

VILLAGE RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

Public Meeting

February 13, 2008

7:00 p.m.

Four Corners Room/Community Center

PUBLIC SAFETY

Police Officer Brian Parsley introduced the new residential liaison for the Village, Issak Ko. He then gave us the latest public safety information:

- There have been a few reports of auto burglary, including a GPS that was stolen recently from a car. Remember to lock your cars and don't leave purses, i-pods, or any valuables in your vehicle.
- Lock up your bikes, even if you are storing it on the upper balcony.
- If someone has parked in your spot, don't park in your neighbor's spot. You might get a ticket that way. Instead, call UCPD and have the car in your spot towed.
- UCPD is transitioning soon from electronic parking tickets to paper tickets. This means that more tickets will be issued.
- Parking along Monroe St. is guest parking, even when there it says "reserved".

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

- The Art Fair will be held in the middle of March this year. Be on the lookout for more information.
- The Health and Wellness Fair will be in April. Details will be forthcoming.
- There is a coed silent meditation class from 7:00pm – 7:45pm in the Family Resource Center on the 1st and 3rd Wednesdays of the month.
- The VRA is offering a \$30 gift card in a random drawing for residents of the Village who post on the new Village Message Board at <http://groups.google.com/group/albanyvillage>. The Message Board is a great way to sell or buy items in the Village.

ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

Steph Burt, a chemical engineer and former VRA Board member, addressed us regarding environmental issues and hazards specific to the Village. Steph has a degree in chemical engineering and works as a consultant for a Denmark-based engineering company. She has been interested and involved in chemical awareness issues for over a decade. Steph first gave us an introduction to environmental hazards in the Village, then answered questions:

- There are two types of environmental hazard exposure: acute and chronic.

- Acute exposure is when you are subjected for a short time to exposure levels that are many, many times what is safe (For example, acute exposure is like being exposed to the radiation of an atomic bomb.)
- Chronic exposure is what you live with from day to day. (For example, humans can stand chronic radiation exposure to the level of 360 millirams per day. We are exposed to 300 millirams per day just through radiation from the earth and the sun. If you fly from east coast to west coast, you are exposed to an additional 5 millirams. That's why airline pilots have to take breaks.) Chronic exposure is something that your body recovers from if it is within safe limits. OSHA has an online database of what levels of things are safe.
- Particulates are a type of environmental contaminant that are linked to cancer and other types of diseases. Our bodies can get rid of dirt and dust, but we have not adapted to get rid of those particulates. Particulates come from car emissions, industrial emissions, and more. Even the paint and construction materials in our houses emit particulates. It's important to limit one's exposure to particulates within the levels that our bodies can handle. (Steph suggests opening the windows when possible to get fresh air and clear out the particulates that come from indoor paint and other materials.)
- In the Village there are two main sources of particulates: the nearby freeway and Pacific Steel. Steph is far more concerned about the effects of particulates from the freeway than from Pacific Steel. For instance, on a windy day when the wind was blowing in from the Bay, she would choose not to take her kids to the Village Community Garden (which lies between the Village and the freeway). It probably wouldn't be bad for an hour or two, but she wouldn't do it for a whole day. On a day *without* wind from that direction, particulates from the freeway shouldn't be much of a problem.
- When Steph first moved here and lived in Section A, there were a few days where the air really stank from the emissions at Pacific Steel. It's important to note, however, that there are a lot of things you can smell, but just because you smell it doesn't mean it is really bad for you. Our bodies are good at smelling some things, but not others.
- Steph has closely studied the data released about Pacific Steel by a local community action group and has not found reason for Village residents to be concerned. Some recent studies have shown that nickel and manganese chronic levels are higher than the EPA suggests. The way they did their measurements, however, was when the scent was really strong and the plant was running at full capacity. She has only counted three days in the last year when she could really smell the smell. Nickel and Manganese can be handled by the human body at much higher levels for short periods of time, as long as chronic exposure is within acceptable limits.
- A new study of the area around Pacific Steel is now being performed. The study is taking samples 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, which will show a much more accurate picture of what is actually going on. Personally, she suspects that the study will find that emission levels are not high enough to be of harm. This would particularly be true of Village residents, since they typically only stay in the Village for 5 years or fewer. The safety limits for levels of exposure that the EPA sets is based on chronic exposure for 70 years or more. Humans can safely be exposed short-term to many times the particulate levels put out by Pacific Steel.

- Children, of course, are more susceptible to particulates because their lung mass is smaller. They are, however, better at ridding their bodies of particulates than adults, so the effect tends to be muted or erased.
- If you are worried about air quality, go to www.sparetheair.com and look under coast and central bay. Albany is statistically the cleanest air in the Bay Area. Livermore and the south bay are really bad.

Steph now answered questions from Village residents.

Q: What levels are our children being exposed to on an ongoing basis?

A: We don't know yet. We'll know in a year when the new study is completed.

Q: Where are they doing the measurements for this study?

A: Near Pacific Steel. The measurements won't tell us exactly what we are exposed to in the Village, but we will know that it will be less in the Village than what the study shows because we are geographically further away.

Q: Can these particulates from Pacific Steel fall on the Community Garden?

A: Coincidentally, probably not. In this area, the wind nearly always blows due east, which is not the direction from Pacific Steel to the Community Garden. In any case, nickle or magnesium won't hurt crops, and neither will the particulates from freeway. The harm to humans from these particulates is in breathing them.

Q: What measures should we take to avoid these particulates? Shut our windows? Wear masks?

A: Actually, shutting your windows is worse than opening them. If you can, you should open your windows every day. There are chemicals in your apartment that are worse than what is outside. Linoleum, glue, and other materials in our houses emit things that are bad for us to breath. Now, if it smells really bad outside, don't spend all day outside, especially if someone in your family has asthma or heart disease. If the wind is blowing strongly from the direction of the freeway, you might try finding somewhere else in Albany or Berkeley to spend time outside. In general, however, it is better to go outside and get Vitamin D and let your kids run around than it is to worry about the very, very low risk of cancer from carcinogenic particulates.

Q: I read an article that said that people that lived near a freeway were more likely to develop asthma and it concerned me.

A: There have been lots of studies about asthma and what causes it. Living in an urban setting means that kids have a higher probability of developing asthma. That includes the Village.

Q: Bottom line – is it dangerous to be exposed to these chemicals from Pacific Steel?

A: Bottom line – no, it isn't dangerous. Because nickel and manganese don't bio-accumulate, we can safely stand a certain amount of exposure to them without any negative effects. If you lived right next to Pacific Steel every day from when you are born until when you are 70, then you might feel the effects. Residents of the Village, however, shouldn't be worried.

RECYCLING

Pepper Black, Director of Programming in the Village, then led a short discussion about recycling within the Village.

Q: Is composting available in the Village?

A: Not on a large scale. You can sign up for a plot in the Community Garden and privately compost on your plot. You could also contribute to the compost bin in the Kids' Garden (near the playground behind the Community Center). Please don't put in meat or citrus.

Q: The recycling areas are often really messy. Some people put in things that shouldn't be recycled. What can be done to help this situation?

A: Ideas: stencil the recycling bins with what can and can't be recycled; hang a laminated sign in the recycling areas with recycling information.

Q: Is anything being done to reduce the number of flyers that go around the Village?

A: The Office is looking at using the locked announcement boxes next to the mailboxes instead of flyering all apartments. They are also trying to set up a listserv to use for sending out announcements.

Prepared by:
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