

Biodegradable products may not be so green

By Wynne Parry, LiveScience

Once thrown out, biodegradable products – everything from trash bags and diaper liners to pens – are designed to break down relatively quickly and disappear into the natural environment. But these products may not live up to their green image, new research indicates.

“The implication is, it’s biodegradable, therefore, it’s better for the environment – and our point is: Well, not necessarily and not so fast,” said study researcher Morton Barlaz, who heads North Carolina State University’s Department of Civil, Construction, and Environmental Engineering.

These biodegradable products release a potent greenhouse gas, methane, as they break down in landfills, a problem aggravated by the relatively rapid rate at which they decompose.

Barlaz and colleagues looked at what happened when food waste, office paper, newsprint, municipal solid waste overall, and a biodegradable polymer called PHB0 were buried in the average American landfill. Their modeling experiment showed that materials with higher rates of decomposition, like food waste and PHB0, ultimately emitted more methane into the atmosphere.

Read the whole story

Train conductor killed in crash from South Lake Tahoe

By Doug Jastrow, Contra Costa Times

CONCORD – One of Mindy Mohammed's favorite memories was when her grandmother allowed her to be a real conductor on a train.

She was only 10 years old at the time, but her grandmother Laurette Lee let her pull the train whistle, see the engine room and learn about the engineer's complex set of controls.

And once the train began to leave the station, Lee and her granddaughter got to work collecting tickets.

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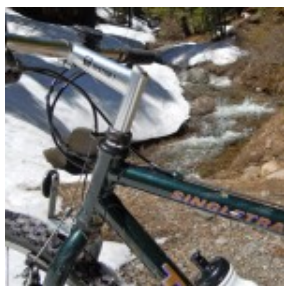
Lingering snow puts chill on Tahoe's early summer tourism

By Jim Carlton and David Ferry, Wall Street Journal

TAHOE CITY – One of the heaviest winter snow seasons in years is putting a chill on the Sierra Nevada's summer tourism, with lingering drifts forcing camping trips, rafting excursions and horseback rides to be canceled or postponed.

Although the snow has mostly melted in this Lake Tahoe resort town, snow at higher elevations is keeping many area campgrounds off-limits, and the two local rafting companies remained closed this week because water managers won't release sufficient lake water into the Truckee River until more snow

melts downstream.



Cyclists are hitting snow not far from the trailheads in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Photo/LTN

“This is devastating for us,” said Aaron Rudnick, owner of Truckee River Raft Co., where about a dozen seasonal employees were on staff Tuesday, compared with as many as 87 during the busy season.

At the Sunnyside Restaurant and Lodge, which relies on its lakeside deck to draw diners, manager Raif Anderson said business was down 10% to 15% for May but warm weather in the past week meant June’s numbers would likely be on par with last year’s.

Two miles up the road, the Tahoe City Golf Course is still reeling from a series of spring snowstorms. The course, which normally kicks into full swing by early May, didn’t open until May 28 and even was forced to close for several snow days in June.

“Mother Nature has a little noose around our neck, and she’s calling the shots,” co-owner Debbie Bechdolt said, adding that business was down almost 50% last month and about 25 percent so far in June.

From the Rockies to here in the Sierra, summer recreational activities are being put on hold after the mountains were buried under as much as double their normal snowpack. The mountains in California and Nevada also experienced an unusually cool spring that has slowed the normal melting.

The economic impact has rippled throughout the Sierra. At Lake Tahoe, where tourism is a \$2 billion-a-year industry, "we have had a little bit of a slow start to our summer season," said Carol Chaplin, executive director of the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority. Among the big setbacks: A late-season snowstorm forced organizers of the Amgen Tour of California to cancel the first stage of the bicycle race, which had been set for May 15 at the alpine lake.

Read the whole story

Memories of Angora Fire fuel anxieties at Wildfire Summit

By Stephen Ward

TAHOE CITY-The frustration was palpable among the roughly 85 firefighters and homeowners who gathered for the Wildfire Summit at the Granlibakken Resort in Tahoe City on Friday. The crowd, who came to learn more about preventing wildfires, expressed their grievances about residents they considered inconsiderate and/or clueless about fire safety within their communities.



Representatives from Incline Village to South Lake Tahoe cited a lack of communication between local agencies and homeowner apprehension as reasons for why the region has had trouble getting residents to develop defensible space around the area.

In fact, the barrage of excuses homeowners deploy to evade reconditioning their property was the centerpiece of one speaker's presentation. Ed Smith, a natural resources specialist for the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension, listed 15 reasons people don't prepare for wildfires, many echoing the sentiments said above, with a PowerPoint slide accompanying each point he made.

"Lack of action is a lack of means, motive and opportunity," Smith said while introducing his points.

But Smith's lecture wasn't spent ridiculing locals – he offered several tips on how to prepare for the worst. Smith advised residents to remove dead trees, create more separation among those that are living and to detach the lower branches of trees so fire can't climb to the top.

After Smith's talk, attendees dispersed into groups based on their residence. In the South Lake Tahoe and Fallen Leaf Lake group, eight members of the community spent their time more as a think tank than a preventative measure session. Most members of the group worked with a fire prevention agency in the area.

Jess Mahnken, project coordinator for Nevada Fire Safe Council, addressed the difficulty of explaining defensible space to lake residents.

"Just like every property is different, every homeowner is different," she said. "You need to hold every hand in a different way."

Memories of the Angora fire fueled many of the anxieties

overheard at the summit, with several attendees referring to the disaster during the breakout sessions. Jeff Michael, chief of Lake Valley's Fire Protection District, touched on the lessons his group learned from the fire earlier in the day, including how to respond more quickly and effectively to wildfires.

Another point Mahnken highlighted at the summit was the incentives for residents to develop defensible space. For instance, the Fire Safe Council offers a 50 percent rebate, up to \$1,000, for homeowners who renovate their property. Some communities even have grant programs that allow the \$1,000 cap to be lifted.

The Fire Safe Council hosted the event in partnership with the University of California Cooperative Extension and University of Nevada Cooperative Extension, with funding from the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and vendors at the conference.

Although the summit had a considerably large crowd, few attendees were actual homeowners; most of the people there were clothed in fire marshal outfits or were involved with an agency.

However, one of the few homeowners who did attend left feeling better about her knowledge of wildfire prevention.

"I thought the talks were exceptionally good," Patricia Owens, who has been an Incline Village resident for 22 years, said. "I wish there were a way to contact more members of the community. People need to relate to the fact that fire is always an ongoing threat to the area."

Despite the lack of community members, Susie Kocher, chair of the event's planning committee, was pleased with the summit's turnout.

"The point we're trying to make is that this is a really broad, complicated problem," she said, referring to

ambivalence to wildfire prevention. "It's going to take action from all of us. Everyone has to work together to reduce risk."

Summer lodging bookings look good for mountain regions

By Howard Pankratz, Denver Post

A tough economy that has Americans postponing extended and overseas vacations has been a blessing to western mountains resorts, according to Ralf Garrison, director of the Denver-based Mountain Travel Research Program.

According to Garrison, advanced reservations are up at most participating mountain resort destinations.

Advanced bookings in May were up 2.8 percent compared to last May with increases in June, July and August.

For the month of May, actual occupancy for mountain lodging was up 5.6 percent over a year ago, and the average daily rate being charged by the resorts is up 3.2 percent compared to May 2010.

Garrison said that with a slumping economy, "there is a disincentive to travel further and an incentive to stay at home."

But where as Americans were recently taking "stay-cations" – or staying very,very close to home – they are now taking what Garrison described as "close-cations". That means the western mountain resorts are seeing an influx of reservations from nearby metropolitan areas, he said.

Garrison said in Colorado, the resorts are seeing reservations from the Front Range, Utah resorts are seeing an uptick from the Salt Lake City area and Tahoe is seeing traffic from California cities.

Read the whole story

Summer deadline to enroll at UNR for fall a first; layoffs coming

By Susan Voyles, Reno Gazette-Journal

The first stab at reducing enrollment at the University of Nevada, Reno will come with the first-ever registration deadline for the fall semester.

UNR President Marc Johnson said he hasn't set a date yet for the deadline this summer.

School records show that students who register at the last moment are not organized to graduate, he said. Until now, students could enroll up to the first day of school.

"We have lost millions and millions in higher education. It means we can handle fewer students," he said.

A record 17,679 students enrolled at UNR last fall.

Dan Klaich, chancellor for the Nevada System of Higher Education, told the Board of Regents last week that he wants all seven campuses to set a cut-off date for applications.

"I flirted with mandating a systemwide cutoff of July 15," he

said. "But the presidents will know best what works for them."

"We cannot and indeed, should not, think we can help or serve everyone," Klaich said. No longer, he said, can young people operate under the impression, "Well, I can always go to college here in Nevada."

Read the whole story

Broc's Puppies case progressing slowly

Former Broc's Puppies owner Dennis Franks' public defender is challenging the charges being brought against the defendant.

Franks was in court Thursday regarding the nearly 100 charges he faces stemming from operating the South Lake Tahoe store that sold puppies.

The court gave Franks' attorney until July 14 to file their paperwork, with the district attorney's office having until Aug. 14 to respond. They are all scheduled to be back in court Sept. 1.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Bare shelves have Christmas

Cheer turning people away

By Kathryn Reed

Christmas Cheer – the year-round-food bank in South Lake Tahoe – could not open its doors Wednesday because it didn't have enough food to give to the growing number of people seeking its help.



"A lot of people think these people are on welfare and just taking advantage, but so many come in crying and are so embarrassed to be there," director Virginia Buffington said.

Christmas Cheer is assisting about 700 households or 1,700 people a month. While the numbers are about the same as last year, they are well above the historical average for the nonprofit.

What is causing the problem is donations – financial and food – are considerably less than years past.

People in need can get one bag or box of food a month. They have different items depending on how many people need to be fed.

For the homeless, Christmas Cheer tries to provide them with canned goods with pull tops because they don't have can openers.

Mostly it's non-perishable food people get. Macaroni and cheese – things that are a meal in a box – are good donations, Buffington said.

Peanut butter and beans help provide protein.

Cash is the best donation because Christmas Cheer can purchase

items from the food bank at 18 cents a pound. This way the money goes farther than when they have to shop at local grocery stores.

However, with donations to the food banks down, Christmas Cheer has been shopping at local stores.

Grocery Outlet is having a food drive for Christmas Cheer all of July. The charity is going to put its familiar barrels that are usually just seen at the holidays out at more locations this summer as a way to remind people the need is not just seasonal.

Christmas Cheer, which is run entirely by volunteers, gives out food Sundays from 2-4pm, and Monday and Wednesday from 11am-2pm. Donations may be dropped off then or call Buffington at (530) 208.8359 to arrange a specific time. Checks may be sent to P.O. Box 14489, South Lake Tahoe, CA 96151.

Disaster training in Douglas County next week

On June 28, Douglas County Emergency Management and East Fork Fire and Paramedic District will host a large-scale man-made disaster training exercise in the Carson Valley from about 5am to 8pm.

Citizens may see a considerable amount of military, law enforcement, fire, and EMS vehicles and personnel in various areas of Douglas County throughout the day during the exercise.

The exercise, code named Sierra Breeze 11, will test local,

state, and national public safety entities in their ability to perform duties in a joint command during a large scale man-made disaster.

The Nevada National Guard 92nd Civil Support Team will be one of the units deployed during the exercise. The mission of the 92nd CST is to provide public safety resources at a domestic chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear threat or incident.

The 92nd CST, based in Southern Nevada, has personnel and equipment to work with civil authorities to identify dangerous substances or chemical agents, assess current and projected CBRN contamination, and provide technical assistance on mitigating CBRN incidents.

Their mission scope includes the intentional or accidental release of nuclear material, toxic chemicals, biological hazards or radiological hazards that could result in catastrophic injury, or loss of life or property within the community. The 92nd CST provides a well trained team to support local and state response in emergency incidents.

At the completion of the exercise, evaluators will identify areas of improvement for all participating agencies, with focus on training or modifying response protocols to improve effectiveness of public safety.

Nevada wants feds to pay for Test Site clean up

By Ralph Vartabedian, Los Angeles Times

The Nevada Legislature has taken the first step in demanding that the federal government make amends for massive radioactive contamination left by decades of nuclear weapons testing on a swath of desert the size of Rhode Island.

In a joint resolution, the state's Senate and House are asking the federal government to contain and mitigate about 300 million curies of contamination left in the soil and water of the former Nevada Test Site, about 75 miles northwest of Las Vegas.



The Nevada Test Site north of Las Vegas is full of radioactive rubble and craters.

Photo/Department of Energy

The Energy Department detonated 921 nuclear warheads underground before testing ended in 1992. An estimated 1.6 trillion gallons of water in aquifers under the site are radioactively contaminated with the byproducts of the bomb tests.

The resolution will open the way for Nevada to demand compensation for the loss of its water resources, said Assemblyman Ed Goedhart, the resolution's lead sponsor. He said the resolution stemmed from a detailed examination of the

radioactive legacy of testing that was published by The Times in November 2009.

“It is one of the largest contamination zones in the U.S., if not the world,” Goedhart said. “If we are prevented from using our water resources, it is a taking and we should be compensated.”

The Energy Department has said the contaminated water is moving very slowly downhill toward Death Valley National Park, but it could take thousands of years to reach any affected community.

Read the whole story