are appearing today.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Daniel Yergin's new book is "The Quest: Energy, Security, and the Remaking of the Modern World." He received the Pulitzer Prize for his history of oil, "The Prize." He wrote this for the Los Angeles Times.

[Bakersfield Californian, Commentary, Monday, Dec 12 2011:](#)

Warning: more air board regulation ahead

By Lois Henry, Californian Columnist

Forgive me for saying I told you so, but I did.

I've been plaguing you with stories about a California-specific air pollution study by Michael Jerrett of U.C. Berkeley on the supposedly deadly effects of PM2.5 since May 2010.

Some of you are probably sick of hearing about this obscure, egghead study. But this is where regulations that affect your daily lives are conceived. So pay attention!

The California Air Resources Board solicited and paid for the Jerrett study and, despite numerous criticisms of its methods and conclusions, it was rubber stamped by CARB's Research Screening Committee in October.

Then right on cue, CARB put out a press release late last week touting the Jerrett study and two other CARB-funded studies as proof that fine particulate matter (PM2.5) "elevates the risk for premature deaths from heart disease in older adults."

"We've long known particulate matter is a major component of California's air pollution problem," CARB Chairman Mary D. Nichols said in the release. "These new studies underscore the need to eliminate the threat from California's air."

Follow along: The regulatory agency seeks the study, it pays for the study and, whaddayaknow, the study's results come back saying the regulatory agency needs to do more regulatin'. How's that for convenience?

Anyhoo, two things about Nichols' absurd statement.

Number one, there's no way to eliminate particulate matter from the atmosphere. Even if all us horrible, rotten humans and our evil emissions suddenly fell off the face of the earth, there would still be dust and soot in the air naturally.

Number two, using CARB's own rules, the studies she touts do not show any threat from PM2.5.

The Jerrett study only shows essentially no elevated risk of premature death from "all causes," which is the only category CARB can use for regulations. The one model out of nine in Jerrett's study that showed any blip of risk at all has margins of error that take the risk down to zero, by the way.

The same is true for the "all cause" category in the other study cited in the CARB release, one by Michael Lipsett of the California Department of Public Health.

"All cause" is important because, as Jerrett himself told me several months ago, it's too difficult to pin a specific cause of death on air pollution. The numbers become too small to show a link.

Not only that, but CARB is supposed to weigh the cost of its regulations against the supposed benefits, lives saved and reduced medical costs.

It's the "all cause" death category that's used to calculate the premature deaths supposedly from PM2.5 exposure.

CARB has had wide swings in the number of deaths it says are caused by PM2.5 and, more specifically, diesel PM2.5. It currently claims its pending truck and heavy equipment rules will save 291 lives per year. (By the way, about 250,000 Californians die each year.)

So, it was very interesting to me that CARB's press release focused on the supposed risk of death "from heart disease in older adults" caused by PM2.5, rather than "all cause."

Makes me wonder if the rules of the game are about to shift. Stay tuned.

Aside from that, the timing of CARB's press release on its studies is impeccable.

The CARB board will meet Dec. 16 and representatives of the trucking and heavy equipment industries plan a last-ditch effort to convince board members to delay or scrap pending rules, slated to go into effect Jan. 1, 2012.

Obviously, popping out several "we're-all-gonna-die" studies right about now is useful to the alarmist community, Nichols chief among them.

The third study mentioned in CARB's release was actually the most interesting to me. It was a study by Fern Tablin, UC Davis, looking at what happens to mice exposed to concentrated levels of PM2.5 and smaller.

Of course, any such study opens an argument that humans don't ingest or inhale anywhere near such concentrations.

But I was interested in Tablin's examination of exactly how fine particles may affect the body, possibly leading to heart disease and other problems.

I'm hoping such studies open the door to more exacting science that drills down to what it is in fossil fuel emissions that harms human health.

Perhaps if we were able to figure that out, CARB could create truly economically feasible regulations for just those harmful constituents. Instead of the hamfisted, non-accountable way we're going about it now.

For years, diesel fuel has been cleaner, truck engines made to vastly lower-emitting standards and some companies have already been adding filters on top of that. And for what?

"I don't have a problem doing all this if they can prove what I'm doing actually works," said Jim Ganduglia, owner of Ganduglia Trucking in Fresno. He's been upgrading and retrofitting his fleet of 15 trucks since 2006.

His question is a fair one: Are the rules actually saving lives?

"But they (CARB) never want to discuss that."

Hey, maybe CARB could spend some of our tax dollars studying THAT.