

Earth Day event teaches Merced kids to pamper the planet

By Ana B. Ibarra, staff writer

Merced Sun-Star, Sunday, May 25, 2014

Golden Valley Health Centers gathered children from south Merced to celebrate its own version of Earth Day late last week.

Students from Alicia Reyes Elementary and Tenaya Middle School, as well as other children from the community, participated Friday in a variety of games and activities designed to teach them how to take better care of their planet.

According to GVHC Program Manager Mary-Michal Rawling, the centers celebrate Earth Day in May because students have testing and spring break in April, which can sometimes conflict with Earth Day celebrations.

Activities available for children Friday included arts and crafts with recycled materials, face-painting, a recycle relay course and information booths set up by local environmental groups.

Some of the topics addressed were water pollution and discharge and alternative modes of transportation.

"We try to cover all aspects of what it takes to be an environmentally friendly community by teaching children how to reduce, reuse and recycle," Rawling said.

Leah Brown, water conservation specialist with the city of Merced, said it is important to start educating children about the importance of being green at a young age.

"We just want to make sure that our children are on the right path so that they become responsible consumers of our water system," Brown said.

She used the gathering as an opportunity to pass out reminders about the new watering schedule, information she hoped children will pass on to their parents.

The new "water diet" asks families to cut down outdoor watering to two days per week. The typical household uses about 70 percent of their daily water outdoors, so reducing usage to two days can make a significant difference, Brown said.

Similarly, Maricela Velasquez, a representative from the Air Valley District, talked to students about the "No Idling" campaign. This initiative asks parents to turn off their vehicles while they wait for their children to come out of school because vehicle emissions put children's health at risk.

Velasquez suggested to students that they ask to be walked to school if they live within a mile. She also recommended using a bicycle to get to and from school.

GVHC's Earth Day is an annual event organized by the centers' staff and local members of AmeriCorps, a community service program that helps carry out health care, education and environmental protection projects.

"I think it's just a fun way to learn about how we can improve our community as a whole," Rawling said about putting on the event. "The reason why we do it at Golden Valley Health Centers is because we realize that people aren't healthy unless the environment they're in is healthy."

Homes evacuated in Mariposa County as 900-acre Hunter fire spreads

Staff reports

Fresno Bee, Monday, May 26, 2014

A fast-moving brush fire in Mariposa County has charred more than 900 acres and triggered evacuations near Lake McClure, officials said Tuesday morning.

The fire started around 3:30 p.m. Monday near Hunters Valley Access Road in the Bear Valley area.

Evacuations began Monday night in the Hunters Valley area. About 30-35 homes in the Bear Valley area have been evacuated and roads have been closed, officials said. The fire is 10% contained.

Evacuations began around 8 p.m. in the Hunters Valley area. Hunters Valley Road is closed at Bear Valley Road and Cotton Creek Road at Bear Valley Road. The evacuation center is at 2820 Highway 140.

Cal Fire spokesman Daniel Berlant said roughly 100 residences were threatened. One was destroyed.

A Red Cross shelter was being set up Monday night at McKay Hall in Catheys Valley. The American Red Cross said they expected to assist about 40 families.

Smoke was visible into Stanislaus County, near Turlock Lake.

Air tankers were called in to assist ground crews in fighting the blaze.

The blaze has been dubbed the Hunters fire because of its proximity to Hunters Valley Road, which is located east of Lake McClure.

Report: Valley makes strides in clean tech

By Ben Keller, staff writer

(Fresno) Business Journal, Friday, May 23, 2014

While not a mecca of energy efficiency and innovation like the Bay Area, a new report showed the San Joaquin Valley on the forefront of some important clean technology trends.

Now in its sixth year, the 2014 California Green Innovation Index prepared by Next 10 and Collaborative Economics put the state far ahead of the nation in terms of emission reductions, renewable energy, electric cars and other clean technology measures.

California's per capita emissions, for instance, dropped 14 percent from 1997 to 2011 as the U.S. without California increased carbon intensity by five percent.

The state also increased its renewable energy resources by 1.3 percentage points in 2012 compared to a decline of 0.7 percent for the U.S., while California also led the way in energy storage deployment at 481 megawatts.

The San Joaquin Valley had its own contributions to the data. From 2011 to 2012, the Valley grew 31 percent in advanced materials jobs, or those involved in processing more efficient metals, ceramics, gels, polymers and composites or bioproducts to replace harsh chemicals.

Out of 11 regions compared, that's behind only the San Diego region, which grew by 84 percent over the same period.

Within the agricultural support sector, including irrigation technology and software companies to make farming more sustainable, the Valley had a majority of the segment at 30 percent, or about 11,500 jobs.

The Valley was also second in total distributed solar installations with nearly 240 megawatts installed from 2007 to 2013, according to the California Solar Initiative.

Only the San Francisco Bay Area had more, with about 366 megawatts installed over the 6-year period.

Zero-emissions vehicle registrations grew about 30 percent in the Valley from 2011 to 2012 to 1,300, the highest change in the state over the period.

Energy productivity was one of the most telling indicators of the state's progress in the clean tech arena. In 2011, California generated \$2.52 of gross domestic product for every 10,000 British Thermal Units (BTU) of energy consumed. That compares to \$1.51 for the U.S. as a whole, meaning California created 1.7 times as much economic activity as the rest of the U.S. with the same amount of energy.

Energy efficiency alone was much better, with per capita energy consumption in the state decreasing by 24 percent to 0.21 BTUs since 1970 compared to only a 4-percent drop throughout the rest of the nation.

California's renewable electricity generation surged 56 percent between 2002 and 2012, reaching roughly 46,500 gigawatt-hours, on its way to reaching the state's Renewable Portfolio Standard of 33 percent of electricity generation from renewables by 2020.

In the area of clean transportation, the state's Low Carbon Fuel Standard established in 2007 is poised to reduce the carbon pollution from gasoline and diesel by 10 percent by 2020.

According to the report, Governor Jerry Brown continues to move the state towards a goal of 1.5 million electric zero-emissions vehicles operating in the state by 2025.

Alternative fuel vehicle registrations increased 16 percent in the state from 2011 to 2012, while zero emissions vehicles increased 62 percent compared to 1.5 percent for all new vehicle registrations.

Total investments in California clean technology companies declined 53 percent in 2013 compared to 2012, but the state continues to comprise the majority of the clean technology venture capital in the U.S. at 48 percent.

California also had a total of more than 1,434 clean technology patents in the 2012-2013 period, more than twice as many as the next leading state of Michigan.

Energy storage also took up several pages of the report, which called California a leader in the largely untapped market.

For one thing, California increased patents in batteries and other storage devices by 220 in 2013, quadrupling 2008 levels.

The state registered more energy storage patents in 2013 than the next four highest states combined, the majority of those registered to private firms like Tesla of Palo Alto and Imergy Power Systems of Fremont.