

Lawmakers want Californians to keep saying 'no'

By Jeremy B. White, Sacramento Bee

Extinguish your filtered cigarettes, ditch the plastic bags to carry your groceries, toss your micro-beaded facial scrub and cancel those plans to catch an orca show at SeaWorld.

Each of those things would be prohibited under a package of bills circulating in Sacramento. Seeking to address such issues as pollution, animal cruelty and tobacco use, lawmakers have advanced measures to ban or limit the availability of various consumer products and activities.

The items facing potential prohibition join a growing list of products legislators have banned in recent years, like lead ammunition, foie gras, eggs from tightly caged chickens and edible shark fins. Those bills drew protests from specific groups saying they were being unfairly penalized – hunters decrying the loss of lead bullets, Chinese Americans who eat shark fin soup mourning the loss of a cherished tradition.

Read the whole story

Ready Mix defends substance of concrete mix

By Kathryn Reed

Mike Wallace, who runs Sierra Tahoe Ready Mix, said paperwork may have been faulty, but the quality of concrete from his

business has never been anything but the best.

Wallace's South Lake Tahoe business and home were searched last week by law enforcement officials who are questioning whether fraud related to government contracts has been committed.

Until March 28 no one from the city had contacted Wallace about any potential indiscretions, Wallace said.

"If they would have just called me, I would have told them what I told Robert Leach," Wallace said. Leach is the El Dorado County assistant district attorney who is handling the case. He was not available for comment.

"What I did wasn't right, but it wasn't to a degree that I thought I was hurting anyone, screwing anyone or making a profit off anyone," Wallace told *Lake Tahoe News*.

He added that he changed the date of a mix because the customer, a firm hired by South Lake Tahoe, needed the paperwork immediately or else they said they would go elsewhere. Wallace said he changed the date to say it was the current year. However, Wallace said the concrete mix that was delivered was that year's formula.

Wallace said a delivery ticket is sent with each batch. Through a computerized mechanism the concrete is mixed. Each job does not requires the same consistency. The ticket has the weight, water content and other details of every load.

At this time Wallace has not been charged with any crime.

South Lake Tahoe officials say it is now up the DA's office.

CalFire hiring crews earlier than usual

By Claire Doan, KCRA-TV

AUBURN -- Despite the wet weather March ushered in, California is still in the midst of a drought.

For CalFire that means bringing on more firefighting resources earlier in the year to make sure teams are ready for a potentially challenging season ahead.

"Already we're seeing a huge increase in the number of wildfires, even on weeks where we're getting a little bit of rain. Right behind that rain are warm temperatures, which dry things back out. That's when we start to see the fires pick back up," said CalFire spokesperson Daniel Berlant.

Read the whole story

Inmate commits suicide in South Lake Tahoe jail

A South Lake Tahoe man hanged himself at the El Dorado County Jail on March 30.

Correctional officers found John Harold Bordycott, 47, on Sunday at 2:26pm unconscious with a bed sheet around his neck. He could not be revived and was pronounced dead at Barton

Memorial Hospital.

Bordycott had been booked into the South Lake Tahoe facility on March 27 on domestic violence charges.

The last hanging at the jail was in 2002 when James Csucsai, 36, killed himself. He with girlfriend Lisa Platz was accused of killing her 9-year-old daughter, Rebecca Aramburo, in 2001 at Campground by the Lake.

“They try to minimize what they can attach a bed sheet to, but in any cell they can find a way,” sheriff’s Lt. Pete Van Arnum told *Lake Tahoe News*. “When they hang themselves they don’t need their feet off the ground.”

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Glass may be the answer to plastic bottles

By Dana Sullivan Kilroy, Los Angeles Times

There’s a reason wine and spirits are stored in glass: purity of taste. Plastic (and, to a lesser degree, metal) can impart various “flavors” into the liquids it comes into contact with. But that’s just one reason that glass is an increasingly popular alternative to plastic and aluminum or stainless steel sport-style bottles.

Another is peace of mind. About five years ago, scientists and the Food and Drug Administration started issuing warnings about bisphenol A, commonly called BPA, a chemical used in plastics and in the linings of some metal vessels.

Then, in 2010, the FDA recommended that parents avoid using bottles and cups containing BPA when feeding infants. That warning was enough to prompt many plastic-bottle manufacturers to start making BPA-free bottles. And it motivated many consumers to look for alternatives for their older children and themselves.

Read the whole story

Lahontan disagrees with EPA bacteria standards

By Kathryn Reed

California is looking at creating a one-size-fits-all approach to handling bacteria in the state's water bodies.

Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board isn't sure that is the correct approach because it would make the rules the same for the ocean, Lake Tahoe and lakes in Desolation Wilderness.

Lauri Kemper, assistant executive director for Lahontan, spoke at this month's Tahoe Area Sierra Club about bacteria standards and protecting recreation uses.



Lauri Kemper with Lahontan talks about bacteria regulations. Photo/LTN

"We believe in diversity because we have a diverse region," she told the group. Much of the water in Lahontan's jurisdiction is used for drinking, except for Mono Lake.

The EPA set the national standard for fecal coliform in water at 200 fecal coliform per 100 milliliters. That is the amount deemed safe to swim in. Lahontan's standard is 20fc/100ml.

"Fecal coliform is an indicator of bacteria and sometimes that something more harmful is present," Kemper said. "When fecal coliform is in the water it doesn't necessarily mean it will cause you harm."

She gave the example of how people may get ill drinking water in another country, but the locals are just fine. It proves "tainted" water takes some getting used to and won't harm everyone.

Kemper said the reason bacteria standards are being looked at is because it's an easy way to test for E. coli. Since 2008 Lahontan has been taking E. coli and fecal coliform samples.

"We are seeing a connection between the two," she said.

The highest concentrations are found where there is grazing. This is in part why Lahontan told the U.S. Forest Service that grazing in Big and Meiss meadows was no longer allowed.

Lahontan is worried that if the state adopts a policy that is less restrictive than what is in place, that grazing could return and tributaries of Lake Tahoe could be negatively impacted.

The EPA is recommending the State Water Board allow 126 E. coli per 100 milliliters. The risk is 35 illnesses per 1,000 swimmers.

Lahontan prefers E. coli limits of 17 per 100 milliliters so the risk of illness is 35 out of every 100,000 swimmers.

“The EPA standard is just swimming, but we have people drinking it,” Kemper said.

Several water purveyors on the Nevada side use Lake Tahoe for drinking water. A filter or chlorine is used as a disinfectant. Beyond that it is not treated because Tahoe’s water is so pristine.

The cabins at Echo Lake rely on springs for their water. It is not treated.

The State Water Board will be conducting scoping on the standards in April. But the listening sessions are by invite only. Public comment and workshops are likely to take place next winter.

Survey: Calif. voters support water bond

By Patricia Yollin, KQED-TV

Almost all of the state’s residents have cut their water use

because of the drought, half of likely voters will support an \$11.1 billion bond for state water projects and a record-high share of Californians, 55 percent, say the water supply is a big problem where they live.

These were among the highlights of a statewide survey by the Public Policy Institute of California, released Wednesday.

The Legislature is considering several new water bond measures for the November ballot, all of them pared back from the \$11.1 billion proposal, which has been pulled from the ballot twice because of the state's fiscal problems.

The revised bond measures are more limited than the expansive 2010 measure and would cost less, with proposals ranging from \$5 billion to \$9 billion. The PPIC survey found that support for a water bond would increase to 59 percent of likely voters if the measure was for a lower amount.

Read the whole story

Stagnation could result in unemployment

By Lauren Weber, Wall Street Journal

It's become conventional wisdom that many of today's workers will see their jobs replaced or transformed by ever-smarter machines. Who needs bus drivers and truckers when self-driving vehicles take over the road – and what happens to the thousands of body-shop workers who won't be needed to repair dents when the sensors in these new vehicles head off fender benders?

A recent paper from Oxford University suggested that 47 percent of U.S. jobs are at high risk of being computerized in the next few decades, with potentially frightening consequences for workers.

Such concerns have raised urgent questions about the skills individuals need to survive in the workforce of the future. Not only is technology displacing workers, as it has in every economic transformation, but it is changing so rapidly that workers and employers are finding themselves unable to keep up, a situation that creates the paradox of a skills gap amid high unemployment.

Read the whole story

Northern Nevada casinos betting property upgrades will keep tourists' interest

By Rob Sabo, AP

Casino operators in the greater Tahoe-Reno area are doubling down on their properties.

The more than \$100 million spent or tabbed for renovations at regional hotel-casinos includes \$50 million at JA Nugget, \$20 million at Boomtown, \$30 million at Grand Sierra Resort, \$20 million at the Hyatt Regency Lake Tahoe in Incline Village and more than \$40 million at the Horizon at Stateline.

Casino operators are bullish on Northern Nevada for any number of reasons, says Carlton Geer, president and chief executive officer of JA Nugget. First and foremost, Geer says, is the

significant rise in year-over-year gaming revenue at large casino properties in northern Nevada.

“If you look at the Nevada Gaming Control Board revenue reports, large casinos in Northern Nevada gained about 6 percent year-over-year through December in gaming win,” Geer says.

That, coupled with other tangible signs that the economy in Northern Nevada has found its legs – solid movement in the residential and industrial construction markets, a rise in revenues from room rates at properties in Washoe County, continued signs of economic recovery from neighboring California – has casino operators scrambling to upgrade their properties to capture greater market share.

“We have a real economic recovery in northern Nevada; it is tangible, we can see it,” Geer says. “And we have the recovery of the northern California economy. We want to deploy capital to reposition ourselves to become more competitive.”

In addition to the regional economic recovery, there’s a continued migration of California residents to Northern Nevada that’s bolstering casino revenues, said Dean DiLullo, chief executive officer of M1 Gaming, which owns Boomtown.

Northern Nevada is a safe bet for casino operators, he adds, because it’s a relatively easy place to run a gambling operation. Reno in particular has tremendous upside because of its proximity to California’s huge population base.

Drawing guests from northern California is a key aspect of the many changes taking places at Grand Sierra, says General Manager Dan Unites. The property recently unveiled LEX, its new \$15 million, 25,000-square-foot nightclub, one of the final pieces of a completely renovated casino floor.

The GSR is banking on the allure of the upscale nightclub experience to pull visitors from the Sacramento Valley and

greater San Francisco Bay Area.

“We added this nightclub to attract individuals coming over from the Bay,” Uonites says. “If you look @ Vegas over the course of the years, it started to buy into the entertainment concept. It was about nightclubs, bottle service, and all these different amenities. It worked. They tapped into this new customer base, and that is what our goal is.”

In addition to the extensive renovations, Grand Sierra Resort placed a renewed emphasis on strategic marketing. The combination of those efforts, Uonites says, has better positioned the property for near- and long-term success.

The Horizon on the South Shore is following a similar path. Jon Park, managing member of NevaOne LLC, owner of the Horizon, says repositioning the property built in 1965 isn’t without risk.

However, the Lake Tahoe gaming market still is quite viable – total revenues at South Shore properties increased by \$6.2 million to \$349.7 million in 2013, the Gaming Control Board reports in its annual Gaming Abstract.

The end goal of the renovation plan is to create a destination with a diverse choice of resort-style amenities, Park says. The property will have multiple restaurant and dining options, as well as upscale bar, lounge and entertainment options similar to competing properties on the other side of Highway 50.

Sometimes upgrades are just a necessary course of business. The Nugget, Geer says, is 58 years old and requires substantial capital expenditure for routine and deferred maintenance that had been delayed over the years.

JA Nugget will paint the entire property in coming months and upgrade behind-the-scenes functions such as its HVAC and mechanical and plumbing systems to increase the property’s

airflow and energy efficiency.

In addition to the large-scale renovations, JA Nugget plans to add a new country bar, upgrade its bingo operations and move bingo, gift shop, deli and sports book operations to the main casino floor – all part of a sweeping effort to gain an edge in a crowded marketplace.

The final piece of the puzzle, DiLullo says, is that Northern Nevada continues to be a place where people want to be. Reno-Sparks will never shed its small town roots, but it's changing and maturing into a more eclectic and vibrant city. DiLullo cites the many small businesses cropping up in Midtown as but one example.

As for Boomtown, DiLullo says the 50-year-old property nine miles west of Reno functions best as a complete package – and that means bringing a truck stop back to the site.

Truckers for decades stopped at Boomtown before passing over the Sierra, but lost that option when Cabela's opened in early 2008. DiLullo says adding a truck stop component at Boomtown is a near-term goal.

"We are working to put the pieces of Boomtown back," DiLullo says. "We would like to see the truck stop added back. If we do that, the 700 trucks that park on I-80 during a snowstorm will have somewhere to park, fuel, gamble and stay."

DiLullo says M1 Gaming currently is reviewing legal and developmental aspects of adding a truck stop to the property. M1 Gaming owns 100 acres at the site and also is mulling plans to develop parcels fronting the Truckee River.

"I could see mixed use development or a riverwalk happening here," DiLullo says.

Nev. OKs rules for medical marijuana

By Cy Ryan, Las Vegas Sun

CARSON CITY – Regulations for setting up medical marijuana clinics cleared their final hurdle Friday, a week before and the law allowing the dispensaries take effect.

The Legislative Commission, without discussion, unanimously approved the rules written by the state Division of Public and Behavioral Health.

Steven Cooksey of MedMen, a consulting firm on marijuana issues, said it may be late this year or early 2015 before marijuana is available for sale.

[Read the whole story](#)