




Office of the City Manager

INFORMATION CALENDAR

November 14, 2006

To: Honorable Mayor and
Members of the City Council

From:  Phil Kamlarz, City Manager

Submitted by: Claudette Ford, Director of Public Works

Subject: Phase Out of Tritium Signs

INTRODUCTION

This report updates the Council on staff activities since the March 2006 ban on tritium exit signs. Based on a March 21, 2006 recommendation from the Community Environmental Advisory Commission (CEAC), Council approved Resolution No. 63,245-N.S. banning the use of new tritium exit signs. Council directed staff to identify the locations of existing signs, properly dispose of these at the end of their useful life, and add them to the list of banned products for environmentally preferable purchasing.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

After inspecting all City-owned and leased buildings, the Public Works Department found five tritium exit signs in the Veterans Building at 1931 Center Street. It was determined that waiting for the useful life of the exit sign to expire and tracking this was not cost effective. On October 12, 2006, all five tritium signs were replaced with Glo Brite exit signs. The new signs are neither toxic nor radioactive. The signs generate energy from ambient light that allows them to glow in the dark and smoke-filled environments without use of electricity. These signs are reliable, easy to install, and maintenance free for up to 25 years.

Tritium exit signs have now been added to the list of banned products for environmentally preferable purchasing. The CEAC was informed of these actions. There are now no tritium signs in City-owned or leased buildings.

BACKGROUND

Tritium exit signs are common since they have an expected lifespan of 10 to 15 years and electric power lines are not required for their operation. These signs contain tritium and are regulated by the United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission, which stipulates such signs have to be returned to the manufacturer and not be disposed of as solid waste. Improper disposal and exposure of tritium could result in significant liability issues for the City.

FUTURE ACTION

Toxics Management staff will share information regarding the successful changeover to Glo Brite exit signs with the Berkeley Unified School District.

FISCAL IMPACTS OF POSSIBLE FUTURE ACTION

None.

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