

Fresno-area Sikhs start recycling at temples as part of global call to action

By Andrea Castillo



Sharnjit Purewal (left) of the Sikh Council of Central California hands a recycling bin to Iqbal Singh Brar of the Pacific Coast Diwan Society temple in Caruthers.

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SELMA — Representatives of six Central Valley Sikh temples participated in the worldwide [Sikh Environment Day](#) with a recycling program kickoff at Guru Ravidass Gurdwara in Selma.

The [Sikh Council of Central California](#) urged leaders of area gurdwaras (temples) to start recycling. They distributed 20 blue 30-gallon recycling bins and planted trees behind the temple. Inside, leaders educated congregants about the importance of recycling and protecting the environment in and out of the temple.

Sikhism is the world's fifth largest religion. The Sikh Council of Central California represents 13 gurdwaras throughout the central San Joaquin Valley, where more than 30,000 Sikhs live. Sikhism comes from the Punjab region of northern India and eastern Pakistan.

The day was also significant for a few other reasons: It marked the new year in the Sikh calendar; was the day Har Rai became the 7th guru, or spiritual teacher; and was the birthday of the Selma temple's namesake. Guru Har Rai is

remembered for his deep love of nature and sensitivity toward its preservation.

Leaders acknowledged that the path to environmentalism will be slow. As they preached about recycling, congregants ate off Styrofoam dishes. All gurdwaras serve meals to their visitors on Sundays as well as other days.

At a table near the eatery, people separated the Styrofoam from recyclables. Gurbachan Singh, temple manager, said he hopes Guru Ravidass Gurdwara can transition to using steel dishes within two years, a move two other area temples have done so far and Sikh Council leaders hope all will achieve.

Sharnjit Purewal, associate secretary of the Sikh Council, said the drought has made them realize the severity of global warming. Followers of Sikhism are to uplift the poor, whom he said are most affected by climate change.

“By looking out for the environment, we can look out for all people in the world,” Purewal said.

Sudarshan Kapoor, an emeritus professor of social work at Fresno State, donated seven trees (a sacred number in Sikhism) to each temple. He said saving the Central Valley is akin to saving Punjab.

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