

San Francisco Comic Strip

What the Giants want the 'Stick'... story of the team Willie Mays... 11 De 10101

-3]

SF EXAMINER

**FROZEN WILLIE MAYS FOUND ON CANDLESTICK SUMMIT**

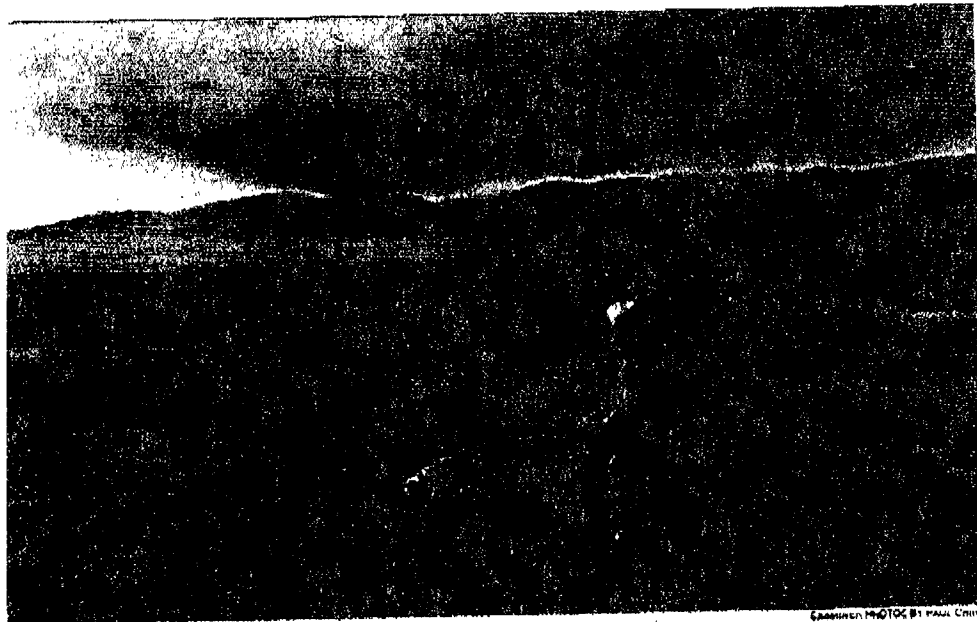
Perfectly preserved... Mays' was... somewhere... near... candlestick summit... 11 De 10101

# METRO

[BAY AREA AND CALIFORNIA]



WEATHER  
OBITUARIES  
ANNOUNCEMENTS



Sally Dagstrom walks her dog through the Westley area as thick black smoke from a massive fire rises into the sky

## Miraculous medicine UCSF at forefront

Great leaps forward in transplants, genetic engineering just a few years away

By Jane Kay

When baby boomers hit old age in the 21st century, they'll benefit from futuristic medical practices they watched in science fiction movies of their childhood.

Doctors could be routinely taking a limb from one person and attaching it to another, or inserting powerful muscle cells to regrow brains, spinal cords and hearts.

UCSF researchers and clinicians, at the forefront of these fields and receiving \$225 million a year in grants, predict giant successes only several years away.

Already scientists and surgeons here.

Transplanted hearts onto two men — one in France, the other in the United States — who lost theirs in accidents more than a decade ago. Because of advances in microsurgery, placing one person's arm or face on another might not be far behind.

Attempted to make newly discovered "stem" cells remedy stroke damage, Alzheimer's, epilepsy and Parkinson's. Called "stem" because they potentially can branch out and turn into cells and tissue of different organ systems, they might regenerate spinal cords and let the paralyzed walk.

Engineered proteins that would rebuild bones. People with osteoporosis might stand straight without pain, and children with birth defects might walk normally.

Some of the most startling discoveries predicted for the next century are based on 20th century strides in molecular biology, microsurgery, drug therapy and genetic engineering.

The high-profile cases of Parkinson's disease, like actor Michael J. Fox's and Attorney General Janet Reno's, or the spinal cord injury that left Christopher Reeve paralyzed in a wheelchair, could be a thing of the past come the next

[See RESEARCH, C-6]

Head... pr... Th... tr... Nat... hel... civil

By Fr... of the

In... can... heat... that... last... Jeffer... moth... were... their... Ye... Daniel... want... into... ment... occur... of... Ci... advice... come... as... Plus... grow... about... stre... T... b... also... feel... need... of... I... own... dent... the... al... n... end... wer... Dec.

### LIVING IN THE PATH OF SMOKE FROM A RUBBERERY



# INFERNO

## Huge tire fire in Valley an environmental disaster

By Jane Kay

WESTLEY, Stanislaus County — When Teresa Escobedo first saw the billowing coal black smoke as she drove from Patterson to her job at the Westley Shell station nearly two weeks ago, she recognized it immediately.

A pile of 7 million tires — stretching over a half-mile, peaking at six stories tall — was on fire, creating an environmental disaster in the San Joaquin Valley and miles beyond.

Ever since a mountain of tires caught fire about a year ago 20 miles away in Tracy, Escobedo said, "I wondered if that Westley pile would ever go up. I could see the flames jump the hill. It was scary."

Raging to 2,000 degrees and reaching 2,000 feet high, the fire ignited at 4 a.m. Sept. 22 when lightning struck a metal loading

ramp in Westley, 36 miles south of Stockton.

The fire, which might burn a year, has left residents in neighboring farm communities worried that they're not getting enough detailed information about the health effects of pollutants. They're also frustrated about the state's failure to eliminate the mountain of waste rubber, despite more than a decade of enforcement actions.

Environmentalists say the state needs to eliminate tire dumps and should recycle more of the 30 million tires that are discarded each year to produce asphalt roads.

Since the fire, hundreds of tons of pollutants have spread across the sky as far away as San Francisco, Sacramento and Fresno, causing "black rain" in Fremont, Milpitas and Hayward during a storm several days later.

More than 80,000 gallons of oil have melted from the tires, draining into a makeshift reservoir in an old stock pond. Officials don't know what they'll do with the growing pool. On Monday, some of the oil caught fire.

On Friday, firefighters started to spray a chemical foam on the flaming oil pool. The crews are trying to quell some of the smoke that's down

plaguing residents in the valley.

By Saturday evening, the smoke had been reduced significantly, they said.

Immediately after the fire, Stanislaus County officials posted a health alert, telling people with respiratory and heart conditions to stay indoors and turn off swamp coolers whenever it got hazy, and to avoid outdoor exercise and to wash food from garden fruits and vegetables.

But, at three public meetings held by government officials to answer questions about the fire, townspeople said they want to know what the toxic mix of nitrogen

[See TIRES, C-6]

Teresa Escobedo at the Shell gas station near the tire fire. "It was scary."

SF Examiner  
METRO SECTION  
Page C-6



EXAMINER PHOTO BY PAUL OWEN

Singh, above, a visitor from Punjab, is staying in a house over the hill from the fire. His host, Mike Karnau Singh, of Sandhu Brothers

Farina, who disappointed that he didn't hear from any health officials whether it's a danger to families living nearby.

### ♦ TIRES from C-1 Giant tire fire a health hazard

Under sulfur dioxide, particulates and a dozen toxic chemicals might do to them and how they all better protect their children with masks and filter systems.

No one has ever come to talk to employees of the Shell gas station on Interstate 5, just over the hill from the fire, said ecologist

"Were we safe? What were they putting the air monitors? We hope we won't get sick, we won't get cancer. People in Patterson and Westley and the other small towns are worried. They're not getting the answers they need," she said.

Mike Karnau Singh, of Sandhu Brothers Farms, owner of 1,100 acres of wheat and almond trees in Westley, said, "That smoke smells pretty bad at night when the wind shifts. Even indoors, you have to open the windows sometimes, and the smoke comes in. We have kids with asthma, and that makes it worse.

Singh said, "We never hear from these environmental people whether it's going to be a danger to any people. We have families living near there."

Starting Friday, in response to the concerns, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District in Fresno started to provide information to the public from the state's mobile monitors in the towns of Patterson, Westley and Newman.

"The state is monitoring for all the pollutants," said Joanne Merrick-Pallo, a district spokeswoman.

"But it's difficult to assess the health effects. There's no cause for alarm. But it's early good common sense; if the wind changes and you're getting hit, you should stay inside."

The district also will pass along information from its permanent monitoring sites, she said.

There is no health risk to people living in the Stanislaus and San Joaquin counties because the plume hits high and disperses hundreds of feet into the air, where concentrations dilute, according to the California Air Resources Board.

But particulates, which can trigger breathing problems, remain higher at ground level.

Local medical clinics and drug stores report an increase in respiratory cases, and many parents have

taken their children out of school or to safer parts of the state.

The Golden Valley Health Center, on the grounds of the Grayson Elementary School near Westley, has seen increased visits.

"They started coming in right after the fire," said medical assistant Jenn Zungo.

"They come in with burning and watery eyes, scratchy throats. We've seen some nosebleeds. We've seen asthma and people with bronchial problems."

At Patterson Drug, 7 miles south of Westley, pharmacist Sam Rodriguez has filled a growing number of prescriptions for inhalers and other asthma medicine, and customers are buying anti-pollution masks.

"People who have been symptom-free have gotten worse over the last week or so from the pollution in the smoke being carried in the wind," Rodriguez said.

Last Sunday and Monday, levels reached 180 micrograms per cubic meter of air. By Thursday, levels had dropped to 84 micrograms in Westley, said board spokesman Alan Hirsch. The state standard is 50.

State air quality officials estimate that by the time the fire burns out, it will have released 8 million pounds of pollutants into the air, including 278,000 pounds of carcinogens.

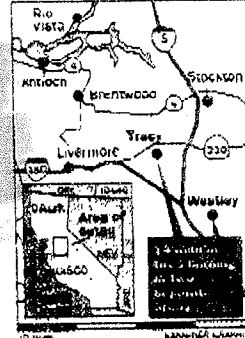
The cancer-causing chemicals include 141,039 pounds of benzene, 69,000 pounds of polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons and 10,000 pounds of 1,3-butadiene. Toxic metals, also carcinogens, include 219 pounds of nickel, 182 pounds of chromium, 31 pounds of lead and 4.6 pounds of arsenic.

Firefighters are trying to contain the fire and nearly have given up hope of dousing it.

Water won't work on burning tires and oil, and adds to the amount of toxic runoff. Sand is impractical, said Virginia Maduena, public information officer with Stanislaus County.

It's very unsafe to get personnel near the fire since it burns so hot. Also, the fire is in a canyon, and the area is unstable. You can't take heavy equipment on it," she said.

Crews from Williams Fire and Hazard Control from Meritville, Texas, have used the foam to suppress the smoke coming off the burning pool of oil. At the time, they don't expect that it could put out the fire.



"Everyone keeps saying we can't see a sign to the moon, but we can't put out the fire. So far that's been true," said Maduena.

At the three meetings, residents said the fire was a problem waiting to happen. In August 1988, more than a million tires caught fire at a 7-million tire pile in Tracy, the second largest dump in the state. It's still burning.

In 1987, the state attorney general's office filed a lawsuit against the original owners, Edward and Mary Etna Filbin, ordering their company, Oxford Tire Recycling, to reduce a collection of 40 million tires. It took a decade for the mountain to dwindle to 7 million tires.

Representatives from the California Integrated Waste Management Board, which since 1992 has regulated waste tire storage, say they couldn't do much until the Legislature toughened laws in the last few years.

The board issued a recent round of cleanup orders in 1998 to the Filbins, who started their business in the 1960s.

The state issued the latest order on Sept. 8, two weeks before the fire.

Filbin, who didn't return calls to The Examiner, released a short statement after the fire saying he doesn't own the tires and has complied with regulations.

On Wednesday, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency told Filbin that he was responsible for the cleanup cost, which has been estimated at \$10 million.

Environmentalists say the real solution is to stop stockpiling scrap tires and clean up existing hazards.

Every year Californians generate 30.6 million used tires. Another 83 million are imported into the

state. Only 7 million are recycled — about 2 million a year chopped up for rubberized asphalt roads and the rest retreaded or melted into such products as playground mats and guard rails.

About 10 million are burned as fuel in cement kilns or energy plants. About 16.6 million are put in landfills or stored in about 40 piles statewide, legally or illegally.

"Every time you pass a farm along I-5, you see dozens to hundreds of tires piled up on the side of the property," said Mark Murray, executive director of Californians Against Waste, a Sacramento non-profit.

"Some may have been illegally dumped on the highway or on the farmers' land. But the waste board's number for the illegal piles grossly underestimates the scope of the problem," Murray said.

Murray, who lobbies in the Legislature to promote tire recycling, wants the Legislature to increase the disposal fee that consumers pay on every new tire to \$2 from 25 cents.

About \$5 million a year goes into a fund, some of which pays for tire pile cleanup. Yet the fees fall short because experts estimate that cleanup costs range from 35 cents to \$2.50 per tire. The fund is also supposed to promote markets for recycled tires.

The year Gov. Davis allocated \$5.2 million in additional funds just for cleanups.

"If the waste board can identify the responsible entities and make them pay for a cleanup, so be it," said Murray. "But given these fires, the state has to take responsibility and clean up the piles."

Many environmentalists believe that using scrap tires to build rubberized asphalt roads represents the greatest potential for recycling tires.

California, Florida, Arizona and other states already have successfully used scrap tires to build thousands of miles of roads that last longer and cost no more than conventional roads.

"We'd like to see California require that rubberized asphalt be incorporated into all new roads and into repaving. They already have a recipe that they say is a swell thing. Let them use it more," Murray said.

"It seems appropriate that those who build roads should take responsibility for creatively and aggressively finding other uses for those tires."