

VenturaCountyStar

Eye on the Environment: Commuters urged to save money, air

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Guest writer

Commuters have a chance to win a \$1,000 gas card or other prizes by filling out a form pledging to car pool, bike, walk, telecommute or use mass transit at least one day during Rideshare Week, Oct. 6-10.

Employers who distribute and collect pledge forms from employees will be entered in a separate drawing for additional prizes.

Rideshare Week gives the Ventura County Transportation Commission and Ventura County Air Pollution Control District another chance to promote car pooling, van pooling and mass transit, as well as biking, walking and telecommuting.

To encourage participation, employers can use incentives such as a pizza party for the department returning the most pledge cards, or using completed pledge cards as an admission ticket to a lunchtime event.

To find out more about Rideshare Week, and for posters and other materials you can use to encourage participation, visit the VCTC Web site at <http://www.goventura.org> or the air district site at <http://www.vcapcd.org>.

Of course, the biggest incentive for participation is the opportunity to reduce traffic, cut smog, lower climate-changing carbon emissions and save on commuting costs. The Transportation Institute's annual Urban Mobility Report, using data from 2005, notes traffic congestion in the Los Angeles area, including Ventura County, delays the average traveler by 72 hours per year. Those delays waste 57 gallons of fuel per traveler.

The institute's total of 490.5 million wasted hours stuck in traffic and 384 million gallons of wasted gas does not even include the time and cost of an unimpeded commute — it is only the difference between traveling at the speed limit and being delayed by traffic.

One of the most common objections to car pooling or taking mass transit is the fear it will take too much time. But it can actually save you time by giving you an opportunity to multi-task. Some ride-sharers use commute time to catch up on work, read or plan ahead. Of course, as traffic worsens, it seems many commuters who drive alone in their vehicles are also trying to apply makeup, eat breakfast or talk on the phone — things that are much safer to do when you are a passenger.

Incentives encouraging individuals and businesses to help the environment are also the focus of an event this weekend. Saturday and continuing from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. today, the Big E Extravaganza is being held at The Palms shopping center in Oxnard. Ken Powell, host of the “Money Intelligence” show on local radio station KKZZ (AM 1400), is the master of ceremonies at an event featuring “sustainable living pavilions.” On Saturday, more than 30 workshops focused on everything from how to remodel for durability and energy efficiency to how to reduce utility bills by using passive solar energy.

The workshops continue today, with one to be given by me at 4 p.m. I will discuss the incentives available from the Ventura County Recycling Market Development Zone, which assists recycling-based businesses with low-interest loans, site selection, permitting and materials for manufacturing. Assistance is targeted to businesses using recycled or reused materials to make products in Ventura County, and the program is designed to increase market demand for these materials.

Joining me today are speakers who will discuss sustainable products, locally grown food, and ways to calculate and reduce your carbon footprint. At 1 p.m., Jay Duncan, the city of Oxnard’s recycling manager, will demonstrate how to use a worm bin to turn food waste into high-quality soil amendments. Also at 1 p.m., author Evan Albright will sign and discuss his book, “Save Green by Going Green.”

Next weekend, you can tour Ojai’s green homes and businesses to see how others have put similar knowledge into practice. From 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, the Ojai Valley Green Coalition will host Ojai’s first Green Home and Building Tour. Designers, contractors and residents will display environmentally preferable features they have incorporated into buildings. To buy a ticket, visit <http://www.ojivalleygreentour.com>.

The home tour, Big E Extravaganza and Rideshare Week all offer great opportunities to keep your eye on the environment.