South Tahoe backs state bill to ban plastic bags

By Kathryn Reed

Four out of five South Lake Tahoe City Council members believe residents of the city are capable of washing dirty reusable bags. Bruce Grego's lack of confidence in the citizenry had him voting no on a resolution to support Assembly Bill 1998.



"I have misgivings about this. I think it's a potential hazard," Grego said at the Aug. 19 council meeting.

He doesn't think people who use reusable bags will know to wash them if juice from meat were to drip in it or an egg were to break. Those were his examples.

Mayor Kathay Lovell pointed out how she has had no problem using the bags for a couple years without contamination or threat of salmonella.

Two members from the public spoke late Thursday afternoon to the benefit of getting rid of one-time use plastic bags.

That is what the bill wending its way through the Legislature would do. Right now it is in the Senate Rules Committee. It would prohibit stores from offering single-use carry out bags at supermarkets, convenience stores and large retail establishments with pharmacies. It would allow for bags in the produce section.

Assemblywoman Julia Brownley, D-Santa Monica, has said, "Californians use 19 billion single-use plastic bags a year

and they cost more than $25 million a year to collect and take to landfills.”

What the city did with its 4-1 vote was to essentially endorse the piece of legislation.

Change in food processing could save millions of gallons of water

By Robert Rodriguez, Fresno Bee

Millions of gallons of water run through fruit processing plants every year, generating high costs and an ocean of waste for companies nationwide.

But all that could change with technology developed by Fresno State professor Gour Choudhury.

Choudhury, a specialist in food processing systems, has devised a system that uses air, rather than water, to blast peels off fruit. The invention could slash the water use by 80%, saving companies each tens of thousands of dollars a month.

The project has been three years in the making and could soon be on the market as an eco-friendly solution for processors of peaches, tomatoes and other soft fruit that needs to be peeled.

Read the whole story

Winds spark fire danger in Tahoe-Reno region

Dry, windy weather is the forecast for all of Saturday. This in turn means a red flag warning when it comes to the threat of fire in the Lake Tahoe-Reno region.

The National Weather Service's red flag warning is in effect from 11am-11pm Aug. 21. There is a lake wind advisory until 8pm.

Winds are expected to be from the south at 10-20mph, with gusts up to 30mph.

It is a strong low pressure system off the coast that is creating the winds.

Sunday and Monday should bring less wind and cooler temperatures.

Timber firm closes plant supplying NV Energy

By Jane Braxton Little, Sacramento Bee

Sierra Pacific Industries' 15 power plant workers learned Friday that the timber company was closing the electricity-generation facility at the end of their shifts.

Sierra Pacific officials also sent a notice to NV Energy, a Reno utility company, announcing that they were suspending operations at the Loyalton plant “effective immediately,” said Mark Pawlicki, a spokesman for the Anderson-based timber company.

He cited federal government decisions that have “cut off” the supply of wood chips and waste used at the co-generation plant in Sierra County.

Read the whole story

Problem Incline bear still eludes Nevada trackers

By Marie C. Baca, Wall Street Journal

INCLINE VILLAGE – In hot pursuit of a notorious burglar along the shores of Lake Tahoe this year, Carl Lackey organized a night patrol to catch the perp. His tools included a fire extinguisher, pepper spray and two dogs that respond only to commands in Russian.

“These dogs were bred to hunt,” says Mr. Lackey, 45 years old.

Mr. Lackey’s nemesis: a 700-pound black bear dubbed Bubba.

The bear has been a longtime target for Mr. Lackey, a biologist with the Nevada Department of Wildlife. Recently, his quest search took on greater urgency.

Driven from the mountains by the 2009-2010 winter—the snowiest in five years—and feeding off the garbage left by tourists, Bubba is living large on Lake Tahoe’s shores. The bear has

broken into at least 50 homes in search of food the past year, causing more than $70,000 of damage, and leaving stinky, basketball-size deposits as his calling card.

So Mr. Lackey has ramped up his bear-catching techniques, deviating from his usual strategy of just laying traps by going on 3 a.m. patrols. This past winter, he placed a shoot-to-kill order, declaring Bubba dangerous and saying the bear "needs to go out of the population."

Read the whole story

Watch the video

MontBleu's parent company posts quarterly loss

By Steve Green, Las Vegas Sun

Gaming operator Tropicana Entertainment Inc. of Las Vegas on Friday posted a second quarter loss of $1.6 million on net revenue of $165.1 million.

The company said the overall results are not comparable to previous periods since the company's big Atlantic City property is not included in the comparable quarter for 2009.

Tropicana Entertainment Inc. is controlled by investor Carl Icahn.

The company, which in March emerged from the Tropicana Entertainment LLC bankruptcy, has Tropicana casinos in Atlantic City and Laughlin, as well as the River Palms casino in Laughlin, the MontBleu casino resort on Lake Tahoe and

riverboat casinos in Evansville, Ind., Baton Rouge, La., Vicksburg, Miss., and Greenville, Miss.

Read the whole story

Garrido's competency questioned; tabloids buy Dugard photos

By Martha Bellisle, Reno Gazette-Journal

PLACERVILLE -– The lawyer representing Phillip Garrido, charged with kidnapping Jaycee Dugard in 1991 and holding her captive for 18 years, raised concerns Friday about whether Garrido is competent to stand trial and help with his defense.



Phillip Garrido

After meeting with the attorneys and prosecutors privately before a hearing in El Dorado Superior Court, Judge Douglas Phimister told the courtroom that Garrido's attorney, Susan Gellman "may be declaring doubt," meaning she may file a motion questioning Garrido's mental state.

If she does so, Phimister said the court would appoint an

expert to examine Garrido to determine his competency status. He set another hearing for Oct. 1 to discuss the next step.

Read the whole story

$5,000 penalty for evading Tahoe’s boat inspectors

A boater who refused a mandatory invasive species decontamination earlier this summer faces a $5,000 penalty for evading watercraft inspectors in order to launch illegally into Lake Tahoe. The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Governing Board will decide the matter at their meeting Wednesday at Stateline.

On June 28, Tahoe Resource Conservation District watercraft inspectors at a boat ramp on the East Shore sent the boater away from the ramp for a mandatory decontamination because the boat he wanted to launch was determined to be high risk for invasive species.

All motorized watercraft in the Lake Tahoe Region are required to be inspected for aquatic invasive species, such as quagga and zebra mussels and New Zealand mudsnails, before being allowed to launch.

The boater’s decontamination was scheduled for three days later, on July 1. When the boater did not show up for the decontamination, inspectors put the vessel’s registration identification on a watch list as an alert to other launch and inspection sites.

Inspectors soon discovered that later on June 28 the vessel

was brought to the roadside invasive species inspection station in Meyers where the boater gave different information to inspectors about the boat’s origin. Inspectors found the boat to be clean and sealed the vessel which allowed the boater to launch at Meeks Bay.

Using the vessel’s description and registration numbers, the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency watercraft team located the vessel and alerted the California Department of Fish & Game. Wardens assisted in removing the boat from the Lake.

According to the operator’s statement at the East Shore inspection site, the boat had come from Utah’s Sand Hollow Reservoir, which is infested with quagga mussels. Quagga mussels are capable of multiplying to the trillions in only a few years.

Although it was later verified that the boat had not last launched in Sand Hollow Reservoir, but rather had come from Lake Powell in Arizona and was likely not a high risk, the evasion of inspectors is a serious violation, according to Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Aquatic Invasive Species Program Manager Ted Thayer.

Immediately following this incident, Conservation District inspectors changed their watch list procedures such that the registration identification of any vessel sent for decontamination is circulated to all inspection locations and launch sites as a prohibited vessel. The registration identification is not removed from the watch list until the boat has been decontaminated.

Fire reported near Sand Harbor

Updated Aug. 21 12:02am: The fire burned some brush, but nothing significant. The cause is under investigation.

From the Reno Gazette-Journal:

Emergency crews are responding to reports of two trees on fire near Sand Harbor at Lake Tahoe.

The fire is reportedly visible from Highway 28, approximately five miles south of Incline Village.

Monopolies allow hospitals to get price they want

By Peter Waldman, Bloomberg

After Mark Logsdon tore a ligament in his knee skiing at Lake Tahoe in March, he returned home to suburban Sacramento and had an MRI scan at Sutter Davis Hospital.

Sutter's price for the knee scan was $1,271, payable by Logsdon and his insurer. Exactly the same MRI at one of the local imaging centers owned by Radiological Associates of Sacramento would have cost $696 – 45 percent less.



Patrick Fry

It turns out that Logsdon didn’t know something that his insurance company does: Sutter Health Co., the nonprofit that owns Sutter Davis, has market power that commands prices 40 to 70 percent higher than its rivals per typical procedure — and pacts with insurers that keep those prices secret.

Sutter can charge these prices because it has acquired more than a third of the market in the San Francisco-to-Sacramento region through more than 20 hospital takeovers in the last 30 years, according to executives of Aetna Inc., Health Net Inc. and Blue Shield of California, who asked not to be named because their agreements with Sutter ban disclosure of prices.

Sutter operates in a competitive market, Chief Executive Officer Patrick Fry, 53, said in an interview. “I don’t see Sutter Health as having market power, given the choices that employers can make,” Fry said. “The market has a lot of room to make a lot of decisions.”

Read the whole story