



The Madera Tribune

Visit us online: www.maderatribune.com

OPINION

Metal recyclers — cleaning up after nature's car wash

By Sen. Anna M. Caballero

FOR THE MADERA TRIBUNE

California has witnessed record rain and snowfall this season with all-time historic levels of snowpack.

One major newspaper recently ran this front-page headline: "Deep snow adds months of flood risks." Another read: "How massive snowpack could cause massive floods." Experts say the state could experience flooding all the way through September, during what are typically our dry months.

Flooding in California indiscriminately inundates many things — homes, businesses, communities, farmlands and crops. Floodwaters, and the deadly mudslides that often accompany them, submerge or carry off thousands of vehicles every year, rendering them inoperative and ruined, as was the case in the communities of Pajaro and Planada. I witnessed firsthand the roads lined with large appliances and other metal debris all destroyed and in need of removal and replacement in order for families to rebuild.

Most cars today weigh around 4,000 pounds, while pickups weigh between

4,000 and 7,000 pounds. This does not, of course, account for even much larger commercial trucks or the mountains of ruined household appliances. None of us would want these damaged items sitting around in backyards, alleyways or on the curb.

So where do these waterlogged cars, trucks, and appliances end up? A small percentage may be salvageable and returned to use, however the overwhelming majority are beyond repair. They are collected and taken to facilities most Californians may never have seen or even heard of: California's metal-recycling plants.

Through a process known as metal shredding, a large device known as a hammermill quickly shreds tons of flood-damaged vehicles and appliances, no matter their condition. The shredding process is purely mechanical, turning these items into fist-sized pieces, separated and sorted into different metal commodities. The process does not involve the addition of any heat, chemicals, or hazardous materials that could adversely affect

public health or the environment.

These metal commodities are sold to customers and shipped to smelters and steel mills around the world, where they are melted down and used to manufacture new steel and other metals, which in turn are used as raw materials in the production of new cars and appliances. In fact, nearly 70 percent of the steel used in making new vehicles and appliances comes from recycled metal.

Without the metal-recycling industry, the metal debris left behind would sit and rust away for years. Instead, through the work of metal-shredding facilities, the ruined materials are recycled and used as a renewable resource.

The metal-recycling industry is already extensively regulated by numerous of federal, state, regional and local authorities that include the U.S. EPA, CalEPA, regional water boards, regional air-pollution control districts, local health and fire departments, and other public entities that manage and regulate land use. This ensures that our metal-recy-

cling plants are managed in accordance with applicable laws. Still, there are interests at work that could result in the imposition of unworkable, unnecessary and extremely costly new requirements on metal-shredding facilities.

If adopted, these requirements could cause some of these facilities to shut down or leave the state in order to remain economically viable. This would be disastrous. Without the metal-recycling industry, our cities, towns and countryside will become littered with tons and tons of ruined metal debris from natural disasters.

California must ensure that the metal-recycling industry remains healthy, strong — and here to stay. It is an essential part of the clean-up crew after our all-too-frequent disasters. We have to prioritize recycling systems and metal recycling is critical in that effort.

Sen. Anna M. Caballero, serving in her second Senate term, represents California's 14th Senate District, which includes parts of Fresno, Merced, Madera and Tulare counties.