



Independent, locally owned and operated!

www.lamorindaweekly.com 925-377-0977

Published March 11th, 2015

Gas Leak at Burton Valley Elementary School

By Cathy Tyson

It all started with a funky gas smell recently at Burton Valley Elementary School. PG&E came out, looked around and eventually found a small gas leak on the side of the multi-use building. Since the school is over 50 years old, and PG&E found several additional minor leaks, it made more sense to replace all the lines than simply patch the aging, corroded gas lines.

Students, staff and administrators bundled up, stayed calm and carried on. Thankful for the relatively mild weather, principal Sue Rusk was transparent about the situation and regularly kept parents and students informed. Overall, the community was patient and understanding.

"It speaks to the need for renovated facilities," said Rachel Zinn, superintendent of the Lafayette School District, about the gas leak. She is keenly aware that the school district has a responsibility ... to maintain safe, state-of-the-art schools that the community demands.

Mike Lescure is president of local mechanical services company Lescure Inc., whose family has been in the area for generations. He said they pulled all of the copper pipe, installed in 1954 and currently illegal in California, from the ground and replaced it with galvanized steel on the roof. Everything will now be up to code. They had to be especially mindful of students, and even worked on weekends and saved the loudest work until after school was out for the day, so as not to disturb class time.

Burton Valley Elementary is one of five schools on a combined 80 acres of land that make up the district. It "represents a significant public investment," said School Board President David Gerson. "The district wants to be a prudent property owner."

With tight budgets since 2008, due to state cutbacks, the entire district reigned in costs and lived within its budget, explained Gerson. There just wasn't the capacity to spend additional funds on deferred maintenance, but now it's time to address those issues.

The district already has the initial version of a report, the Facilities Master Plan, which assesses infrastructure needs - everything from roofs, windows, grounds, plumbing and more - and will prioritize repairs. Some work has been done at all of the district schools over the years, and all the campuses have solar panels to help defray utility costs.

With only about \$3 million in a special account for maintenance, Zinn stated, "It's very clear that won't meet our needs." The district is "exploring all possibilities" for funding to accommodate necessary upgrades. Once the Facilities Master Plan report is complete, a revenue committee will recommend a plan of action that will go before the school board.

Repairs at Burton Valley Elementary are expected to be complete in the near future. The gas will remain off until the contractor as well as PG&E fully test the lines. Unfortunately, expensive, unfunded infrastructure repairs will likely be a common theme in Lafayette and beyond as schools continue to age from sea to shining sea.

Reach the reporter at: cathy@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA