Tahoe studying ways to meet greenhouse gas emissions rules

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Reducing greenhouse gas emissions per California law is being tackled by the Tahoe Transportation Commission by delving into vehicle miles traveled and other contributing factors.

Jeremy Nelson with Nelson/Nygaard Consulting Associates in San Francisco gave a brief overview of the Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) to the commission earlier this month. (The commission is part of the Tahoe Transportation District.)

"We are focusing on a few key areas to help identify a suite of polices to decrease the vehicle miles traveled in the region," Nelson said.

The broad categories in the SCS are:

• Parking management

• Transportation demand management

• Transit service and facilities

• Bicycles and pedestrians

• Other capital projects.

An updated regional transportation plan must be approved by August 2012 to meet federal and California requirements. The California Legislature through AB32, the Global Warming Solutions Act, has set certain emission reduction targets for metropolitan planning organizations (MPO).

Every MPO must have an SCS in place. With the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency working on its Regional Plan update, much of the data the Tahoe MPO needs is contained in that document even though it covers both states.

“Transportation is the single larges source of CO2 emissions in California (at 38.4 percent),” Nelson said. He said it’s the average person driving her vehicle that is the biggest percentage – 71.8 percent of that 38.4 percent figure.

Nancy McDermid, TTD board member, wants all facets of transit to be looked at as alternatives. She mentioned how some California towns allow golf carts on city streets and this might be an option in parts of Tahoe.

No action was taken by the commission.

Hotels in Northern Nevada doing robust holiday business

By Frank X. Mullen Jr., Reno Gazette-Journal

Don’t look for signs of an economic recession in the Northern Nevada tourism industry this New Year’s weekend.

Major hotel-casinos at Tahoe and Reno-Sparks reported sold-out rooms and lots of reservations at in-house parties to say goodbye to 2010.

“Ring out the old and ring in the new,” said Glenn Carano, marketing director for the Silver Legacy in Reno. “It’s true 2010 was a challenging year, but there were a lot of bright spots. We brought some great entertainment to town, successful special events and (trade) shows and of course, the (National

Bowling Stadium) bowlers.

“If the weather cooperates, we’re looking at a sell-out crowd for New Year’s and feeling very positive about what’s to come in 2011.”

The Eldorado Hotel Casino also expects a sold out weekend.

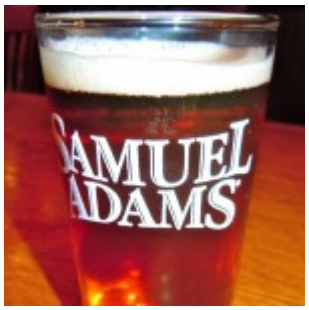
Resorts agreed the holiday season was a boost for the local economy.

Read the whole story

Sam Adams crafts beer that drinks like Champagne

By Debbie Arrington, Sacramento Bee

Champagne of bottled beers? A new brew fits that description with bubbles to spare.



After two years of research and experimentation, Samuel Adams rolled out its much-anticipated Infinium in time for New Year’s celebrations. This is no ordinary ale; according to Sam Adams founder Jim Koch, Infinium is the first new beer style created under German Reinheitsgebot standards in a century.

Koch and Josef Schradler, managing director of Germany’s Weihenstephan Brewery, collaborated on inventing Infinium, which looks and drinks more like champagne than beer.

As a special winter release, it comes packaged in a heavy 750-ml bottle with a wire-caged cork, just like sparkling wine. It's priced like champagne, too, at a suggested $19.95 per bottle.

Poured into a champagne flute, amber-hued Infinium offers a frothy head and pinpoint bubbles. It smells fruity – a mix of apple, apricot and vanilla – and much more like wine than beer.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Gibbons never seemed comfortable in office

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the Dec. 29, 2010, Reno Gazette-Journal.***

The four-year term of Jim Gibbons as governor of Nevada started quietly and out of the view of the public early on New Year's Day in 2007 – for security purposes and to ensure that the state wouldn't be without a chief executive, Gibbons explained.

Perhaps it was a foreshadowing of what was to come. The longtime member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Reno never quite seemed to get comfortable in the Governor's Mansion and offer the leadership that Nevada needed after his narrow victory over Democrat Dina Titus in 2006.

The transition from working as a policymaker outside of the spotlight in Congress – one of 435 members in the House – to managing one of the fastest growing states in the union can't

be an easy one. And for a man who spent most of his career as a pilot – a skilled, highly disciplined profession in which decisions are only rarely second-guessed – it was particularly difficult to have to deal with the state's entrenched bureaucracy and undisciplined Legislature.

It often seemed as though, having won the office he'd long sought, he wondered why he ever wanted it.

Read the whole story

Building industry faces new fire regulations, green codes

By Jessie Marchesseau

California mandates new building codes every three years. 2011 is one of those years.

Beginning Jan. 1, South Lake Tahoe, Truckee and most of the rest of the state will be implementing some new standards.

"There's gonna be grumbling with the mandated issues," said Dave Walker, building official for South Lake Tahoe. "There's gonna be a learning curve, but our contractors are good. They will adapt."



Contractor Joe Stewart checks on the boiler at STHS's TADA building that is under construction. Photos/Jessie Marchesseau

Truckee has already hosted classes to bring local building professionals up-to-date on the new codes. South Lake Tahoe plans to offer some after the first of the year, as does the Sierra Green Building Association.

The most notable on this year's list of building code changes are the ones having to do with fire sprinklers and the new California Green Building Standards Code, known as CALGreen.

Sprinkler systems

Fire sprinkler systems in homes are nothing new. They have been required in all new homes over 5,000 square feet since the last building code was implemented three years ago. But the state has decided to expand the code to include all new residential structures, regardless of square footage.

"It should provide for a safer community because sprinklers save lives," said Gareth Harris, fire marshal for Lake Valley Fire Protection District.

According to the National Fire Protection Association, nearly 3,000 U.S. residents die in home fires every year. Harris said not one of those was in a home with functioning sprinklers and smoke alarms.

Contrary to common myths, he said, sprinklers do nowhere near the damage to a home that fire, smoke and water from a fire hose do. They can often detect and extinguish a fire when it

is relatively small, and only the sprinkler in close proximity to the actual fire will activate, leaving the rest of the house dry. In fact, the NFPA reports that fire sprinklers reduce the average property loss from a fire by 71 percent.

Even though sprinklers can help significantly reduce property damage from a fire, Harris said the new regulations are “based on saving lives, not saving homes.”

For this reason, he is wholeheartedly behind the new regulation, but admits the added cost to building will make it tougher for builders. Contractor Tod Williamson of TW Construction in Meyers is well aware of this. He fears fewer people will want to build homes because of the additional financial burden.

“I don’t think it’s a good idea to tell you the truth,” Williamson said. “I think it’s a step in the wrong direction, considering the significant cost to the entire project, and they don’t offer significant protection for the money.”

Walker from his city office admitted it is definitely going to add to the cost of building. Even though prices have gone down in recent years, a sprinkler system will still add approximately $15,000 to the cost of building a home.

“The way I see it is anything that they come up with that makes it harder to build makes it harder for me to survive,” Williamson said.

Despite the increased cost, not all contractors are against the new regulations. Joe Stewart of SMC Contracting has been installing sprinkler systems in commercial and residential structures for years.

“They are really, really good. Sprinklers save lives,” he said. “When you’re living in wood houses, wood burns.”

He does note, however, that cold temperatures add to the

difficulty of installing fire sprinkler systems in the Lake Tahoe area. If water is sitting in the lines, it could freeze, and the pipe could burst.

For this reason, a mix of 50 percent glycerin and 50 percent water is used in the lines. Harris said this glycerin is food-safe and nontoxic, so Tahoe residents do not have to worry about it leaching into the soil or contaminating the lake.

The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency is aware of the new code, but has chosen not to get involved. They do not generally review interior home issues and refer to the Environmental Protection Agency to make decisions on toxic chemicals inside homes.

Green building

Something TRPA does get involved with, however, is the environmental impact of structures and building. In fact, some of the things TRPA has been mandating for years are addressed in the new CALGreen code such as best management practices, or BMPs.

In addition to BMPs and storm water management, the new green building codes demand reduced water consumption, greater energy efficiency, material conservation and improved indoor air quality.

Walker said the air inside homes can be more toxic than the smog in downtown Los Angeles. The new code forces homeowners and contractors to acknowledge the amount of volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, released by building products.

“People are going to have to pay a little more attention to what they put in the interior of their homes because they want better indoor air,” he said.

Walker estimates the CALGreen codes will have less of a financial impact on the building process than the fire

sprinkler mandate. But as a contractor, Stewart sees it differently.

“For us as a contractor, that’s going to have a larger impact,” he said. “There will be substantial upfront costs we’re forced to pay.”

Many of these costs will come from the added insulation and energy efficient windows, doors and heating systems. Construction waste management could also potentially add costs for contractors. The new code requires 50 percent of all waste on a construction site be recycled.

However, with a little planning ahead, the waste recycling could end up being one of the least intrusive aspects of the new CALGreen code, at least for local builders. South Tahoe Refuse already offers recycling services to all of its customers at no extra charge. The company will even track the percentage of waste recycled and provide evidence to the contractor, if they are notified and accounts are properly set up ahead of time.

California is the first state in the nation to mandate green building practices. With local entities such as TRPA and Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board already requiring many of these practices, adopting the CALGreen code may be easier for builders in the Lake Tahoe area than elsewhere in California.

“I believe Tahoe is going to feel less of a shock factor,” Stewart said, “simply because we’re already dealing with portions of it simply by building in Tahoe.”

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More resources brought in to search for missing snowboarder

By Bill Lindelof and Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee

A National Guard helicopter is scheduled to join the search tonight for a snowboarder who has been missing in the Sierra Nevada since Tuesday afternoon.

Capt. Jeff Ausnow of the Placer County Sheriff's Department said the helicopter will fly over the area around the Alpine Meadows ski resort using Forward Looking Infrared Technology in an effort to locate Shawnte Marie Willis, 25, of Tahoma. This will be the first opportunity search teams have had to use air support, he said, noting that a break in the weather they had hoped for before nightfall did not occur.

Ausnow said Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue skiers searched through the night. They were relieved this morning by another search and rescue team of about 10 people on snowshoes who continued the search.

Ausnow said high winds and low visibility have prevented the use of search vehicles, including helicopters and snowmobiles, and blowing snow has covered tracks. Although the search area is relatively small, he characterized it as backcountry on U.S. Forest Service land that is not groomed for skiing.

As the search continues, Willis' family in Humboldt County is hoping for the best, but worried because she has epilepsy.

Read the whole story

Reno Redevelopment Agency almost out of money

By Susan Voyles, Reno Gazette-Journal

Another significant drop in casino property taxes received by Washoe County in 2011 will essentially put the Reno Redevelopment Agency out of business.

The agency, which works to revitalize downtown and a second redevelopment district, will lose its last 11□2 employees July 1 and will have enough money on hand only to pay debt service and other obligations, said Kevin Knutson, who does double duty as the city's budget and communications director.

"We are going to remove everybody. It will be more like a holding company," said Knutson, whose agency employed 16 staffers at its height in 2009.

The taxable value of 16 casinos on the Washoe County Assessor's obsolescence list has been reduced by $143.6 million, to $920 million, for coming tax year. The reduction – which can be calculated by each property's income if it chooses, instead of the building's replacement value – comes on top of a $239 million reduction the previous year.

"It's dire," said Mark Stafford, a senior appraiser in the Washoe County Assessor's office who reviewed the financial books of the 16 casinos. "The pie is getting smaller. And the economy is still trending down."

The redevelopment agency is budgeted to collect $4.4 million in property taxes from its two districts for the current fiscal year of 2010-11.

Read the whole story

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3 American men in top 20 in World Cup downhill

By Elizabeth Karam, U.S. Ski Team

BORMIO, Italy -– Bode Miller of Franconia, N.H., led a U.S. trio into the top 20 with eighth in Wednesday's Audi FIS Alpine World Cup downhill in Bormio. Steven Nyman of Sundance, Utah, finished 11th and World Cup rookie Travis Ganong of Squaw Valley was 20th, while Austria's Michael Walchhofer clinched the victory.

Known amongst the racers as one of the most strenuous, if not the most strenuous course on the World Cup circuit, the U.S. was up to the challenge. Nyman scored his best World Cup result since Val Gardena in 2008, while Ganong raced to a career best finish and first World Cup downhill points.

Despite having teammate Marco Sullivan of Squaw Valley injured in Tuesday's downhill training, Miller, Nyman and Ganong showed their focus and strength on race day. Erik Fisher of Idaho and Andrew Weibrecht of Lake Placid were also on the injured reserve list with injuries sustained prior to Bormio.

Bormio first-timer Ganong admitted Bormio was the stop about which he was most nervous all season.

"This hill is crazy. It's a real deal downhill, bumpy, fast, icy and dark. It's just tough skiing from top to bottom and I came through today," said Ganong. "In my mind this is the toughest hill, but it turns out I really like it. It's really

turny and suits my more technical style.”

The U.S. Alpine Ski Team’s speed crew will return stateside for a break before heading back to Europe for the second half of the World Cup circuit. Part two will kick off with the famed Lauberhorn races at Wengen, Switzerland, Jan. 11-14.

The next stop on the World Cup tour is Munich Jan. 2, where World Cup giant slalom leader Ted Ligety of Park City will be representing the U.S. in the parallel slalom city event.

Audi FIS Alpine World Cup, Bormio, Italy, Dec. 29, Downhill

1. Michael Walchhofer, Austria, 1:59.66

2. Silvan Zurbriggen, Switzerland, 1:59.74

3. Christof Innerhofer, Italy, 2:00.02

4. Patrick Kueng, Switzerland, 2:00.26

5. Georg Streitberger, 2:00.62

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8. Bode Miller, Franconia, NH, 2:00.92

11. Steven Nyman, Sundance, UT, 2:01.31

20. Travis Ganong, Squaw Valley, CA, 2:01.93

Storm downs trees, power lines; shelter open in S.

Tahoe

Updated 6:45pm: In anticipation of the low temperatures this evening and people still without power, South Lake Tahoe officials in conjunction with the American Red Cross has opened a warming shelter at the South Lake Tahoe Recreation Center located at 1180 Rufus Allen Blvd.

Power is still off in the Al Tahoe neighborhood of South Lake Tahoe, with the power company not saying when lights will be on. Sierra Pacific Power said they are still looking for the cause as of 6:06pm. Between 2,500-3,000 customers on the South Shore are still without power. Traffic lights are flashing red and some are completely out in that area. Power is back on in Meyers and on the North Shore. Left turn lanes are the big issue on Highway 50 tonight through South Tahoe because they are not plowed and it's causing a back up in travel lanes. Spooner Summit is slow going, but navigable.

By Kathryn Reed

Chain saws were buzzing in the predawn hours of this normally quiet South Shore neighborhood. A tree had gone through a house.

The wet, heavy snow that fell overnight is wreaking havoc with power lines and tree branches throughout the Lake Tahoe Basin.

South Lake Tahoe firefighters ran more than 20 calls between 2-8am. Battalion Chief Ray Zachau said four trees went through houses in that time. A secondary power line was across five driveways on South Shore Drive.



Keith Cooney looks at the tree leaning on and in his South Lake Tahoe home. Photo/Kathryn Reed

“Then the primary came down right after that. It’s a mess with power lines,” Zachau said. “The wet snow is breaking trees.”

Keith Cooney, who lives in the Tahoe Island area of South Lake Tahoe, was abruptly awoken at 3:45am by a loud crash that shook the entire house.

“I knew what it was when it happened,” Cooney said looking at the tree branch coming through the ceiling of his garage.

The entire Jeffery pine in his back yard is uprooted and leaning against the house, taking out part of the chimney, creating a 9-foot gash in the kitchen ceiling and holes in the garage.

Firefighters cleared his driveway of the debris in the dark of the early morning so he could get his vehicle out.

Cooney and his black Lab were not hurt in the ordeal – just shaken up a bit. Cooney is a survivor – his house burned in the 2007 Angora Fire, he was laid off from his job and is still out of work, and his family barely survived Hurricane Katrina.

“I’m just very grateful to have a guardian angel,” Cooney said of surviving the latest trauma without a scratch.

He had planned to go to his friend’s restaurant in Meyers, but the power is out.

Sierra Pacific Power crews came up Tuesday night to start working on getting power back on. Three lines remained out at the Meyers substation, affecting close to 10,000 customers. The company does not have an estimate when the power will be back on.

Power started going out at 11pm Dec. 28 in the Stateline and Ski Run areas. That was back online quickly.

On the North Shore, initially three lines were down between Kings Beach and Tahoe City. Half of the 3,300 customers had power back by 8am, with the rest expected later this morning.

There is no estimated time when the power for the 1,500 customers in the dark on the West Shore south of Tahoe City will have lights again.

The roads are a mess. Zachau said a five-car crash on Lake Tahoe Boulevard at Park Avenue this morning sent one person the hospital.

“The roads are in horrible shape. They are really slippery,” Zachau said.

The Nevada Highway Patrol cleared a two-vehicle accident at the Bourne Curve on the South Shore this morning that resulted in minor injuries. A non-injury accident was being worked on the Mount Rose Highway as well.

“Slow down and don’t go out if you don’t have to,” is the recommendation of Trooper Chuck Allen.

The ride into Carson City from South Tahoe was a bit treacherous this morning.

“A few people couldn’t get out of connecting streets and are stuck in snow banks,” commuter Sue Wood said. “It’s pretty bad. It is the blowing wind that makes it bad.”

About a foot of snow on the South Shore at lake level fell overnight, with 2 feet being reported on Tahoe Mountain with no plows in sight at 9:30am.

The National Weather Service in Reno has reports of 2 to 3 feet in the higher elevations.

Most of the day will be sunny, but snow showers are expected to return this afternoon.

“The air is dropping down from Alaska so that will keep the high temperature for Thursday and Friday below freezing, probably in the 20s for a high,” meteorologist Brian Brong with the Weather Service said.

Overnight lows may be below zero. Brong doesn’t anticipate any records to break, but it may come close the record of 5 below for South Lake Tahoe.

For the entire Lake Tahoe Basin, Brong said the snowpack is 220 percent of normal for this time of year.

The next chance of significant snow for Lake Tahoe may come New Year’s Day.

All El Dorado County offices South Lake Tahoe opened late – 10 today. For additional information, call the snow closure hotline at (530) 573.3050.

The Tahoe Queen and M.S. Dixie II cruises are canceled today. Zephyr Cove snowmobiling is sold out.

South Lake Tahoe Parks and Recreation Department suggests people think about using the pool and gym as things to do once the shoveling is done.

The ice rink is closed because it doesn’t have power. In the Al Tahoe area of South Tahoe the senior center is also without power, flashlights were used at the main post office to sort mail, and visiting hours at the jail were canceled because it is being run on by generators.

Ski report: Call the resort before you go



Close to a foot of snow fell on the South Shore overnight. It started heavy.

All this white stuff is likely to affect lift operations throughout Lake Tahoe.

Here is the ski report from Curtis Fong, the Guy from Tahoe.