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News Briefs

How to Get Rid of Old Paint

Paint is considered household hazardous waste (HHW) and so cannot go into the regular garbage cans or recycling bins. But it can have a new life covering up graffiti! Take old paint to the Environmental Health drop off facility, located next to the county landfill on Hwy 59, Mon-Fri, 9-4 or Sat, 9-1. The usable leftover paint will be offered to the Merced Community Action Network to help with their graffiti abatement program.



YARTS Celebrates 10th Anniversary of Service from Valley to Yosemite

With lots of hard work and a belief in the idea of a bus system to take visitors to Yosemite National Park from surrounding communities, numerous people will be commended Friday, Aug. 21 for making the dream of Yosemite Area Regional Transit System become a reality. The ceremony will take place at Yosemite Park's Visitor's Center from 11-noon.

YARTS is celebrating its 10th years of service from Mono, Merced, and Mariposa counties to Yosemite National Park. YARTS goals are to offer a safe and enjoyable ride for visitors and employees, improve air quality through mass transit, and reduce congestion in the Park.

MCAG Staff Wins 3 Awards For Website, Newsletter

The Central Valley Public Relations Organization

MCAG Introduces Two New Managers for Regional Landfill, Transit System

He ran campaigns for local candidates, owned a couple of restaurants, and wanted to get into politics. But a call from a friend started him on his career in solid waste.

Sam Chandler recently took over the position of Deputy Director of Solid Waste, following the retirement of Scott Johnston. Sam moved to Merced from Snohomish County, WA, where the bulk of trash was transported to a regional privately-owned landfill by rail.

"There wasn't as much diversion to recycling as you have here," he commented. "And we certainly didn't have any chickens!" he joked, referring to the enormous amount of recyclables generated by Foster Farms in Livingston.

Sam comes to Merced County at a time when economic conditions have affected even trash collection. He recently reported to the city and county managers that recycling is down 30%. While a large amount is from construction, there's also a noticeable drop in curbside recycling as people spend less and so generate less trash and recyclables.

Born in St. Louis, Sam received his B.A. from Grinnell College in Iowa and a Master's from the University of Iowa. He and his wife moved to the Western part of the U.S. in 1985.

He started his college education with a desire to get into politics. "In Iowa, it's pretty easy because the presidential caucuses roll through." During his time in Iowa, he managed several local campaigns.

He also invested in two restaurants, a pizza and salad place near a college, and a sub shop in St. Louis. These were not franchises, but businesses that Sam started from scratch.

In the mid-80s, a friend who was city manager in Champaign, IL, told Sam he had received a grant to do curbside recycling and asked him if he knew anything about the subject. He talked Sam into becoming the recycling coordinator for this new type of program, and that started Sam in a career he's maintained ever since.

Assignments have taken him to Portland, Tucson, and other cities around the West where he worked both as a manager and a consultant.

Sam's goals for Merced County Solid Waste are to "stabilize the budget. We must have fiscal stability. It's essential for us to use the \$32 million in bond money efficiently."

Future plans include building a new transfer facility at the Billy Wright landfill near Los Banos, providing new scale houses for both landfills, completing the gas collection systems, and expansion of both facilities. The bond money cannot be used for daily operations, including salaries; it is only available for capital projects.

"These changes will increase the speed of transactions for customers, and make us more up to date," says Sam.

In college at Indiana University, Rod Ghearing wasn't sure what he wanted in a career. He bounced from pre-med to a degree in biology, then to education before a summer job settled the question once and for all.



In the fall of his senior year, he drove a campus bus and decided that he "liked the interaction with the passengers. And I had a great interest in transportation, how things moved." Once his life's goal was in sight, he earned an MBA in public transportation management. Coincidentally, Indiana U was one of only five institutions in the country offering that major.

After graduation, Rod moved to Cincinnati and worked for a company that provided staffing for transit agencies. Assignments took him to Virginia, Alabama, Michigan, Colorado, New York, and Bridgeport, Connecticut, where he was Operations Officer for the Transit Authority.

The job opportunity in Merced County as Transportation Manager for THE BUS appealed to Rod because of the friendly, small city environment and the warmer weather of California. Adding to the appeal was the fact that Merced County's bus system is countywide. "The ease in intercommunity travel is very important," he adds. "Also, the proposed new Joint Powers Agreement with MCAG, the county, and the cities makes the transit system have a more regional approach."

The new assignment isn't without it's challenges, however. Citing the state budget issues, especially in taking transit funds to help balance the budget, the upcoming re-bid on the service contract, and the need to take a hard look at THE BUS routes and fares, Rod says there's a lot of work ahead. He looks forward to finding solutions to the challenges.

Congressman Cardoza Outlines Federal/State Challenges at One Voice Lunch

Stating that trying to absorb all the information being sent to Congress regarding the nation's problems was like "drinking water out of a fire hose", Congressman Dennis Cardoza addressed over 100 people at a luncheon organized by the MCAG One Voice program in July.

Due to all the new programs being presented by the Administration and Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Congressional representatives and their staffs were working around the clock. Cardoza stated that he had spent several nights in his office where he only got two hours of sleep.

He described economic conditions in the San Joaquin Valley as "the perfect storm" and "the Katrina of California" as he tallied off the dismal figures on foreclosures, healthcare, the state's water system, and energy. He and his staff have spent numerous hours asking others in Congress as well as directors of federal agencies why more attention hasn't been paid to the Valley.



(CVPRO) honored MCAG with three awards at their annual ceremony in June. The MCAG Reporter won an Award of Merit, as did MercedRecycles.com. The home website, www.mcagov.org, won an Award of Excellence. Tracy McMahan, webmaster, and Candice Steelman, Public Information Officer, accepted the awards on behalf of MCAG.

Over 10% of Cardoza's constituents are behind on their mortgage payments. Water regulations have caused massive unemployment in the agricultural industry. The drop in the price of milk has brought many dairies "to their knees".

On water, "we have 38 million people using a system designed for 20 million," he said. Cardoza particularly pointed out the ag industry which has been significantly hurt by water regulations.

On healthcare: Calling the U.S. system "totally out of control", he stated that the nation pays far more for healthcare than other western countries, yet has "one of the worst health care systems of any industrialized nation."

On energy: The Congressman expressed concern over the recently passed cap and trade bill. He believes global warming is a real problem, but he doesn't want to give the EPA more control over how to solve the problem.

Cardoza wound up his talk by giving kudos to the One Voice program and said that elected officials need to hear from those they represent who have to deal with the decisions electeds make.

Annual Pavement Study Shows It's Better to Repair Slightly Damaged Roads

Every year MCAG gathers data from the cities and county to rate pavement conditions. While most of the areas have a significantly larger percentage of "fair to better" roads than "poor and worse", Dos Palos' figures are reversed, with only 41% fair to better roads and 50% poor and worse. Gustine has the second lowest rating with 46% poor and worse roads.

Altogether, the cities and county maintain 2,325 road miles. The county's share, 1,727 miles, is about the distance from L.A. to Chicago. While Merced County has more road miles than many other counties, this area receives fewer dollars because 75% of the funding formula is based on number of registered vehicles and only 25% is based on the number of miles.

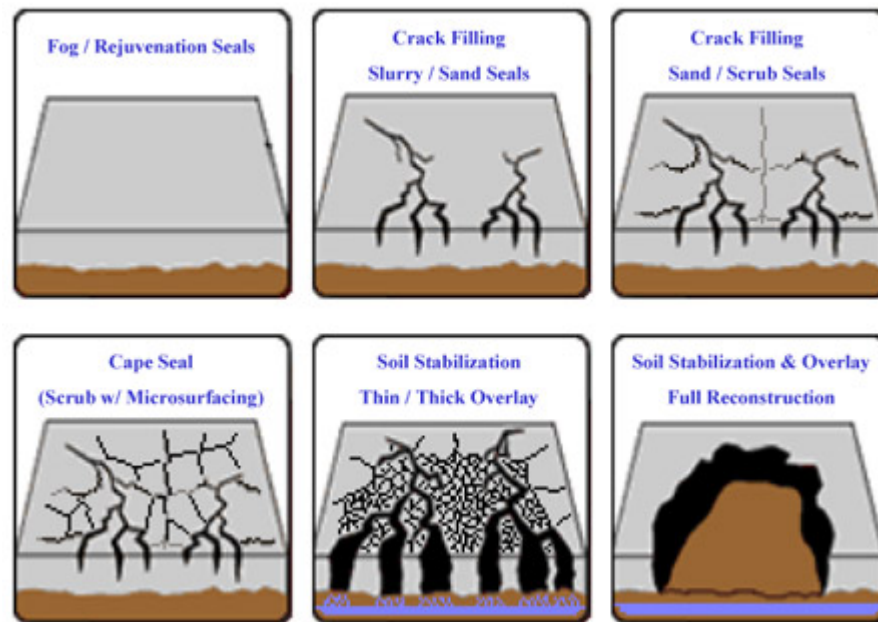
Sometimes residents are surprised to see "good" roads receiving more attention than obviously deteriorating roads. This is due to the fact that a city gets more value for its dollar by doing less expensive repairs and lengthening the life of a road than by putting all of its budget dollars into replacing a broken road. For instance, if roads can be kept sealed, it's less likely that water will seep into cracks, which speeds up road deterioration.

It costs almost \$800,000 per mile to reconstruct a road. Even with the infusion of Prop. 1B funds and money from this year's America Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the need far exceeds available funds. For instance, Dos Palos' and Gustine's \$400,000 from Prop. 1B and \$200,000 from ARRA limit the types of projects they can do. Even the County's \$9.7 million from both funds doesn't cover much of their 1,727 miles, especially when the overall need is \$99 million.

The instability of funding hampers long-range planning. The sales tax on gas (Prop. 42) has been borrowed by the state in several years. The Highway Users Tax Account has also been eyed by the State. Unlike some of its neighbors, Merced County does not have a dedicated tax for streets and roads.

So, cities and the country stretch their limited road dollars by maintaining the good roads and doing what they can for other problems, always with a goal of safety for the motorist first in their planning.

Treatments: Various Pavement Conditions



Cheerfulness and Flexibility Cited for Lori Flanders' Employee of Quarter Award

Lori Flanders was named MCAG Employee of the Quarter for her flexibility and cheerfulness in splitting her time between two departments – and two managers.

Lori joined MCAG 3.5 years ago as an Administrative Assistant and was soon promoted to Assistant Planner. She facilitates the Continuum of Care program that assists the homeless and the Social Services Technical Advisory Committee. In addition, she oversees the Transit Development Act funding and writes transit grants.



Previous to MCAG, Lori worked for Verizon Wireless. When asked what surprised her when she started working for a government agency, she said, "All of the transportation funding pools. I never knew there were so many! And the varying opinions I see on different committees."

Admitting that at first it was intimidating, she now finds the lively conversations on the various committees interesting. "It's healthy to have so many viewpoints and really talk through issues."

Lori and her husband live in Merced with their two daughters. In

her spare time, Lori coaches her youngest daughter's soccer team.

In receiving the award, Lori was told that her work in two departments displayed "the ultimate in flexibility". A manager of another department wrote, "Lori always helps out where needed, lending a hand on a special project or manning the recycling booth, even on weekends!"

And she does all this with a cheerful attitude and smile.

MCAG Governing Board Decisions of June/July; New Decisions for August 2009

• In June, the Directors made the following decisions –

As the Merced County Regional Waste Management Authority Board:

- Approved the Solid Waste Enterprise budget
- Revised the solid waste fee schedule and set a public hearing

As the Transit Joint Powers Authority for Merced County:

- Set a public hearing to raise fares 50-cents for children 5 years and younger
- Accepted the Countywide Transit Enterprise Fund Audit

As the MCAG Governing Board:

- Approved the new One Voice procedure and timeline with the understanding that education and healthcare need to contribute monetarily in order to participate.
- Selected Director Pedrozo as the Governing Board Chair and Director Faul as the Governing Board Vice Chair for FY 2009/2010

In July, the Directors made the following decisions --

As the Merced County Regional Waste Management Authority Board:

- Moved to August the item on budget enhancements for the landfills due to falling revenues
- Held a public hearing and made slight administrative adjustments to the Solid Waste Facility fee schedule

As the Transit Joint Powers Authority for Merced County:

- Accepted the 205-2008 transit performance audit
- Held a public hearing and then accepted the Disadvantaged Business Enterprise Plan and Goal

As the MCAG Governing Board:

- Continued the request by Mr. Lopez for a hardship acquisition of his property in Los Banos, which is in the path of the future Los Banos bypass
- Approved the participation of Education and Healthcare in the One Voice program
- Directed staff to partner with Merced County Mental Health to apply for a Community Development Block Technical Assistance Grant to develop a 10 Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness
- Approved combining all the non-urbanized transit service required to meet the 10% ratio and determine that the fare box ratio was met
- Approved the adoption of the Memorandum of Understanding with the eight Regional Planning Agencies in the San Joaquin Valley and the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District
- Accepted the concept report and schedule for the 2010 Regional Transportation Plan update

In August, the Directors will consider the following –

As the Merced County Regional Waste Management Authority Board:

- Consider the proposed Solid Waste budget reduction actions

As the Transit Joint Powers Authority for Merced County:

- Consider a resolution to approve the Disadvantaged Business Plan
- Hold a public hearing to consider a 50-cent fare increase for passengers less than six years of age
- Consider adoption of the Coordinated Transit Services Plan to allow agencies within Merced County to apply for transit funding under SAFETEA-LU, the federal transportation authorization bill

As the MCAG Governing Board:

- Decide on a formal amendment to the Interim Federal Transportation Improvement Program, adding an air quality exempt rail project
- Consider directing staff to release a Request for Proposals for a consultant to prepare a 10-Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness prior to applying for a grant
- Approve modifications to the Anna Maria Fuentes Scholarship Program
- Review the annual Pavement Management Report
- Review American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) obligation deadlines
- Consider a call for projects from the Caltrans Highway Safety Improvement Program
- Review the regional Blueprint Awards program criteria
- Review the Abandoned Vehicle Abatement Program
- Review the annual report for the Merced County SAFE program (Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies), which maintains 88 call boxes on County highways
- Consider a new process for selecting One Voice legislative priorities
- Consider sending a letter of support for AB 934 and a letter to Caltrans concerning favoring counties that are in economic distress
- Consider a hardship application request from Mr. Lopez, whose property lies in the path of the future Los Banos bypass