

Make this holiday season a safe one, and a fun one

TREE SAFETY

- ★ Make sure your artificial tree is labeled "Fire Resistant."
- ★ Check live trees for freshness. A fresh tree is green, needles are hard to pull from branches and they do not break when bent. The trunk butt of a fresh tree is sticky with resin, and when tapped on the ground the tree doesn't lose many needles.
- ★ When setting up a tree at home, place it away from fireplaces and portable heaters. Locate the tree out of the way of foot traffic and don't block doorways.
- ★ Cut a few inches off the trunk of your tree to expose the fresh wood. This allows for better water absorption and will keep your tree from drying out.
- ★ Keep the stand filled with water, because heated rooms can dry trees out rapidly.



Don't drink and drive

If you are going to a holiday party, make sure there is a designated driver. If you are hosting a party, make sure there are non-alcoholic drinks available, and don't let guests drive if they are under the influence. If you see a drunk driver on the road, immediately call 911 before they ruin the holidays for someone else.

Fireplace rules in effect

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has a "Check Before You Burn" program in effect from November to February. The program prohibits fireplaces and wood stove use — including pellet stoves — on days when air quality is expected to be bad.

Burn status is available at www.valleyair.org, by calling 1-800-SMOG INFO or in the local media.

City offices close for holidays

City offices will be closed for Christmas, Dec. 25, and New Years Day, Jan. 1, so that employees can spend time with their families.

Due to the holidays, refuse collection will be delayed by a day, so the usual Thursday collection will take place on Friday, and the Friday collection will be on Saturday.

Dispose of trees correctly

The City no longer has curbside collection of Christmas trees. Trees should be cut up into four-foot lengths, placed in the green container and put out for regular collection. The green material will be turned into compost that will be reused.

LIGHT SAFETY

- ★ Check all tree lights before hanging them on your tree, even brand new ones. Make sure all the bulbs work and that

there are no frayed wires or broken sockets.

- ★ Never use electric lights on a metallic tree. It can be deadly.
- ★ Before using lights outside, make sure they are designed for outdoor use. String lights through hooks or insulated staples, not nails or tacks. Never pull or tug lights to remove them.
- ★ Plug all outdoor electric decorations into circuits with ground fault circuit interrupters to avoid potential shocks.
- ★ Turn off all lights when you go to bed or leave the house. The lights could short out and start a fire.

Treatment plant gets low-cost loan from state

Last month, the City's \$37 million loan application was approved by the State Water Board.

By using the State Revolving Fund loan with a 2.6 percent interest rate, the City expects to save more than \$13 million.

The City will provide \$28 million from local sources for the project.

The project will add tertiary treatment to the plant that includes filtration and ultra-violet (UV) disinfection.

The UV treatments replace chlorination and eliminates the toxic by-products of that process.

The improvements to the plant were required by the state Regional Water Quality Control Board, which oversees the treatment plants discharges.

The City is expected to award bids on the \$65 million project in February. Completion is expected by the year 2012.



Merced City Council

Mayor Ellie Wooten
 Mayor Pro Tem John Carlisle
 Council members:
 Joe Cortez
 Michele Gabriault-Acosta
 Noah Lor
 Jim Sanders
 Bill Spriggs

Contact the City Council by email at Citycouncil@cityofmerced.org, by calling 385-6834. You can write to Council members at the Civic Center address listed below.

Council meetings

The Council usually meets on the first and third Monday of the month at 7 p.m. in the Council Chambers in the Civic Center. The agenda is posted online at www.CityofMerced.org.

Contacting us

The Web site, www.CityofMerced.org, contains City Council information, the Municipal Code and General Plan and other information. To contact the Newsletter, e-mail newsletter@CityofMerced.org, call the Public Information Office at 385-6232 or write:

Merced Civic Center
 678 W. 18th St.
 Merced CA 95340

The Civic Center is open Monday-Friday 8 a.m. - 5 p.m., except holidays.

Call us

City Council	385-6834
City Manager	385-6834
City Attorney	385-6868
City Clerk	388-7100
Airport	385-6873
Code Enforcement.....	385-6861
Finance	388-7900
Inspection Services	385-6861
Personnel	388-7100
Planning Department.....	385-6858
Public Works (7:30-4:30) ...	385-6800
After hours	385-6905
Recreation/Parks	385-6855

IN AN EMERGENCY DIAL 911

Fire Department.....385-6891
 Police Department.....385-6912

Ask the City: What about my old RXs?

Ask the City is an ongoing column answering questions that have been submitted to us by mail, email or phone. Readers can submit their questions to the addresses in the column on the left.

How are you supposed to dispose of old prescriptions? I know you're not supposed to flush them down the toilet, but how do you get rid of them? G.D.

You're right, **DON'T** dump them down the toilet. Our wastewater treatment plant is designed to deal with biodegradable materials, not pharmaceuticals.

Some pharmacies will take back the drugs, so ask them. The drugs can be put in the trash if you take certain precautions.

Scratch your name off the container, add some water and something non-toxic but obnoxious, such as kitty litter, spices or charcoal. Seal the pill bottle with packing of duct tape and put it in a plain container for disposal. The Household Hazardous Waste site, 723-4753, located at the Highway 59 landfill, can help with your disposal.



That's also the place to dispose of all "sharp waste" — the hypodermic needles, pen needles, lancets and other devices that penetrate the skin to dispense medications. State law now prohibits tossing those devices in the trash or in recycling containers.

Sharps must be transported in an approved container for sale at drugstores. A hard opaque plastic or metal container with a screw on cap also may be used.

More information is available at the County Division of Environmental Health, 381-1100 or by visiting the County website at www.co.merced.ca.us.

Utility rates increasing

Utility bills will be increasing next month based on the rate schedule approved by the City Council in 2006.

The increases are used to replace and upgrade equipment as required, for salaries, fuel and electricity and other increased operating costs. Sewer fees do include the costs to upgrade the plant to meet stricter standards required by the state. The fees are not used to pay for new growth or expand services to new areas.

The actual fees will vary depending on use, connections, lot sizes, services and other

factors. For the typical residential household the bill is:

Residential sewage:	2008: \$34.77	2009: \$41.37
Water service:	2008: \$32.18	2009: \$35.40
Refuse/recycling/green waste	2008 \$26.69	2009: \$28.02

The typical bill will rise by \$11.15 a month. For more information on the rates and the complete rate schedule, visit the City website at www.cityofmerced.org and go to the Public Works Department site or call 385-6841.

Become a volunteer

The Amgen Tour of California with Lance Armstrong is coming through Merced Wednesday, Feb. 18, and the bike race organizing committee needs volunteers. Volunteers can go to the City's web site and a link will help you register online.

Be an Internet subscriber

Sign up on our home page and get the City Council agendas sent directly to your email address. Also available, the latest City news releases, bids, job listings, redevelopment news or police news.

ComVIP workshops

The Gang Awareness Workshops presented by the Merced Police Department and ComVIP will be held in area schools throughout the year.

The workshops help parents and the public recognize gang behavior, clothing and signs, along with discussion on gang activity in the area. Everyone is invited to attend any of the presentations, and area businesses are encouraged to set up workshops on site for their employees by calling 385-6233.

All workshops are from 6 p.m.-7 p.m. The list is available online and in the local newspapers.