

CUSD revises policy about bad air days

Changes already part of process, officials say

By Gabriel Alexander, Independent Staff Writer

Clovis Independent Friday, Jan. 6, 2006

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District suggested changes after it reviewed the policy guiding what Clovis schools do during times of bad air pollution.

Clovis Unified School District's Governing Board approved revisions to its policy at its Jan. 4 meeting. The revisions - recommended by the air district - more clearly define poor air quality, according to the meeting agenda.

"It doesn't change the way we're doing business at all," said district spokeswoman Kelly Avants. "It's just makes the language clearer."

The revisions include broadening terms such as "Health Advisory episodes" to "episodes of poor air quality." For example, one policy said, "The Board recognizes its responsibility to restrict physical activities in school or at school-sponsored activities during declared Health Advisory episodes." After the revisions, the policy now says, "The Board recognizes its responsibility to restrict physical activities in school or at school-sponsored activities during episodes of poor air quality."

The Valley air district is required by the state to issue health advisories to public schools when the air's ozone level becomes dangerous. It is not required to issue warnings during poor air quality when the air district recommends everyone limit outside exertion.

The policy now clarifies that the school district will act during times of poor air quality, not just when the air district issues a health advisory. It's something the district is already doing, Avants said.

In 2005, there were no health advisories, but the air quality standard, or AQI, exceeded 150, which indicates a higher pollution level, 11 times. AQI is a measure the air district uses to gauge the amount of pollution in the air. If the AQI is over 150, the air district encourages everyone to curtail outside activity.

When AQI is over 150, Clovis Unified restricts student behavior. Sporting games are cancelled if they're longer than 45 minutes. Playground monitors make sure students aren't exerting themselves. Special attention is given to students with respiratory problems. Last year, there were 9,061 Clovis students with problems such as asthma.

When a health advisory is issued, all outside activity is cancelled including football games. Usually health advisories end at 7 p.m., so many games are unaffected because of later starting times.

A general plan deferred

Tracy Press

Joanna Parsons

Tuesday, Jan. 10, 2006

A dozen letters critical of the Tracy's proposed general plan from government agencies, builders and environmentalists caused the city to delay hearings on its blueprint for growth.

Hearings, scheduled for this week, have been pushed back until March or later until concerns can be addressed.

Bill Dean, Tracy's planning manager, said several letters expressed dissatisfaction about certain segments of the plan's environmental report. Dean and Bill Reeds, director of development and engineering services, will ask for \$30,000 to \$50,000 for more analysis during the Jan. 17 City Council meeting.

Already, the general plan project has cost the city \$800,000, Dean said.

"It's not unusual for a project of this magnitude to take a little more time to be adopted," said Ed Gable, planning commissioner. "It's important that all the information and the concerns are flushed out and addressed."

The valley's air district said the report had inadequate information about the impacts of growth on air quality. Caltrans said it needs more data on traffic, and two developers complained about a ban on mini sewage-treatment plants.

Other concerns addressed in the letters include the lack of affordable housing and a vague definition of "small town feel," according to one letter submitted by Mark Connolly of the Tracy Region Alliance for a Quality Community.

A letter sent by the Sierra Club said the report failed to analyze traffic effects of growth on 7,890 acres in and around Tracy. Souza Realty & Development said the report failed to back up an assertion that building out from the city's core is preferable to sprawl.

"People made enough comments that they have to address them, and they want to take the time to address them," said Michael Souza, a consultant hired by the developers of Tracy Hills, a proposed 5,500-home community planned for southern Tracy.

The general plan is a blueprint for the city's growth during the next two decades. The plan has been discussed, redrafted and studied throughout the last few years, in various sections, with public comments.

Dean and Debra Corbett, the city attorney, said that after additional analysis, revised sections of the environmental report will be available for public comment in February. Dean hopes to have a final environmental report out by April.

Business Calendar

Bakersfield Californian
Tuesday, Jan. 10, 2006

Today Interactive Workshop on Leadership, luncheon seminar with Jim Pentico, president/CEO of Dale Carnegie Training in Central California, 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., Chamber of Commerce, 1725 Eye St. \$20 members; \$30 non-members. 327-4421.

Investing Basics Seminar, presented by Glenn O. Allen, 6 to 8 p.m., Edward Jones, 3731 Columbus St. Web site www.edwardjones.com or 871-0847.

Upcoming

2006 annual Statewide Pistachio Day, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Jan. 18; registration begins at 8:30 a.m., Visalia Convention Center, 303 E. Acequia, Visalia. Buffet lunch provided. Must be paid and ordered in advance. (559) 221-8294.

Greater Bakersfield Chamber of Commerce annual Dinner & Installation of Officers, social 5:30 p.m.; dinner 6:30 p.m. Jan. 26, DoubleTree Hotel Ballroom, 3100 Camino Del Rio Court. \$60. Reservations required by Jan. 18. 327-4421.

"Energy & Clean Air Business Exposition," featured speakers, mixers, car crusher demos, vendors, exhibits, lunch and more, noon to 6:30 p.m. Jan. 19, Holiday Inn Select, 801 Truxtun Ave. Web site www.bakersfieldchamber.org or call 324-1375.

Cleaning up the cleaners

New methods offer alternatives to toxic solvents

Illana DeBare, staff writer
S.F. Chronicle, Tuesday, January 10, 2006

Carbon dioxide created the bubbles in that cherry soda you spilled all over your brand-new cashmere sweater.

Now carbon dioxide will get the stain out too -- as part of a new environmentally friendly dry cleaning process being introduced in the Bay Area this month.

Blue Sky Cleaners, a family-owned business in Union City, will be the first Bay Area cleaner to replace traditional toxic solvents with a liquid form of carbon dioxide.

Environmental experts praise carbon dioxide cleaning as less harmful to human health than perchloroethylene, the solvent used by about 80 percent of dry cleaners. In fact, local air quality officials provided a \$10,000 grant to Blue Sky to help create a model for other local dry cleaners.

"We are excited because we're hoping that Blue Sky Cleaners will demonstrate to dry-cleaning owners that there is a new technology out there that is less toxic," said Luna Salavar, spokeswoman for the Bay Area Air Quality Management District.

Perchloroethylene has been the primary solvent used in dry cleaning for more than 50 years. Less flammable than previous oil-based products, it allowed for the spread of mom-and-pop cleaning businesses in residential and commercial neighborhoods.

But in the 1970s, researchers identified a slew of health problems linked to exposure to the compound, ranging from dizziness and nausea to liver problems and cancer. Perchloroethylene was listed as a hazardous air pollutant and a groundwater contaminant.

Frank Shaghafi, who started Blue Sky Cleaners with his brother-in-law Kyoung-Young Kim, experienced some of the dangers firsthand.

Shaghafi's parents were dry cleaners, and he followed them into the business. But in 1994, an industrial accident showered Shaghafi with boiling perchloroethylene. He became disoriented and dizzy; his shoes melted under him. He still has scars from the second- and third-degree burns.

After the accident, Shaghafi switched careers to respiratory therapy. But then he learned about emerging alternatives to perchloroethylene such as carbon dioxide and decided to return to dry cleaning.

"This is in my blood," Shaghafi said. "I know how to do this very well. And when we saw this new opportunity, we figured, 'We can do this and not get injured.' "

When his machines are up and running later this month, Shaghafi will be one of about 35 cleaning facilities around the country using carbon dioxide.

The process works by taking the gas form -- the same gas used by fast food restaurants to carbonate their soda -- and pressurizing it into a clear liquid. The pressurized liquid is then mixed with soap and clothes as in a traditional dry cleaning machine.

There are other alternatives, but they are of varying quality and safety. Some cleaners use oil-based solvents, but those can contribute to smog and are flammable. Others have adopted a silicone-based solvent made by a Kansas City firm called GreenEarth. Still another alternative is wet cleaning, or cleaning with water in special industrial machines.

In 2003, Consumer Reports compared the results of traditional cleaning with carbon dioxide, GreenEarth and wet cleaning. It concluded that carbon dioxide gave the best results, with GreenEarth coming in second. Both outperformed perchloroethylene.

"The clothing (cleaned by carbon dioxide) didn't change shape, shrink or stretch," the magazine said. "There was little or no change in the color or the texture of the fabrics; only one silk shirt faded slightly after the third cleaning."

Shaghafi and his family have invested a total of \$1.7 million in Blue Sky. Their 11,000-square foot facility includes three carbon dioxide machines, more than any other single cleaner in the country. They've also bought four wet-cleaning machines for fabrics such as triacetate that aren't appropriate for carbon dioxide, allowing them to completely eliminate perchloroethylene.

Blue Sky started testing its machines this week and will begin laundry service on Sunday. The company will pick up dirty laundry from homes and businesses and drop it off after it has been

cleaned. It already has contracts with 32 hotels, as well as with a 1-800-Dry-Clean franchise in Dublin that will use Blue Sky to clean its customers' garments.

Although air quality officials hope that other local cleaners will follow in Shaghafi's footsteps, the cost of carbon dioxide technology may prove an obstacle to many small neighborhood cleaners.

Shaghafi estimates that it will cost just \$3 per load to run the new machines, much less than the \$15 cost of cleaning with perchloroethylene.

But the investment in the new technology is significantly more expensive. Blue Sky spent \$165,000 on each of its carbon dioxide machines -- far above the \$30,000 to \$50,000 for other kinds of dry cleaning machines.

Carbon dioxide cleaning "will primarily be for larger garment care operations," said Peter Sinsheimer, director of the Pollution Prevention Center at Occidental College and an expert in the environmental impact of dry cleaning. "But most cleaners are five employees or fewer. Wet cleaning is a much more affordable alternative to (perchloroethylene) for most mom-and-pops."

There is government grant money available on a first-come, first-served basis to cleaners who switch from perchloroethylene to carbon dioxide or wet cleaning. The state is offering \$10,000 for switching, as are the city of San Francisco and the Bay Area Air Quality Management District. (PG&E also offers incentives of up to \$5,000 for switching to wet cleaning because it uses less energy.)

Meanwhile, like other technologies, carbon dioxide machines could become less expensive if demand grows. Environmental advocates hope that Blue Sky will help spur that demand.

"This is the first time Bay Area cleaners will be able to see both these (carbon dioxide and wet cleaning) technologies at a fully-operational cleaner," Sinsheimer said. "Frank has risked his livelihood for this and should be applauded for it. ... Frank is a sample size of one. But one is better than none. And one can become two or four or eight."

Dry cleaning alternatives

These are the main methods of professional garment cleaning in use today:

Perchloroethylene: The traditional dry cleaning solvent used by more than 80 percent of cleaners, it has been found to cause cancer as well as kidney and liver damage in animal studies. It can also cause dizziness, headaches and unconsciousness if inhaled for a short period of time. Perchloroethylene is nonflammable but is classified as a hazardous air pollutant under the Clean Air Act. Los Angeles air quality officials have ordered dry cleaners in their region to stop using it by 2020.

Petroleum-based solvents: This category includes a longtime dry cleaning solvent known as Stoddard, as well as newer solvents such as DF-2000, introduced in 1994 by ExxonMobil. The newer petroleum products are less flammable than the older ones. But they continue to present a fire hazard and emit volatile organic chemicals that contribute to smog.

Silicone-based solvents: GreenEarth is the brand name for siloxane D5, a silicone-based chemical that has been used for a long time in products such as deodorants, body lotions and shampoos. GreenEarth says its product is completely safe and degrades into sand, water and carbon dioxide. However, a 2003 study showed an increase in uterine tumors among female rats that were exposed to very high levels of siloxane. The Environmental Protection Agency is still assessing whether siloxane presents a cancer risk.

Carbon dioxide: Carbon dioxide cleaning uses a liquid form of the nontoxic, nonflammable gas that creates the carbonation in soft drinks. The form used in dry cleaning is a byproduct of other industrial operations such as fertilizer production, so there is no net increase of the chemical and no added contribution to global warming. In a 2003 test, Consumer Reports ranked carbon dioxide as the most effective form of dry cleaning, followed by siloxane. However, carbon dioxide machines are significantly more expensive than other kinds of dry cleaning equipment.

Professional wet cleaning: Like a regular washing machine, wet cleaning relies on water and biodegradable detergents. But it uses equipment that washes clothes more gently and sets a specific humidity level for the drying process. Then wet cleaners use pressing and tensioning equipment to prevent shrinkage and maintain garment shape. Wet cleaning can be used on some garments labeled "dry clean only."

For a list of Northern California cleaners that offer wet cleaning, see departments.oxy.edu/uepi/pperc/cleaner_near_you.htm.

For dry cleaners that offer carbon dioxide cleaning, see www.epa.gov/dfe/pubs/garment/gcrg/cleanguide.htm. Blue Sky Cleaners is at www.blueskycleaners.com.

For dry cleaners that offer siloxane cleaning, see www.greenearthcleaning.com/consumer/rostersearch.asp.

Sources: California Air Resources Board, Environmental Protection Agency, Pollution Prevention Center of Occidental College

Environmentalists Worry on China's Kangs

By JOE McDONALD, The Associated Press

Published in the Washington Post

Sunday, January 8, 2006; 7:20 AM

HUACHUAN, China -- Li Xiulan says that for all of her 73 winters in China's frigid northeast, her best weapon against the biting cold has been a pile of bricks. Like millions of northern Chinese, Li wakes up every morning on a kang _ a traditional brick sleeping platform heated from below by burning straw or coal during the long, dark winter months.

"Without the kang, winter would be unbearable," she said, bundled in layers of sweaters and warming her hands before the gentle heat of the kang in her grandchildren's bedroom.

Environmentalists worry that kangas waste energy and add to choking air pollution. But people here say it's the only way to survive in China's version of Siberia, where the winter sun sets at 3 p.m. and temperatures can plunge to 40 below zero.

For centuries, the kang _ pronounced "kahng" _ has been the center of winter life in the northeast. Families crowd together on them to sleep under mountains of quilts. Children play on them during the day. Parents do as many chores as they can on them.

"All day, if there's nothing else to do, we're on the kang," said Zhou Yuyong, a 27-year-old soybean farmer on the outskirts of Huachuan, a town near the border with Russia.

In Beijing and other northern cities, traditional homes with kangas have fallen to the wrecking ball, making way for apartment blocks with steam radiators. Cities have banned the burning of the coal bricks that fueled kangas and contributed to eye-searing smog.

But in the countryside, kangas have survived the arrival of electricity, mobile phones and the Internet. Families gather on them to watch satellite television and DVDs.

An estimated 80 percent to 90 percent of farm families in China's northeast use kangas, said Wang Hongyang, a professor at the Resource and Environment Institute of the Northeastern Agricultural University in Harbin, capital of China's northernmost province, Heilongjiang.

Scientists warn that kangas waste fuel, pollute the atmosphere and endanger the health of farm families by releasing carbon monoxide and other dangerous gases indoors.

Towns throughout the northeast are wreathed in smoke as families fire up their kangas for the evening. More prosperous homes emit the fetid odor of burning coal.

"In order to protect the environment, the government should encourage and guide farmers to give up using kang," Wang said. "But the kang cannot be phased out in a short time because the farmers in these areas depend on them."

The government and environmental groups have sponsored research to produce alternatives using such things as natural gas from decomposing farm waste.

But for many families, the kang is close to perfect.

The furnace doubles as a heat source for the kitchen stove and burns roots, corn stalks and other vegetation that come free as a byproduct of their crops. The bricks soak up heat and hold it for hours, releasing it through the night.

Some tourist hotels in Beijing and elsewhere have tried to lure tourists looking for a taste of old China by installing kang's heated by electricity.

Preparing for winter dominates life in China's northeast, the region once known as Manchuria.

Hundreds of cabbages, a hardy vegetable that keeps for months, are stacked like firewood in the yards of homes.

The south-facing walls of some are almost entirely glass, double- and triple-layered for a greenhouse effect from the few hours of daily sunlight in the dead of winter.

"If the windows were smaller, there would be no sunshine and it would be freezing in here," Zhou, the soybean farmer, said as she stood in her father-in-law's parlor.

In the yard outside, a flock of ducks waddled around, trying to stay warm in minus 5-degree weather _ and that was at 2 p.m. Icicles dangled from a mop hung out to dry.

"When it gets cold, everyone has to have a kang," said Zhou's father-in-law, Dou Zhiquan, 56. "Without one, you can't survive the winter."

[Commentary in the Orange County Register, Jan. 8, 2006](#)

Clearing the air

READER REBUTTAL to a recent column about the South Coast Air Quality Management District, from the chairman of its governing board.

By William A. Burke, Ed.D.

AQMD Governing Board Chairman

In a Dec. 30 column, Pacific Research Institute writer Lance Izumi pronounced the South Coast Air Quality Management District guilty of a "predisposition to overregulate" [California Focus]. Izumi himself appears predisposed to conveniently ignore the federally mandated mission of the Air Quality Management District: improving air quality to benefit public health.

A deluge of scientific studies continues to demonstrate that air pollution significantly increases our risk of cancer, emphysema and heart disease and reduces our life expectancy. Although Southland air quality has improved significantly since the 1970s, the recent rate of improvement has been slowed by population growth and a lack of adequate new mobile source measures to reduce emissions. This past smog season, one of the cleanest on record, brought 84 days of unhealthful air quality - more than any other region in the country.

So it is not from a "predisposition to overregulate" or an "eternity mindset," as Izumi suggests, that AQMD's governing board adopts new and innovative programs to reduce pollution. Rather it is from a sense of urgency that much remains to be done to clean the air, and that leaving any stone unturned or delaying cleanup means that millions of residents - particularly our children and the elderly - will unnecessarily suffer the health effects of dirty air.

We need vigorous new programs to further reduce emissions, particularly from large, under-regulated sources including locomotives, ships and other equipment at the ports. That is why AQMD has called for a fundamental strengthening of the weak and ineffective agreement to reduce locomotive emissions - reached behind closed doors - by the California Air Resources

Board and the two major railroads serving the state. Most of the agreement's major provisions are legally unenforceable, and in some cases it is weaker than existing local restrictions on locomotive emissions.

This is not a case of Air Quality Management District officials being guilty of hubris or envy of other environmental agencies, as Izumi charges. It is an example of AQMD's governing board members standing up for public health by opposing a questionable agreement arrived at behind the public's back.

Izumi also rushes to judgment in claiming that the Air Quality Management District is opposed to industrial expansion. On the contrary, AQMD's governing board has a strong track record of supporting clean business expansion that embraces public health safeguards.

State and federal air quality regulations permit businesses to expand, but only if they offset any emissions increases by providing emission reduction credits to ensure that the region's air quality does not worsen. AQMD is actively working to assure a sufficient and affordable supply of emission credits so that new businesses can start up and existing ones can expand.

If AQMD's governing board is guilty of anything, it is of working with a sense of urgency to clean the air and protect the public's health.

The Southland's breathers deserve no less.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Tuesday, January 10, 2006:](#)

Fussing around the edges of Valley's air problems

On Jan. 2, the air quality index in Fresno County was given as good, around 40 or so. On Jan. 6, the AQI went up to an unhealthy 104 -- just four days later. I guess every home in Fresno lit up the fireplaces and wood stoves.

Or could there be some other source of air pollution? Internal combustion engines, for example, particularly buses, heavy trucks, gas-guzzling large vehicles, older smog-exempt vehicles and especially two-cycle engines such as leaf blowers?

I suppose that the new fees imposed on builders will have some effect on air quality -- in 15 or 20 years, if we live that long. But little is being done about curbing the biggest single source of air pollution right now, other than the fireplace police and the smoke Gestapo, who give themselves way too much credit when most of the improvement has been because of cooperation from Mother Nature.

Two-cycle engines, drive-though businesses and smog-belching heavy vehicles continue to spew clouds of smoke and dust into the air. Let's get serious about the No. 1 cause instead of nibbling around the edges of the problem.

Neil K. Sorenson, Fresno