

Pappas fined \$23,000 for clean air violation

Staff reports, The Fresno Bee, Monday, Oct. 5, 2009

Pappas & Co. in Mendota has agreed to pay a \$23,000 fine for failing to submit and update federal risk-management plans for its anhydrous ammonia process at two of its produce packing facilities -- a violation of the nation's Clean Air Act.

Pappas & Co. submitted a risk-management plan three years after bringing more than 10,000 pounds of anhydrous ammonia onto its Mendota plant at 1431 Lyons Ave. The company also failed to submit an updated risk-management plan for its 181 Naples St. location when it was due for a five-year update.

Pappas & Co. will also spend about \$8,000 on two supplemental environmental projects. It will donate a hand-held ammonia detector to Fresno County Fire (the department with jurisdiction over the packing plants) and install an ammonia sensor outside the Naples Street facility.

Modesto may trash blue bag recycling program

By Leslie Albrecht

Modesto Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Tuesday, October 6, 2009

The city's blue bag recycling program could be headed to the big landfill in the sky.

The City Council votes tonight on whether to trash the 12-year-old recycling program, which officials say isn't doing much to help the environment.

The blue bag program allows residents to put recyclables in blue shopping bags and toss them into their black, 96-gallon garbage container. The blue bags and recyclables are supposed to be separated from other garbage so they don't end up in landfills. But that rarely happens, said Doug Chadwick, a member of a volunteer committee that advises the city on recycling issues.

Chadwick said he was "extremely annoyed" when he toured local garbage handling facilities and saw firsthand what really happens to the blue bags.

"They're just tossed on the floor and run over with a bulldozer that pushes everything into a truck that gets taken out to the landfill," Chadwick said.

That's one of the reasons the city is considering eliminating the blue bags starting Jan. 1. Other reasons include:

Not many recyclables end up in the blue bags, said Solid Waste Manager Jocelyn Reed. Instead, people often turn in their empty glass bottles and aluminum cans for money at redemption centers.

The material collected in the blue bags often is not valuable enough to recycle, so it goes to a landfill.

There's little market for such items as milk jugs, butter tubs, tin cans and Styrofoam, Reed said. But recycling them costs money. Materials must be sorted, baled, trucked to an end user and made into a product. It costs more to sort, ship and process those materials than they are worth, Reed said.

Encouraging people to use blue bags puts more plastic into the waste stream. Some cities have banned plastic shopping bags. "There is a problem with plastic bags in the environment," Reed said. "They do create a degree of pollution. It's kind of a contradictory message to continue to promote the use of the plastic bags."

Cost. The \$30,000 state grant that paid for the blue bags was axed from the budget this year.

If the blue bags are eliminated, will Modesto start using a third can for recyclables?

Not likely.

The program would be expensive, costing garbage customers \$3 to \$5 more a month. A third can would require more garbage trucks, which would create more [air pollution](#) and wear and tear on city streets, Reed said.

People who want to help the planet should focus on their green yard waste can, Chadwick said. Paper, food scraps and anything else that's biodegradable is now allowed in the green cans. The city turns the material into compost.

Dorothy Griggs, a member of the Citizens Advisory Committee on Recycling, said no one should shed a tear if the blue bags go. To her, the program is a "fraud" that deceives the public.

"It's just infuriating to us," Griggs said. "People are conscientiously putting this stuff in those bags, but it's just a big joke. It's not a real recycling program."

The City Council meets in the basement chamber of Tenth Street Place, 1010 10th St.

Farmers, worker advocates clash over air quality

Farmers want more time to develop alternatives

By Wes Sander

Capital Press Ag Weekly Fri., Oct. 2, 2009

MODESTO, Calif. -- While farmworker advocates persuade California to further restrict pesticide use under the federal Clean Air Act, farmers hope to limit those restrictions until new options are available.

"If we put agriculture under the gun too far, we might get some unintended consequences," said Paul Wenger, first vice president of the California Farm Bureau Federation, at a listening session held by the Department of Pesticide Regulation and the Air Resources Board here on Monday, Sept. 28.

To keep up with the effort to comply with the federal Clean Air Act, regulators are working on future amendments to California's required state implementation plan.

Meanwhile, state and federal programs are helping farmers develop technologies and practices.

The San Joaquin Valley meets federal designation as a problem area for ozone pollution, resulting largely from pesticide use. Under its 1994 plan, the state set voluntary guidelines for reducing the volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, emitted by pesticide use.

Ozone is formed from reactions between nitrogen oxides, mostly from engine exhaust, and VOCs, mostly from pesticides. Hot summer days accelerate the process.

Although the state found reductions in valley ozone between 1995 and 2007, it wasn't enough to meet the federal rules. So in 2008, DPR adopted enforceable regulations.

In 2006, a federal court had ordered DPR to enforce a 20 percent reduction from 1991 levels to meet the state plan's guidelines. An appeals court overturned the ruling in 2008, allowing DPR to set San Joaquin Valley reductions at 12 percent from 1990 levels, which DPR says is more consistent with the state plan.

Stakeholders, including farmworker advocates who spoke at the Modesto meeting, still want the 20 percent reduction.

"This 12 percent reduction means nothing," said Martha Guzman, a legislative advocate with California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation. "These communities don't merit this sort of mediocre protection."

But Wenger argued that efforts to extend health care to farmworker communities should also play a larger role in controlling health effects while the region works to reduce VOCs and keep agriculture viable at the same time.

"If they go to the 20 percent, it'll really be problematic," Wenger said.

Dorene D'Adamo, a member of the California Air Resources Board, said the last few years have seen a significant change in perspective among those in agriculture, aided by programs like USDA's Environmental Quality Incentives Program and California's Carl Moyer program.

"I think there's a lot more common ground than what we're giving credit for here," said D'Adamo. "I really see a change that has developed over the last several years. I think that agriculture has gotten on board."

Emissions rules restrict some digester operations

Capital Press Ag Weekly Sat., Oct. 3, 2009

According to information supplied by dairy organizations and agriculture departments in the West, there are four commercial dairy manure digesters operating in Washington state, two in Oregon, three in Idaho and seven to 10 in California.

Renee A. Rippchen, vice president of sales and marketing for BioEnergy Solutions in Bakersfield, Calif., said that most digesters in the state are set up on the premise of capturing the gas and running it through an on-site generator to provide power for the individual dairy farm.

But Rippchen said the problem this model has run into in California is that the mono-nitrogen oxide emissions from the generators violate air-quality standards.

While several generators are being tested, Rippchen said there doesn't appear to be a generator on the market today that has been proven to meet California's air-quality standards for mono-nitrogen oxide emissions when biogas from dairy cows is used as a fuel.

Rippchen said that the regulation impacts all of the generators in the state, regardless of size.

Obama uses L.A. program as a model for going green

The president orders federal agencies to set high goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, cut energy use, save water and recycle more.

By Jim Tankersley, staff writer

L.A. Times, Tuesday, Oct. 6, 2009

Reporting from Washington - Urging the government to "lead by example," President Obama ordered federal agencies on Monday to set ambitious goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, cut energy use, save water and recycle more.

The order calls for a 30% cut in vehicle fuel use by 2020, a 50% increase in recycling by 2015 and the implementation of high-efficiency building codes.

It also instructs agencies to set goals within 90 days to reduce the heat-trapping gases scientists blame for global warming.

The measures echo a Los Angeles sustainability program launched under the direction of then-Deputy Mayor Nancy Sutley, who now heads the White House Council on Environmental Quality.

The federal government, which operates 600,000 fleet vehicles, occupies 500,000 buildings and employs 1.8 million workers in civilian jobs, is the nation's largest energy user.

White House officials said the initiative, which is detailed in an executive order and does not require congressional approval, would yield significant energy and environmental benefits and -- because of Washington's huge role as a consumer -- encourage savings throughout the economy.

"The power to do very simple things to conserve energy will do dramatic things to save money," Sutley said in an interview. "By setting aggressive standards, the federal government helps to move the market."

No cost estimates were provided, but officials said initial expenses -- mainly to make buildings more energy-efficient -- would be largely covered by the federal stimulus program.

The long-term goal is for the program to pay for itself.

Once agencies set goals and the council approves them, the Office of Management and Budget will publish a "scorecard" of how the agencies are faring.

Sutley said the initiative builds on the experience of Green LA, a 2007 program to reduce Los Angeles' greenhouse gas emissions by 35% by 2030. That program includes measures such as strict efficiency standards in building codes and drawing power from renewable-energy sources.

Romel Pascual, L.A.'s environment director, called Obama's order "quite impressive" and said it incorporated much of the Green LA initiative, which he said is on track to meet its goals.

"We're certainly ready to be an example" for the nation, Pascual said.

Environmental groups say Green LA, despite some struggles, is a good model for a comprehensive federal plan.

The city has succeeded in adopting a more efficient vehicle fleet, conserving water and cleaning up its port, said David Pettit, a senior attorney with the Natural Resources Defense Council in Santa Monica.

But it has found it more difficult to increase tree planting and move away from energy derived from coal.

V. John White, director of the California-based Center for Energy Efficiency and Renewable Technologies, said Obama's push could enjoy greater success based on scale alone.

"Clearly, the federal government could do a lot in terms of new, green construction of federal buildings," he said. "It really helps to have a clear mandate."

Council decision looms tonight on Ralphs center

By Fred Swegles

The Orange County Register, Tuesday, October 6, 2009

SAN CLEMENTE – After months of debate, the City Council will consider tonight whether to approve or reject plans for a 68,150-square-foot Ralphs shopping center at 911 S. El Camino Real.

The plan calls for demolition of an existing Ralphs and an adjoining strip mall, replacing them with a 40,000-square-foot Ralphs (double the size of the current one) and a three-story parking structure with integrated restaurants and shops.

A public hearing is set for 6 p.m. at City Hall, 100 Avenida Presidio. A big turnout is expected, as at previous sessions.

Critics say the proposed three-story structure is too big, tries to cram too much into a small site and is out of character with the community. Supporters say the project would be an asset to southwest San Clemente and that its size is necessary to provide an economically viable project and a full-service Ralphs with enough parking.

In a report to the City Council, city staff says development of the new center would generate an additional \$125,775 in sales taxes per year and \$17,936 in property taxes. The council will receive an updated view analysis and an analysis of the project's air-quality effects. Up for consideration will be various scenarios if Village Courtyard were to use two accesses for cars vs. the single access proposed.

The San Clemente Planning Commission is recommending approval of the plans, together with a zoning amendment and an amendment to the city General Plan. City staff is neutral.

"Extensive project review has ensured the project is functional and provides the best design possible based on the project objectives," a staff report says. "The decision to support the project becomes a policy decision to be made by the council based upon the project's compatibility and benefit of the project to the community."

The staff report says the city received about 900 written endorsements of the project and fewer than 100 written comments against it.

Obama orders feds to cut energy use, emissions

Renee Schoof - McClatchy Newspapers
Merced Sun-Star, Tuesday, October 6, 2009

WASHINGTON -- President Barack Obama on Monday ordered the federal government -- the nation's largest energy user -- to cut its greenhouse gas emissions and to reduce its impact on the environment.

The president's executive order also requires all agencies to conserve water, reduce waste and use the government's enormous purchasing power to buy more environmentally sound products. Once the changes in place, they could touch everything from the kinds of vehicles in federal fleets to the use of recycled paper and non-plastic utensils in government cafeterias.

Obama's edict is the first time a president is requiring the federal agencies to reduce their overall greenhouse gas emissions. In January 2007, then-President George W. Bush signed a similar executive order that required the government to improve energy efficiency, but he didn't require greenhouse gas-reduction targets.

Coal industry steps up fight against environmentalists in Kentucky

Surge in deer leads to more wreckage in North Carolina

Some in Sacramento want second look at plans for water bottling plant

Monday's order came a little more than two months before an international negotiating session on a new global plan to reduce emissions of heat-trapping gases. Other countries are looking for action from the United States, which contributes about 20 percent of the gases that accumulate in the atmosphere. Mandatory economywide emissions reductions imposed through congressional legislation probably won't be ready in time for the international negotiations.

The reductions that the president set in motion Monday with a stroke of his pen, however, would be a step in the same direction. Nationwide, the government has 500,000 buildings, runs more than 600,000 vehicles and buys more than \$500 billion a year in goods and services.

The White House said the order would result in substantial energy savings, which would mean savings for taxpayers.

It won't be known until the individual agencies report their targets how much they've cut greenhouse gas emissions.

Although the agencies set their own plans, the White House gave some requirements, including a 26 percent improvement in water efficiency and a 30 percent reduction in the use of petroleum for vehicles. Both goals are to be accomplished by 2020.

The White House Office of Management and Budget plans to grade each agency's ability to meet its own target and post the results on the Web.

The order doesn't apply to military operations. Even so, the Department of Defense will be asked to reduce its energy use in other ways, such as in the use of more energy efficient buildings at its installations around the country. Parts of the Pentagon have been given independent certification for sustainability, including a subway entrance and the library and conference center.

The executive order, however, calls for agencies to do more than they have so far on energy savings.

"This executive order builds on the momentum of the Recovery Act to help create a clean energy economy and demonstrates the federal government's commitment, over and above what is already being done, to reducing emissions and saving money," Obama said in a statement.

The Recovery Act, last winter's economic-stimulus measure, set aside about \$80 billion for clean energy projects, including renewable energy generation on some federal properties.

Some of the things the order requires:

Buying greener products. Federal agencies will be asked to think of such things as buying Energy Star appliances and many other sustainable products.

Buildings. New buildings after 2030 will be required to have net-zero-energy use. Reducing energy intensity — energy use per square foot -- in all buildings.

Vehicles. Use more vehicles that run on electricity or alternative fuels, or bicycles. The order gives agencies extra time -- 240 days -- to figure out how to reduce emissions in indirect ways, such as reductions in employee travel and package shipments.

Climate change threatens national parks, report warns

By Renee School - McClatchy Newspapers

In the Merced Sun-Star, Monday, October 5, 2009

WASHINGTON -- America's national parks are at risk of disappearing or being fundamentally changed as seas rise, glaciers melt, trees die and animal habitat changes as a result of climate change, according to a report Thursday from two environmental groups.

The assessment focuses on the 25 most threatened parks including Yosemite. It also discusses vulnerabilities at Sequoia/Kings Canyon.

The report from the Rocky Mountain Climate Organization and the Natural Resources Defense Council says that the most important action needed to protect parks is to reduce the emission of heat-trapping gases, mostly from burning fossil fuels such as coal and gasoline. It also calls on the federal government to take other steps -- such as expanding parks and creating wildlife migration corridors.

Theo Spencer of the NRDC said that although the report wasn't timed for the recent PBS documentary series about the national parks by filmmaker Ken Burns, there's a link: Treasured American lands again need protection. This time, he said, the parks have no champion like naturalist John Muir, who led the early drive for the parks, or President Theodore Roosevelt, who established so many of them.

Spencer said that in Muir's and Roosevelt's time, "there was resistance by people who wanted to develop them, who saw economic gain in the parks. But the leadership at the time had the vision to think of the greater good, to think of the trust of the American public for the future.

"This is really a nonpartisan issue, and it desperately needs the leadership that was shown at the time these great parks were created."

Stephen Saunders, the president of the Rocky Mountain Climate Organization and a principal author of the report, said that climate change was "the greatest threat our national parks have ever faced."

The report notes that the signature of the Sierra -- its snow-capped peaks and glacier-carved crags -- is diminishing.

In Yosemite and Sequoia/Kings Canyon, six glaciers (along with a seventh just outside Yosemite) lost an average of 55% of their area since 1900. The retreat hasn't been steady: After about a quarter-century of relative stability, melt started accelerating after 1985 and increased this decade.

Year-round snow at the highest elevations will become less likely, and winter sports are likely to be curtailed because of rising temperatures. The report singles out Badger Pass in Yosemite, the only downhill ski area in a national park, and says its future is in jeopardy.

Shrinking glaciers will mean less water year-round in the parks. But the report also notes a trend for more downpours over the past century and says parks vulnerable to flooding (Yosemite Valley has been closed in January 1997 and May 2005 because of flooding) will likely see more.

The report also noted that trees are dying at a faster rate and forests are changing with the warmer winters. Wildlife populations and plant communities are shifting to adjust to the changes.

"Yosemite is well aware and concerned about the climate change," said Yosemite park ranger Kari Cobb.

For years, rangers have been learning more about shifts in the park, such as trees dying at a faster rate than before and the population decline of the mountain yellow-legged frog. The rangers share this information with visitors who are interested in preserving Yosemite's natural beauty, Cobb said.

The report recommended federal mandatory limits on global-warming pollution and support for energy efficiency and clean energy, the main parts of a bill the Senate is expected to take up this fall.

Other recommendations included expanding the parks, creating wildlife corridors, and using the National Park Service's educational programs to explain how climate change is affecting the parks.

The 64-page report provided details collected from previously released studies.

The 25 parks were Acadia National Park; Assateague Island National Seashore; Bandelier National Monument; Biscayne National Park; Cape Hatteras National Seashore; Colonial National Historical Park; Denali National Park and Preserve; Dry Tortugas National Park; Ellis Island National Monument; Everglades National Park; Glacier National Park; Great Smoky Mountains National Park; Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore; Joshua Tree National Park; Lake Mead National Recreation Area; Mesa Verde National Park; Mount Rainier National Park; Padre Island National Seashore; Rocky Mountain National Park; Saguaro National Park; Theodore Roosevelt National Park; Virgin Islands National Park and Virgin Islands Coral Reef National Monument; Yellowstone National Park; Yosemite National Park; and Zion National Park.

Gov't to consumers: break on winter heating costs

By Josef Hebert- Associated Press Writer

In the Modesto Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Tuesday, October 6, 2009

WASHINGTON -- There's good news for people who heat their homes with natural gas.

This winter's heating bill should be about \$105 less than last winter, the government said Tuesday. Households using fuel oil, electric heat or propane also will save money.

The Energy Information Administration said in its annual winter outlook Tuesday that lower fuel costs across the board and an expected milder winter will cut average heating costs for the upcoming season by 8 percent compared to last year - to about \$960.

Households are expected to pay an average of \$783, nearly 12 percent less than last winter, for natural gas, and \$1,821 for heating oil, about 2 percent lower. People using electric heat will pay \$933, a decline of 2 percent and those using propane \$1,667, or 14 percent less than last winter, the agency said.

The report cautioned that the projections reflect average costs and that expenditures for individual households will vary depending on local weather conditions, the size and energy efficiency of homes and the efficiency of heating equipment.

About half of all households depend on natural gas for heating, especially in the Midwest where seven in 10 homes use the fuel. People in the Midwest also are expected to benefit from a milder winter, compared to last year, and see natural gas bills 15 percent lower than last year, the agency said.

The report said natural gas inventories approaching the heating season are expected to be at a record high of more than 3.8 trillion cubic feet. Wholesale prices are well below last winter and the EIA said prices are expected to remain low through October and then increase slightly as demand picks up.

The nearly 58,000 households that use heating oil, primarily in the Northeast, can expect to save an average \$40 to \$60 compared to last winter. The agency said residential heating oil prices in the Northeast is expected to average \$2.64 a gallon this winter, 2 cents less than last winter, but a significant drop from the average \$3.31 a gallon that consumers paid two winters ago.

The biggest savings will be seen by users of propane where households are expected to save an average of \$280 this winter, a decline of 14 percent. Propane users in the Midwest are expected to save as much as 21 percent compared to last winter because of a combination of lower fuel prices and milder weather, the agency said.

The report covers the winter period from October through March.

The EIA report also said:

- Gasoline prices are expected to decline for the remainder of the year to a national average of \$2.44 a gallon, while increasing next year to an average of \$2.62 a gallon.
- Crude oil prices are likely to average about \$70 a barrel through the winter period and that global petroleum consumption is expected to increase by about 1.1 million barrels a day in 2010 as the economy strengthens.
- U.S. crude oil production is expected to increase slightly next year to 5.34 million barrels a day, mainly because of the declining economy, emissions are expected to increase by 1.1 percent next year, as the economy begins to recover resulting in greater energy use.
- While a 5.9 percent decline in carbon dioxide emissions is projected for this year compared to 2008, mainly because of the declining economy, carbon dioxide pollution will again be on the rise next year. The EIA projects an increase of 1.1 percent in 2010 as the economy slowly recovers leading the greater energy use.

Carbon dioxide from burning fossil fuels is the leading greenhouse gas linked to climate change.