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Redlands plans to go green, reduce emissions

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By MICHAEL PERRAULT

REDLANDS - It's said that Redlands got its name from the red earth that spawned grove after grove of navel oranges and led to the nickname "Navel Orange Capital of the World."

That, however, is not stopping Redlands from embarking on its own "green" revolution.

Mayor Jon Harrison this week won support from fellow City Council members to form a "climate action task force."

Among the group's initial goals will be creating a detailed list of public and private actions to cut greenhouse gas emissions.

The city signed the U.S. Conference of Mayors' Climate Protection Summit agreement committing Redlands to reduce carbon emissions at least 7 percent below 1990 levels by 2012.

"If we each reduce our energy by 2 or 3 percent per year, we can reach the target set by the (agreement)," Harrison said.

"Green" has become the watchword for many city departments that now require vendors, contractors and consultants to recycle, use recycled paper and embrace other environmentally friendly products, said Gary Van Dorst, director of Redlands' Quality of Life Department.

His department is creating a Green Initiatives page on the city's Web site to list efforts such as opening Redlands' liquid natural gas and compressed natural gas fueling stations to outside users.

The city is installing particulate filters on trash trucks, expanding recycling programs and decreasing energy use during peak demand hours.

It has also launched a ride-share program.

The Fire Department's solid waste division operates a recycling service that collects about 100,000 pounds of electronic devices a year at two collection sites, Van Dorst said.

Other steps include generating electricity from landfill gas, converting the city's solid waste fleet to use alternative fuels and installing energy-saving streetlights.

Individuals and businesses are being recognized in a new Green Awards initiative.

Among the first recipients was Montessori in Redlands, which slashed disposable packaging waste 25 percent after doling out briefcase-style lunchboxes to students and employees.

"It cuts a ton of trash over the year," said teacher Jean Bonner-Drinkwine. ". . . Our four trash cans used to be filled after lunch each day. Now they're only a third full."

Harrison believes cutting greenhouse gases can be achieved one action at a time, helping to address the problems of climate change and rising competition for energy.

Redlands is recruiting local university professors, alternative energy experts, representatives from the business community and others for its task force.

They will explore how to be greener in areas such as transportation, land use, energy and water conservation, vehicle emissions, waste reduction and greenscaping.

Tim Krantz, an associated professor who heads the University of Redlands' environmental studies department, has worked alongside the mayor and other city officials on various green initiatives.

Krantz recently returned "pumped up and energized" from Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's Global Summit on Climate Change, even more confident that the current economic slump will not stifle green efforts.

Instead, he said, green jobs and green technology in a time of energy crisis are seen as keys to reinvigorating the economy.

The 23 students who attend Krantz's Sustainable Building and Communities class are "gung ho and ready to go," Krantz said. "They recognize that this is their future."

Redlands also supports the year-old Green Valley Initiative, a regional economic development plan to promote green technologies, renewable energy, alternative transportation and sustainable lifestyles.

Redlands resident Daniel Cozad, director of the Green Valley Initiative, sees the program as a long-term, sustainable approach.

The goal is to transform the Inland area into a region that integrates people and businesses with natural resources to create new jobs, greater opportunities and higher quality of life, Cozad said.

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