



Burn ban lifted in county

By Christina Beringer
Colby Free Press
colby.society@nwkansas.com

Commissioners lifted the burn ban in Thomas County during their meeting Monday, following recommendations from the fire department and emergency management.

Commission Chairman Ken Christiansen, Commissioner Paul Steele, Commissioner-elect Mike Baughn and County Clerk Shelly Harms were present for the meeting.

Linda Sowers, the wife of Commissioner Byron Sowers, facilitated a phone conference. He has been voting via telephone since going into the hospital at the end of May.

She said he is doing well and hopes they'll be home by Thanksgiving.

Fire Chief Bob McLemore and Assistant Chief Sean Hankin said

they've been getting a lot of calls from citizens wondering when they'll rescind the burn ban, since Thomas County has received some rain and the temperature is starting cool off.

The ban had been in place since June.

Emergency Management Director Susan McMahan agreed conditions have improved enough to ensure peoples' safety if the ban is lifted.

The motion was approved unanimously.

"People still need to be safe when burning, though," said McLemore, "and need to follow rules set by the Kansas state fire marshal. You shouldn't burn with wind speeds over 15 mph, and fires need to be finished before it gets dark."

He said people should watch the weather forecast for a red flag

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Survey work set next week

A survey crew from the Kansas Department of Transportation will be working around U.S. 83 south of the "Nine-Mile" junction with U.S. 24 for about three weeks starting next Wednesday.

Kristen Brands, district public affairs manager for the department in Norton, said the crew will be surveying around a bridge over the North Fork of the Solomon River about half a mile south

of the junction. The department plans to replace the bridge.

If crew members need to enter private property, she said, they will first ask the owner or tenant for permission. Michael Selley, a party chief with the department, will be in charge of the survey. For information, contact Brands at (785) 877-3315 or kristenb@ksdot.org.



Building projects aided by weather

Construction and repairs were under way on several buildings this morning, including the AT&T building downtown (above), where workers unloaded supplies onto the roof, and the Department of Transportation building and Highway Patrol office on Range Avenue, (left) where a worker said renovations should be completed by Tuesday, Oct. 2.

SAM DIETER/Colby Free Press

School board hears energy update from engineers

By Sam Dieter
Colby Free Press
sdieter@nwkansas.com

The Colby School Board heard a report Monday from 360 Energy Engineers, a company which examined energy use in district buildings and came up with some suggestions for saving money.

The board made no decisions, putting off discussions until next month's meet-

ing. Board members Omar Weber and Brice Barton, Maintenance Director Gary Barton, Business Manager Jo DeYoung and Superintendent Terrel Harrison had met with company representatives earlier in the day.

The engineers said decades-old components in the heating and cooling systems for the elementary and middle schools were a big concern.

They suggested replacing this equipment in phases. A 1960s-era steam boiler under a driveway which provides heat for the whole campus is near the top of the list, they said, suggesting a more modern hot-water heating system.

Each building has a different cooling system, the engineers said, including gas-absorption chillers on the middle school roof which also should be replaced soon. Then, the engineers said, cooling systems

and steam heating piping at the elementary school, installed when the building was built in the 1930s, should be replaced.

In a report it provided to the school board, the company estimated the cost of these improvements. A phased approach to fixing the elementary and middle school heating and cooling system would cost the school district \$4.8 million to \$5.5 million in all and would ultimately yield about \$59,300 per year in energy

and maintenance savings.

For the most part, they said, new equipment would involve several pieces of identical equipment doing the same job. Much of equipment left over after these replacements will be a more current crop of machinery from the mid '90s.

Scott Strom, business development manager for the company, said that the

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Red Roof repair



SAM DIETER/Colby Free Press

A roof on the east building of the Southwind Plazal needed a bit of repair and Dave Jacobsen took up the task Tuesday morning.

Agency urged to set standards for rice

By Mary Clare Jalonick
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON - The Food and Drug Administration may consider new standards for the levels of arsenic in rice as consumer groups are calling for federal guidance on how much of the carcinogen can be present in food.

So far, FDA officials say they have found no evidence that suggests rice is unsafe to eat. The agency has studied the issue for decades but is in the middle of conducting a new study of 1,200 samples of grocery-store rice products - short and long-grain rice, adult and baby cereals, drinks and even rice cakes - to measure arsenic levels.

Arsenic is thought to be found in rice in higher levels than most other foods because it is grown in water on the ground, optimal conditions for the contaminant to be absorbed in the rice. There are no federal standards for how much

arsenic is allowed in food.

Arsenic is naturally present in water, air, food and soil in two forms, organic and inorganic. According to the FDA, organic arsenic passes through the body quickly and is essentially harmless. Inorganic arsenic - the type found in some pesticides and insecticides - can be toxic and may pose a cancer risk if consumed at high levels or over a long period.

How much organic and inorganic arsenic rice eaters are consuming, and whether those levels are dangerous, still remains to be seen.

FDA Commissioner Margaret Hamburg says consumers shouldn't stop eating rice, though she does encourage a diverse diet just in case.

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