

Advocates consider expanding Calif. recycling

By Jeremy B. White, Sacramento Bee

The fact that you drag that recycling to the curb doesn't mean it escapes the landfill.

In the years since California enacted a recycling framework, subsidized by the deposits paid on cans and bottles, people have generally been willing to do their part. Cities and counties have reflected that receptiveness by expanding the universe of materials eligible to be picked up curbside.

But putting recyclables in a bin forms just one link in a long chain allowing containers to live second lives as repurposed raw material. Once discarded goods arrive at a processing facility, their fate is governed by a simple business decision: given the resale value, is it worth the time and money to collect, separate or process?

A recent Californians Against Waste report found that most most cartons containing milk and juice end up intermingled with garbage – despite the fact that more and more cities encourage residents to toss those containers in with other recyclables. Styrofoam is technically recyclable but often becomes garbage.

“It's important to make a distinction between collected and recycled,” said Mark Oldfield, a spokesman for CalRecycle. “It quite often comes back to, what do they have locally in terms of processing capability?”

California's foremost recycling advocacy group hopes to expand that capacity. Fresh off a resounding victory as the Legislature passed a ban on the single-use plastic bags that gum up recycling machinery and clutter waterways, Californians

Against Waste is contemplating legislation to expand the type of materials covered by the state's program.

Read the whole story

Private security outfit raids Calif. pot farms

By Dylan Scott, TPM

They wear camouflaged uniforms, bearing military-style insignia. They ride helicopters over the forests of Mendocino County equipped with firearms, where they cut down illegal marijuana. But they aren't the army. They aren't even the police. They are Lear Asset Management, a private security firm that is attracting a lot of attention for the work it's doing – and even perhaps some work it hasn't done

KCBS in San Francisco described them as “mysterious men dropping from helicopters to chop down” pot plants. Rumors swirl in the area's marijuana community about heavily armed men choppering onto their private land and cutting down their marijuana plants without identifying themselves or answering questions about who they are. Lear has become a boogeyman of sorts for a certain population in Northern California.

But they aren't hiding. Paul Trouette, Lear Asset Management's 55-year-old founder, spoke with TPM for more than 30 minutes earlier this week to describe what his company does and why they do it. They see themselves filling a void that law enforcement cannot. Trouette at one point invoked the Pinkertons – the private detective agency notorious for, among other things, violently busting unions and chasing Wild West

outlaws – to demonstrate the historical precedent for what they’re now doing in this county of 88,000 on the edge of the California Redwoods.

“Law enforcement just doesn’t have the means to take care of it any longer,” Trouette told TPM. The 2011 murder of Fort Bragg City Councilman Jere Melo by an illegal trespasser tending poppy plants as Melo patrolled private land for a timber company made a big impression on Trouette, he said. Lear was incorporated the same year, and the company has worked with a nonprofit founded in Melo’s memory.

Read the whole story

Calif. pot legalization efforts under way

By Lisa Leff, AP

SAN FRANCISCO – A national marijuana advocacy group took steps Wednesday to begin raising money for a campaign to legalize recreational pot use in California in 2016, a move with potential to add a dose of extra excitement to the presidential election year.

The Marijuana Policy Project filed paperwork with the California secretary of state’s office registering a campaign committee to start accepting and spending contributions for a pot legalization initiative on the November 2016 state ballot, the group said.

The measure would be similar to those passed in 2012 by voters in Colorado and Washington, the first U.S. states to legalize

commercial sales of marijuana to all adults over 21.

California, long the national leader in illegal marijuana production and home to a thriving, largely unregulated medical marijuana industry, is one of the 21 other states that currently allow marijuana use only for medical reasons. The drug remains illegal under federal law.

“Marijuana prohibition has had an enormously detrimental impact on California communities. It’s been ineffective, wasteful and counterproductive. It’s time for a more responsible approach,” Marijuana Policy Project Executive Director Rob Kampia said. “Regulating and taxing marijuana similarly to alcohol just makes sense.”

The Washington, D.C.-based group also has established campaign committees to back legalization measures in Arizona, Massachusetts and Nevada in 2016.

Voters in Oregon, Alaska and the District of Columbia will weigh in on marijuana legalization in November.

In 2010, California voters rejected a ballot initiative seeking to legalize recreational pot. The measure, just like the medical marijuana law the state approved in 1996, was the first of its kind. But along with opposition from law enforcement and elected officials, Proposition 19 faced unexpected resistance from medical marijuana users and outlaw growers in the state’s so-called Emerald Triangle who worried legalization would lead to plummeting marijuana prices.

Marijuana Policy Project spokesman Mason Tvert predicted no such divisions would surface this time around.

Citing his group’s experience in Colorado and the advantage of aiming for a presidential election year when voter turnout is higher, Tvert said legalization supporters would use the next two years to build a broad-based coalition and craft ballot language that addresses concerns of particular constituencies.

“Obviously, it’s a whole different landscape in California, where it will cost probably as much or more to just get on the ballot as it did to run a winning campaign after getting on the ballot in Colorado,” he said.

League of California Cities lobbyist Tim Cromartie, whose group opposed the state’s 2010 pot legalization initiative and until this year fought legislative efforts to give the state greater oversight of medical marijuana, said Wednesday that it was too soon to say what kind of opposition, if any, would greet a 2016 campaign.

Lynne Lyman, California director of the Drug Policy Alliance, said her group expects to play a major role in the legalization effort and already has started raising money. Lyman said the goal is to have an initiative written by next summer. She estimated that a pro-legalization campaign would cost \$8 million to \$12 million.

Even though California would be following in the steps of other states if a 2016 initiative passes, legalizing recreational marijuana use there would have far-reaching implications, Lyman said.

“When an issue is taken up in California, it becomes a national issue,” she said. “What we really hope is that with a state this large taking that step, the federal government will be forced to address the ongoing issue of marijuana prohibition.”

Swarm of earthquakes shakes

Mammoth

By Veronica Rocha, Los Angeles Times

The more than 600 earthquakes that have struck the Mammoth Lakes region over the last 24 hours are an indication of tectonic, not volcanic, stress, an expert said Friday.

At least 109 of the earthquakes were magnitude 2.0 or greater, with smaller quakes making up the bulk of the activity, said David Shelly, a seismologist at the U.S. Geological Survey's Volcano Science Center. At least six, however, were greater than magnitude 3.0.

The largest, a 3.8 temblor six miles from Mammoth Lakes, occurred at 9:21pm Thursday.

Read the whole story

Cascade Fire nearly contained at 20 acres

Updated 9:55pm:

Significant precipitation and decreased winds have helped firefighters suppress the Cascade Fire burning near Snow Lake in the Desolation Wilderness.

Based on infrared data, the estimate of the fire's size has been reduced to 20 acres.

With significant precipitation in the weekend forecast, the incident commander plans to begin releasing

resources Saturday.

The fire poses no threat to structures at this time. No evacuations and no road closures are in effect.

Full containment is expected soon.

Bayview Trailhead and Campground and TaylorCreek Sno-Park on Highway 89 remained closed. Previously closed trails are open as is the parking lot at Vikingsholm.

The cause of the fire is under investigation, but it was human caused, according to the U.S. Forest Service. This wildfire is not related to the King Fire.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Burglary suspect arrested in Truckee

A suspected burglar entered a Truckee residence Sept. 23 when the owner and her infant were home.

The suspect fled the Estates Drive house when confronted by the woman.

Three days later Truckee police officers arrested Angel Torres of Truckee on charges of outstanding burglary warrant, possession of a controlled substance, possession of stolen property and burglary. Bail was set at \$100,000.

Officers said the located stolen property consisting of numerous prescription pills that are scheduled as a controlled substance. Further investigation revealed these items were

taken in a different residential burglary.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

King Fire at 74% containment

Updated 9:10pm

Rain has helped the more than 7,700 firefighters bring containment of the King Fire to 74 percent on Sept. 26.

Since the fire began Sept. 13 at the hands of an alleged arsonist 97,009 acres that have been charred.

The fire is moving northeast from its origin of Pollock Pines.

The Tahoe National Forest has issued a road closure which includes the Foresthill Road, Forest Service Road 22, and the Western States and Tevis Cup trails.

There are 289 structures still threatened, but mandatory evacuations have been lifted. Twelve houses have been lost and 68 out buildings. The shelter in Camino has closed.

Smoke drifted into the Folsom and Rancho Cordova areas. It was in the unhealthy category Friday, according to Sacramento County health officials.

A low-pressure system is suppose to be over the area through Sunday, which will bring rain and humidity levels that are ideal for firefighting.

Crews are fixing any damage that was done by firefighters. To stop the spread of nonnative weeds a vehicle rinse station is being used.

CFire crews are beginning to return to their home stations. Six firefighters have been injured on this blaze.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Cops to collect more personal data without public notice

By Ali Winston, Center for Investigative Reporting

LOS ANGELES – Without notice to the public, Los Angeles County law enforcement officials are preparing to widen what personal information they collect from people they encounter in the field and in jail – by building a massive database of iris scans, fingerprints, mug shots, palm prints and, potentially, voice recordings.

The new database of personal information – dubbed a multimodal biometric identification system – would augment the county's existing database of fingerprint records and create the largest law enforcement repository outside of the FBI of so-called next-generation biometric identification, according to county sheriff's department documents.

On Sept. 15, the FBI announced that the Next Generation Identification System was fully operational. Now that the central infrastructure is in place, the next phase is for local jurisdictions across the country to update their own information-gathering systems to the FBI's standards.

When the system is up and running in L.A., any law enforcement official working in the county, including the Los Angeles Police Department, would collect biometric information on

people who are booked into county jails or by using mobile devices in the field.

This would occur even when people are stopped for lesser offenses or pulled over for minor traffic violations, according to documents obtained by the Center for Investigative Reporting through a public records request.

Officials with the sheriff's department, which operates the countywide system, said the biometric information would be retained indefinitely – regardless of whether the person in question is convicted of the crime for which he or she was arrested.

The system is expected to be fully operational in two or three years, according to the sheriff's department.

All of this is happening without hearings or public input, yet technology companies already are bidding to build the system, interviews and documents show. Officials would not disclose the expected cost of the project or which companies are bidding but said it would be a multimillion-dollar undertaking.

The new system is being readied as the public has become increasingly concerned about privacy invasions by the government, corporations and Internet sources. Privacy advocates worry the public is losing any sense of control over the widespread collection of data on its purchases, travel habits, friendships, health, business transactions and personal communications.

At the same time, cities and counties across the country are facing renewed scrutiny for accepting the transfer of military technology from the Pentagon. The national biometric database is part of the transition of military-grade technologies and information-gathering strategies from the Pentagon to civilian law enforcement. During the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq over the past decade, the U.S. military collected and stored

biometric information on millions of civilians and militants.

In 2008, President George W. Bush required the Defense, Homeland Security and Justice departments to establish common standards for collecting and sharing biometric information like iris scans and photos optimized for facial recognition. Law enforcement agencies have been testing mobile systems for documenting biometric information, including a facial recognition program uncovered in San Diego County last fall.

Authorities in California already collect DNA swabs from arrestees booked into county jails, a practice upheld last year by the U.S. Supreme Court and this year by a federal appeals court in California. Dozens of other states also collect DNA samples from arrestees.

Documents from the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department show its database will house information on up to 15 million subjects, giving the department a major stake in the Next Generation Identification program, a billion-dollar update to the FBI's national fingerprint database and the largest information technology project in the history of the U.S. Department of Justice.

For privacy advocates, the development of the Los Angeles biometric system without any public oversight or debate and an indefinite data retention policy are causes for concern.

Jeramie Scott, national security counsel for the Electronic Privacy Information Center, said it's critical for the public to be aware that this new technology is being rolled out, because the information held by law enforcement poses unique threats to privacy and anonymity.

"Biometric data is something you cannot change if it is compromised," Scott said. "There are privacy and civil liberties implications that come from law enforcement having multiple ways to identify someone without their consent."

Scott, whose organization has sued the FBI to release information related to Next General Identification, added: "It becomes a one-sided debate when law enforcement alone is making that decision to use new technologies on the public."

Hamid Khan, an organizer with the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition who studies police surveillance, said the arrival of Next Generation Identification means Los Angeles is now a frontier in the battle for privacy.

"Now our whole bodies are up for grabs," Khan said.

The multimodal biometric system under development by the sheriff's department will collect four out of the five "inputs" used by the Next Generation Identification program – fingerprints, mug shots, iris scans and palm prints. Voice recordings are the fifth input.

The L.A. system is designed to transmit and receive data to and from the FBI and the California Department of Justice, which has its own biometric database.

Originally announced in 2008, Next Generation Identification is being rolled out across the country this year after pilot projects were carried out in Michigan, Maryland, Texas, Maine and New Mexico. About 17 million facial records already were integrated into Next Generation Identification as of January.

Earlier this year, residents and city officials in Compton were outraged that Los Angeles County sheriff's officials had experimented with a cutting-edge aerial surveillance tool known as wide-area surveillance without any prior public notice.

"A lot of people do have a problem with the eye in the sky, the Big Brother, so in order to mitigate any of those kinds of complaints, we basically kept it pretty hush-hush," sheriff's Sgt. Douglas Iketani told CIR earlier this year.

Sheriff's Lt. Joshua Thai, who is in charge of implementing the county's new biometric database, said the department currently is collecting only fingerprints and has used mobile devices since 2006 to check the fingerprints of people stopped on the street against the county's records.

Thai said biometric information would be collected from people only when they are arrested and booked, but the mobile devices would be used to verify individuals' identities in the field.

"It could be somebody gets pulled over for a traffic violation and he or she does not have a driver's license on him or her, and the officer is just trying to identify this person," he said.

Thai said the goal of the project is to help law enforcement officers better identify the people they contact and avoid wrongful arrests. "What we're hoping is that based on the mug shot is that that will compensate some of the biometrics to maybe better identify this person," Thai said.

The sheriff's department declined to release information on which companies were already bidding to install the new system.

According to federal guidelines for the storage of biometric data in Next Generation Identification, information on an individual with a criminal record will be kept until that person is 99 years old. Information on a person without a criminal record will be purged when he or she turns 75.

The FBI's guidelines for keeping biometric data on individuals, regardless of whether they have criminal records, "amounts to an indefinite retention period," said Peter Bibring, a senior staff attorney with the Southern California ACLU. If the Next Generation Identification database simply were an update to the FBI's existing fingerprint database, Bibring said the project wouldn't be problematic.

However, he said the biometric database “significantly expands the type of data law enforcement collects and creates a more invasive system” that may encourage police officers to make more stops in the field to gather photographs and biometric data for the new database.

Experts say the collection and storage of biometric information creates challenges for the legal system and personal privacy – challenges that have not been adequately considered in the planning and implementation of Next Generation Identification.

Bibring said the new database, if paired with facial recognition-enabled surveillance cameras, could drastically increase law enforcement’s ability to track a person’s movements just as license-plate readers track vehicles.

“The federal government is creating an architecture that will make it easy to identify where people are and were,” Bibring said. “It threatens people’s anonymity and ability to move about without being monitored.”

Scott, of the Electronic Privacy Information Center, said FBI documents obtained by the center make it clear that uncertainty lingers about who has access to the biometric data that will be stored in the new federal database, and he has doubts regarding the security of such information.

Dozens of Southern California law enforcement agencies have been using mobile fingerprinting devices in the field for roughly a decade. Gang officers routinely submit fingerprints, mug shots and photographs of tattoos and unique scars of suspected gang members to the statewide CalGang database, which contains information on over 130,000 individuals statewide.

The national biometric database also has come under fire from privacy advocates and civil libertarians because it is being implemented without a thorough study of its impact on privacy

– which is required by federal law.

“They need to do this before any pilot programs, of which they’ve done two for facial recognition and iris recognition,” Scott said. “They’re not meeting their legal obligations, which is now being followed up by state and local authorities.”

Khan, of the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition, said such sensitive information in the hands of the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department raises further questions about oversight and information security.

“When we look at the multiple contractors and subcontractors and who will have access to this information,” he said, “the whole issue of identity theft comes to mind.”

College education tied to earnings potential

By Thomas C. Frohlich, Robert Serenbetz, Alexander Kent and Alexander E.M. Hess, 24/7 Wall St.

The proportion of Americans with a college degree has increased steadily each year for more than a decade. According to the latest U.S. Census data, 29.6 percent of Americans at least 25 years old had at least a bachelor’s degree last year, up from 27.9 percent in 2009.

Based on recently released educational attainment data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey, West Virginia had the lowest level of educational attainment, with 18.9 percent of adults 25 and older having attained at least a

bachelor's degree in 2013. Conversely, more than 40 percent of Massachusetts residents had at least a bachelor's degree, the highest percentage nationwide.

Earnings vary dramatically according to a person's level of education. According to Holly Yettick, director of the Education Week Research Center, it is very clear that "people with higher levels of educational attainment make more money." While a typical American adult with less than a high school diploma earned slightly more than \$20,000 in 2013, a person with a bachelor's degree earned more than \$50,000.

Varying levels of income and poverty may also help explain the considerable variations in educational attainment between states. According to Sterling Lloyd, senior research associate at the Education Week Research Center, "varying poverty levels, or differences in socioeconomic status among residents in states" are among the major contributors to disparities in educational attainment.

In fact, the median household income in nine of the 10 states with the lowest educational attainment rates was far lower than the national median of \$52,250 in 2013. On the other end of the spectrum, the most educated states all had among the highest median household income in the nation.

A number of other factors contribute to a state's college attainment rate. While it is extremely difficult to measure the impact of policy on a region's level of education, Lloyd explained that policy makers expect that "efforts to increase financial assistance for students will ultimately result in higher rates of educational attainment." State policymakers are also attempting to improve college readiness by implementing new curriculum standards and benchmarks for college readiness, Lloyd told 24/7 Wall St.

College attainment levels may also be influenced by a migration effect. Yettick pointed out that areas in Colorado,

for example, have excellent college attainment rates but relatively poor high school graduation rates. This may indicate that while a state's education system may be weak, its job market may be strong, attracting people with college degrees to move to the state.

However, a state may also attract people without college degrees. Yettick mentioned Nevada in particular, which had among the lowest college attainment. According to Yettick, "there are a lot of service jobs, so a lot of people moving into [Nevada] do not have college degrees."

Read the whole story

Snow in the forecast for Lake Tahoe

Bundle up because the temps are going to drop and white stuff is going to fall.

Expect a dusting of snow at lake level on Saturday. Above 8,000 feet there could be 4 to 6 inches.

The National Weather Service in Reno told *Lake Tahoe News* the storm that is passing through could impact travel on Sierra passes. For road conditions, click on the state icons on the home page of *Lake Tahoe News*.

By Sunday the storm is expected to have moved through the region. The highs for this weekend are forecast for the mid to low 50s, with the temp climbing to 69 degrees by Tuesday.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*