



Student's commitment toward the environment wins him a spot in calendar

By Doane Yawger

Merced Sun-Star, Friday, December 15, 2006

A Merced third-grader who already is environmentally conscious is one of 14 San Joaquin Valley students whose artwork appears on a 2007 calendar produced by the Valley Air District.

Brenden Booth, 8, a Donn B. Chenoweth Elementary School student, created a picture of the world which cautions against smoking and using fireplaces and lawn mowers while advocating people take the bus, carpool, walk and ride bicycles.

Booth, the son of Joe Booth and Amelia Peterson of Merced, loves nature, animals and talks about the environment. His mom said her son grasps the concept of global warming and is wise beyond his years.

"He (Brenden) said people should be more careful and conscious about taking care of the world. He is a compassionate individual who thinks of others," Peterson said.

Booth's entry shows a globe of the world with the United States highlighted. It says: "Shoot for the Green, Keep Our Air Clean." There were 800 entries extolling the clean-air message.

Liliana Zermeno, 11, a sixth-grader at Gustine Middle School, also was one of the students whose original artwork was chosen for the 2007 educational wall calendar distributed free to schools, community groups, health care facilities, churches, civic organizations and nonpolitical groups on a first-come, first-served basis.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District covers San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and Kern counties. Calendars are available beginning today at the air district's Modesto, Fresno and Bakersfield offices.

Groups push to uphold air pollution rule

BY STACEY SHEPARD, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Friday, Dec. 15, 2006

Three environmental advocacy groups have joined regulators' efforts to uphold a controversial air rule to cut pollution caused by new development in the Central Valley.

The California Building Industry Association, business leaders and affordable housing advocates filed a lawsuit in June seeking to repeal the new regulation, which took effect in March.

The indirect source rule, as it's known, is the first of its kind in the country to require developers of large-scale housing and commercial developments to reduce pollution or pay a fee to offset emissions caused by construction and increased traffic.

A Fresno Superior Court judge Thursday allowed Environmental Defense, Medical Advocates for Healthy Air and the Sierra Club to join the case in support of the regulation, which was developed by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

"We represent people who live in the valley who are concerned about air pollution and whose health is affected by bad air," said Kathryn Phillips of Environmental Defense. "We think their voice should be heard."

Builders say the rule goes overboard and ignores efforts they've already made to reduce emissions.

"There's a number of things we've already done in mitigating our impact on air quality. This regulation ignores that and it just slaps a tax on new housing," said Nick Cammarota, general counsel for the California Building Industry Association, the lead plaintiff in the case.

Despite the criticism, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has stood by its efforts to reduce pollution in the Central Valley, which consistently ranks among the worst air in the country.

Catherine Tognazzini, an attorney for the air district, said having the environmental groups on their side has the potential to help their case.

"It's always better to have more voices aligned on the issue," she said.

Dirty film envelops homes by grain site

Wind whips up material moved from train to truck, leads to air district notices

By MICHAEL G. MOONEY - BEE STAFF WRITER

Modesto Bee, Friday, December 15, 2006

EMPIRE -- It doesn't happen every day. And for that, the 120 or so people living at Breezewood Mobile Home Park are thankful -- very thankful.

Because when the wind kicks up grain dust from across the street -- mixing it, in the process, with moisture in the air -- the odor quite literally can take your breath away.

"Oh, it's awful," said Amanda Housewright, manager of the park at 648 S. Santa Fe Road. "I have a 4-year-old who's very smell sensitive. She has to put a rag over her face when we go outside."

Housewright said many of the park's residents are senior citizens and have complained about breathing difficulties whenever grain dust swirls in the air.

The source of the particulate matter and/or dust pollution plaguing Breezewood residents, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, is the nearby Central Valley Ag Grinding Inc.

At the company's facility, located at 300 Codoni Ave., grain is taken from railroad cars and loaded onto trucks.

Since Dec. 1, according to air district officials, the company has received two notices of violation - - for improper emissions and creating a nuisance.

Whether the company will be fined was not clear Thursday.

A final decision on possible sanctions against the firm, if any, will be made by staff working in the district's Fresno office, possibly within the next 30 days.

The foul smell at Breezewood would have been bad enough.

But there's more.

The grain dust also creates a gummy residue, coating everything from outdoor plants and porches to car windshields and the modular homes themselves.

"You can wash your car," Housewright said, "and an hour later, that stuff is layered all over it."

Michael Barry, president of Oakdale-based Central Valley Ag Grinding, said the company already has taken steps to correct the problems.

"Some of the products we deal with are sensitive to moisture," Barry said. "We have moved the products indoors. There was an issue that arose, and we have corrected it."

Barry said the company doesn't grind or otherwise process grain at its Empire facility.

Jami Aggers, northern region compliance manager for the air district, said a number of factors will be considered before a decision is made on whether to sanction or fine Central Valley Ag Grinding.

"Is this a repeat problem or first offense? How long has the problem been occurring? How many people are impacted?" Aggers said.

During the last year, Aggers said, three complaints were lodged against the company's Empire facility.

Aggers said the company received the first citation -- for creating visible emissions -- Dec. 1. She said a second citation, for creating a nuisance, should have been received by the firm earlier this week.

All things considered, Housewright said, the air at Breezewood hasn't been bad this week.

Weather conditions have changed. Said Housewright: "It's not been real windy the last few days."

Which is better to burn: real firewood or manufactured logs?

By Sara Cardine - Record Staff Writer
Stockton Record, December 15, 2006

When winter winds bring bone chills, nothing restores warmth like sitting in front of a fire.

The burning question is: what should San Joaquin County fireplace owners use this season? The answer depends on whether you prize a clean burn or real heat.

Since the rise of manufactured logs such as Stockton-based Duraflame in the 1960s, the market has expanded to meet the needs of even the pickiest consumer. Real logs are available in stores for those who prefer to burn au naturel. Manufactured logs offer options for those who aren't stoked about tending to a finicky fire.

What's different?

Real wood

- Available in varieties of hard and soft woods
- Produces creosote, which clogs chimneys
- Emits harmful particles into air
- Generates long-lasting heat if tended
- Can be used for cooking

Manufactured logs

- Comes in different formulas and styles
- Produces heavy soot, which lines chimney walls
- Two-thirds the emissions of real wood

- Produces some heat but mostly flame
- Not recommended for cooking or roasting

Air-quality advocates warn of the health risks associated with wood burning. Smoke inhalation can aggravate the lungs and worsen symptoms of asthma. Burning treated or wet firewood increases airborne toxins and particulate matter, which can get deep inside the lungs and prohibit the flow of oxygen.

Each winter's peak brings record levels of air pollution, said Kelly Morphy, spokeswoman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. On record pollution days in urban areas, she added, residential fireplaces contribute as much as one-third of all emissions.

Natural woods produce creosote, a substance effused during burning that clogs flues and can cause chimney fires. Still, many consumers stick to real wood, because its snap and crackle adds a sound sensation to the burning experience. Wood's embers also typically provide more heat than manufactured logs, according to Kurt Kautz, president of Manteca-based California Hotwood.

For more than 20 years, California Hotwood has sold a mix of oak, almond, cherry and fir wood in as many as 14 Western states, Kautz said. Compressed wood products might be neat and look like fire, but they don't emit as much heat.

Manufactured logs, on the other hand, are primarily made from sawdust and petroleum wax. The log acts like a big candle with the wood product being the wick that keeps the petroleum burning, Duraflame spokesman Chris Caron said. The logs don't produce creosote but release soot from the burnt wax.

Caron says manufactured logs release two-thirds the amount of harmful particulate matter of real wood, creating a much cleaner burn. Newer Duraflame product lines feature plant-derived wax fuels that minimize emissions even further, he added. The company's products account for more than 50 percent of all compressed logs sold in the United States.

Local and state agencies are reluctant to steer consumers toward any particular burning product because of the proliferation of logs and fuels on the market. But people can arm themselves with a few pointers when looking for warmth this winter.

"If you're going to burn real wood, make sure it's dry and clean," Morphy said. "If you're looking at manufactured logs, the less petroleum in the log, the better."

Craig T. Roley has been cleaning chimneys for nearly three decades as the owner of Old World Chimney Sweep. One look at a funky flue and Roley can tell if someone's been burning real or manufactured wood products.

Logs such as Duraflame are a lot cleaner, the chimney sweep said. Still he understands the attachment people have for the real thing.

"I always use the real wood," Roley said. "I love bringing it in, watching it crackle, poking it. It's relaxing to me."

Tire recycling plant a no-go

By Eiji Yamashita

Hanford Sentinel, Friday, Dec. 15, 2006

A proposed Kings County rubber tire recycling plant was shot down for a second time Wednesday.

The Kings Waste and Recycling Authority board backed John Koster's concept for the plant. But for now, the board rebuffed his attempt to move onto the agency's property on Hanford-Armona Road.

The Visalia businessman wants to start a new business in Hanford that would turn scrap tires and farm plastic waste into rubber sidewalks and drains using a type of melting technique.

"The board was in favor of the project, but they wanted the company to consider coming to us as a last resort," said KWRA executive director Mike Adams. "If in fact they cannot find any suitable property, then we will revisit the issue."

Koster's proposal fits the KWRA motto, but accommodating it on site could complicate its already tightly regulated operation, board members said.

Wednesday's decision was just the latest blow to Modular Rubber Drains, Inc. of Goshen.

On Oct. 24, the proposed plant had received a conditional use permit allowing it to operate in the Kings Industrial Park in south Hanford. But a nearby yogurt plant protested and concerns were raised about whether the city had properly notified nearby property owners.

The permit was revoked in November.

That prompted Koster and Modular Rubber Drains, Inc. to look to the Kings Waste and Recycling Authority.

Concerns were raised by the board, however, about legal aspects of the operation.

"We also have two residences directly to the south of us who have sued us many times," said Marcie Buford, a Hanford city councilwoman who sits on the KWRA board. "There's a high possibility of him and us being sued, and we don't want that."

Jon Rachford, another of the recycling authority board members, said the KWRA has not shut the door completely but remains ambivalent.

Meanwhile, the project still awaits a new public hearing before the Hanford city planning commission. The date of that hearing has yet to be determined.

Koster declined to comment regarding his project Wednesday.

The company claims - and Valley air officials confirm - that its operation would have no emissions that would pollute the air. But a group of residents, the nearby food processor and a San Francisco-based environmental justice group remain skeptical.

They are calling for greater scrutiny on the environmental impacts.

Company officials say thermokinetic mixing, a patented technology, will fuse tire crumbs without melting them. The process, they say, uses centrifugal force and molds the rubber into useful products.

Koster's plan has the financial backing of the state Integrated Waste Management Board as well as a green light from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Yet these endorsements did little to convince the KWRA officials.

The waste authority has a bitter memory from its experience in working with a plastic-to-diesel recycling plan two years ago.

The project, proposed by a Sacramento firm, died after three and a half years into planning amid opposition coordinated by a San Francisco-based environmental justice group, Green Action.

The same advocacy group stands loosely behind residents' opposition against Koster's proposal.

"We already have enough headaches caused by certain individuals and certainly don't need another variable to our operating permit which will undoubtedly cause (Green Action) to visit us again," Adams stated in his report to the KWRA board.

Synagro's composting plant to start operating at capacity

By Doug Keeler, Midway Driller Editor

Taft Midway Driller, Friday, Dec. 15, 2006

Synagro held the formal ribbon cutting for its South Kern Compost manufacturing facility on Dec. 7.

The new state-of the art plant, located on South Lake Road about 12 miles east of Taft, is starting its operation this month and will be up to speed earlier next year. General manager Scott Deatherage said.

"We'll be ramping up in December. By the middle of January we hope to be up to capacity," Deatherage said.

It takes about 60 days for the material to be composted, he said.

The current facility will take treated biosolids and mix it with greenwaste for composting into high-grade composted soil amendment that is sold both retail and wholesale (including locally at True Value Store).

The plant will have a capacity to compost up to 400,000 tons. of biosolids with up to 270,000 tons of greenwaste annually.

It uses the newest technology, aerostatic pile compost process with biofiltration to cut emissions into the atmosphere of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) by more than 80 and odor emissions by more than 90 percent, Synagro officials said.

It also has lined asphaltic composting pads and lined water retention basins to prevent the composting material from seeping into the ground.

Synagro plans to be an active partner in the community, too.

The firm has committed to contributing \$75,000 annually, including a \$25,000 donation to the Taft College Foundation, another \$25,000 to the City of Taft and \$25,000 more to local charities and nonprofit organizations.

Synagro officials expressed their gratitude to the community for support during the permitting and construction process.

"We've been so appreciative of how Taft and Maricopa and the whole West side has supported us, said Synagro.

The South Kern Composting facility could be just the first part of a major recycling center east of Taft.

Synagro owns a 744 acre parcel south of South lake Road. The current plant occupies 44 acres and will keep another 55 acres for future expansion.

City manager Bob Gorson said Synagro has already had offers from other recycling operations to purchase some of the more than 600 acres remaining.

Gorson said the city is looking into bringing that area into the city's sphere of influence and masking it a recycling development zone, a move that could make low interest loans for development available for recyclers in certain categories.

Arsenic plant on hold family keeps farm... for now

By Seth Nidever

Hanford Sentinel, Friday, Dec. 15, 2006

ARMONA - Plans to build a water treatment plant on a farm here were put on hold after an overflow crowd protested at a public hearing Wednesday night at the Armona Community Services District.

The Davidson family members, who own the property, were concerned about losing their farm. Topping the concerns of the neighbors were safety issues surrounding the project.

The public hearing on the issue lasted more than three hours.

In the end the community services district decided to put off a decision on the matter for 60 days.

At the hearing, people demanded that the district consider other treatment methods and alternative locations.

The district wants to take 19 acres on Locust Street, immediately east of the Armona Union Academy school, for a purification plant that would remove arsenic from Armona's drinking water.

The well that needs to be purified is adjacent to the property. But to construct the plant, the community services district would build a series of evaporation ponds to remove the arsenic on the Davidsons' farm.

The plan called for taking the land by eminent domain, a process by which a government entity can seize private property for public use if it pays the owner fair market value.

Scores of family members associated with the land protested.

"You're going after eminent domain property without having done your homework," said U.S. Air Force Col. Peter Davidson, a co-owner of the property who said he came from Rammstein, Germany, to attend the meeting.

Like the neighbors, he expressed concerns about the safety of the evaporation ponds.

Several neighbors took issue with both the method of purification and the location of the project.

"We are deeply concerned about having arsenic ponds on the border of our academy," said Kenneth Pierson, school board president of Armona Union Academy.

The grounds of the private, K-12 Seventh-day Adventist school would be 40 feet away from the ponds under current plans.

"If anything ever happened to our students, we would take you to court as far as we could," Pierson said.

Bobby Schales was one of several nearby residents who said they never were notified by mail about the impending project.

Schales was also one of many to question the safety of the evaporation pond system and if wind might blow arsenic off site.

"I'm not for it. They say (the arsenic) won't blow? I don't believe it," said Schales, who lives at the corner of Cedar and Locust streets southeast and down wind of the site.

District staff tried to counter the concerns by asserting that contaminated sludge would be scraped from the ponds and trucked to a safe location to dry. They also said the district would ensure that sludge was removed regularly enough to prevent arsenic concentrations from rising to toxic levels.

District officials have said that there is no practical alternative location other than the Davidsons' land, which is adjacent to the well that needs to be treated. They are under pressure to quickly meet a new federal standard requiring an arsenic concentration of less than 10 parts per billion.

Cities around Kings County have faced the same problem, but municipalities such as Corcoran have chosen purification methods that don't involve evaporation ponds.

District staff said Wednesday that evaporation ponds are the only way to remove arsenic and several other minerals in Armona's water.

Ed Bittner, chairman of the board, said a \$1.1 million grant the district got from the state to build the plant would be lost if development of the project didn't begin soon. Bittner said piping the well water to other locations would push residents' water fees from the current \$60 a month to anywhere from \$160 to \$210 a month.

But the protest was too much for new board member Sal Gutierrez, who moved to delay the decision for 60 days to consider other options.

The board then voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

"What got me was that the people of Armona knew nothing about this," said Franklin Davidson after the decision.

Franklin Davidson, now living in Texas, said he planned to live on the Armona farm when Peter Davidson, his son in the military, retired there.

Oakland rail companies test new soot cleaner

By Erik N. Nelson, STAFF WRITER

Tri-Valley Herald, Friday, December 15, 2006

In another step to combat air emissions from the Port of Oakland and other U.S. freight depots, Union Pacific railroad Thursday began testing a new scrubber that burns and filters soot from locomotive exhaust at its Oakland railyard.

"It's part of our industry's continued effort in looking for cleaner, more fuel efficient locomotives," said Mark Davis, spokesman for the Omaha, Neb.-based railroad giant. "We looked at 14 different filtering technologies and this one made the most sense and best fit the rail industry's needs."

The ungainly sheet-steel-covered box was placed in front of the 1,500-horsepower General Electric switching engine, which was built in 1982. The locomotive was overhauled last year to meet U.S. Environmental Protection Agency standards for pollutants such as nitrogen oxides, but not the small soot particles that can become lodged in human lungs and cause respiratory ailments such as asthma.

HUG Engineering, one of the world's top makers of pollution control devices for older rail and marine engines, made the scrubber and is testing it on six other locomotives in its home country of Switzerland.

Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway plans to test another such scrubber in Los Angeles, Davis said.

The test was no surprise to Margaret Gordon, co-chair of the West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project.

"The rail companies are only doing this because they've been sued twice, and last year the (California Air Resources Board) signed an exclusive (memorandum of understanding) with them," she said.

That agreement requires Union Pacific and BNSF Railway to reduce emissions and conduct health risk assessments for all of their major rail yards in the state.

To Lee Jones of North Richmond, another area that feels the brunt of locomotive, truck and ship exhaust, the railroads are moving in the right direction.

"I think it's great that they are looking at technology to cut down on the (soot particles) from the trains," said Jones, who has been active in efforts to reduce smog from freight traffic. "I was wanting to invite them to use the (BNSF Railway's) Richmond yard as a lab."

The diesel particulate filter attached to the yard locomotive will be tested for a year to determine its effectiveness — the manufacturer promises an 80-percent or more reduction in particulate emissions — and its durability, Davis said.

The filter is made up of small channels running through silicon carbide, which captures most unwanted carbon particles. A diesel-fired burner periodically heats the silicon carbide, burning the particles into a small quantity of carbon dioxide gas, which is released, according to Union Pacific's literature on the device.

"It's great to see individual fleet owners stepping up and starting to do their part in reducing their own impacts," said Swati Prakash, research associate with the Oakland-based Pacific Institute environmental group. "But it's also important to put it into the bigger picture."

People living around the area's ports also are subject to emissions from massive seagoing container ships and tankers, which have only recently begun to convert to alternative fuels and consider steps like "plugging in" to power supplies while in port instead of running their engines.

Smoky diesel locomotive turns into a clean machine

Michael Cabanatuan, Chronicle Staff Writer
S.F. Chronicle, L.A. Friday, December 15, 2006

On first glance, the hulking locomotive in Union Pacific Railroad's yard near the Port of Oakland looks like any other. But Locomotive 1378 doesn't have any smokestacks -- or the clouds of black smoke that typically puff from the diesel engines.

As part of an experiment to cut emissions from older diesel locomotives, the railroad has removed the two smokestacks from the locomotive and replaced them with a big stainless steel box that sits behind the cab.

That box contains the nation's first diesel particulate filters made for locomotives. The filters are devices that trap, then burn off most of the microscopic pollutants linked to premature deaths and lung disease.

"Lots of times with diesel locomotives, you see plumes of black smoke," said John Hedrick, an engineer with Southwest Research Institute of San Antonio, Texas, which installed the filters and will oversee testing. "With this filter, all you see are heat waves coming out."

For the next year, the device will be used and tested in the Oakland yard. Three other devices -- one on another Union Pacific locomotive, two on Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway locomotives -- will be installed in the next few months and tested in California over the next year.

The goal is to reduce the particulate matter produced in rail yards, where diesel-fueled locomotives move rail cars and frequently idle.

"It deals with a very big problem with some rail yards, particularly in some cities like Oakland, where the yards are near residential areas," said Jerry Martin, a spokesman for the state Air Resources Board. "The community gets bombarded with these fine particles."

The filter works by pushing the exhaust through two large blocks of high-temperature large silicone carbide with small square openings. The blocks capture the particulates, which are then burnt off every three hours with a small diesel burner. A small amount of carbon dioxide is emitted into the air.

"Based on the testing, we are getting an 80 percent reduction in particulates when this is used in the yard," said Mike Iden, Union Pacific's general director of car and locomotive engineering. "It's very efficient."

Hedrick said the filter, developed by a Swiss firm and in use on six locomotives in Switzerland, is capable of eliminating 90 percent of the particulates.

The 1,500-horsepower diesel locomotive is equipped with an array of sensors that allow remote monitoring of the filter and the engine. So far, the filter appears to slightly decrease the locomotive's efficiency, causing it to use slightly more fuel, Iden said. But the true impact on efficiency and maintenance, as well as pollution reduction, won't be determined until a year's worth of data has been collected and analyzed.

"There are lots of questions that need to be answered and we expect to be able to answer them in a year," Iden said.

The testing of the emissions control devices is a cooperative effort involving the Union Pacific and Burlington Northern Santa Fe -- the nation's two largest railroads -- along with the state air board and the federal Environmental Protection Agency. Regulators in recent years have focused on reducing emissions from new and existing diesel engines, and have included locomotives and rail yards as key targets.

If the tests are successful, the locomotive exhaust filter could be installed on all older yard locomotives and possibly adapted for higher-horsepower engines that haul passenger or freight trains across the country at higher speeds.

"Right now," said Iden, "this is one of a kind."

Locomotive scrubber to limit emissions debuts in Oakland

By Erik N. Nelson, Media News Staff

Contra Costa Times, Friday, December 15, 2006

Oakland - To combat emissions from the Port of Oakland and other U.S. freight depots, Union Pacific railroad on Thursday began testing a new scrubber that burns and filters soot from locomotive exhaust at its Oakland railyard.

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Utility users to foot bill for cleaner air

Regulators approve a voluntary program that would let PG&E customers pay extra to offset the effects of greenhouse gases.

By Elizabeth Douglass, Times Staff Writer
L.A. Times, Friday, December 15, 2006

Customers of Pacific Gas & Electric Co. would be able to pay more on their monthly bills to fight greenhouse gas emissions under a program described as the first such arrangement by a U.S. utility.

The voluntary program, approved Thursday by the California Public Utilities Commission, would begin in spring and cost an average residential customer about \$52 a year. The San Francisco utility would spend the money on tree-planting projects and other ventures aimed at offsetting emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in California.

The state this year passed a groundbreaking law that would attack global warming by cutting greenhouse gas emissions 25% by 2020.

"I think it's a very positive step," commission President Michael R. Peevey said of PG&E's ClimateSmart program.

"As the warnings about the threat of climate change mount daily, it is increasingly apparent that we will need to pull out all the stops to prevent very dire consequences," Peevey said during Thursday's commission meeting in San Francisco. "This means we need both mandatory and market-based measures, as well as voluntary actions by individuals and businesses, which this program encourages."

PG&E, a subsidiary of PG&E Corp., is California's largest utility, serving 5.8 million residential and business customers in Northern and Central California.

More than 600 U.S. utilities, or 20%, operate programs giving customers the option of paying

more to support solar, wind and other renewable energy projects, according to the National Renewable Energy Laboratory in Golden, Colo. But the PG&E program is the first to focus on offsetting the global warming effects of day-to-day energy use by businesses and homes, state regulators said.

San Diego Gas & Electric Co. is developing a program that would "meet the exact same objective but through our own unique approach," spokesman Peter Hidalgo said. Southern California Edison, the utility serving much of Southern California, didn't respond to questions about its plans.

Matthew Freedman, a staff attorney at San Francisco's Utility Reform Network, isn't convinced the PG&E plan is the right approach.

"It's a step forward insofar as we are taking action to meet the state's climate goals, but we think this program burdens customers with unnecessary costs," Freedman said. "There's already going to be a huge price tag" to combating global warming, he said, "so we want to be looking at the cost-effectiveness of all these choices."

PG&E's plan includes spending \$16.4 million — paid for by all of its customers — on administration and marketing costs over three years.

About \$900,000 of the funding would go to the California Climate Action Registry, a nonprofit group that specializes in measuring reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. The group would verify the effectiveness of the carbon dioxide reduction projects that PG&E funds.

The utility said it expected to sign up 4% of its customers, raising about \$20 million to offset emissions during the three-year program.

PG&E, which would pay \$1 million as a customer of its own program, guaranteed state regulators that it would cut a minimum of 1.5 million tons of carbon dioxide from the air but said it hoped to achieve a reduction as high as 2 million tons.

"When you look at the amount of greenhouse gas reductions that they expect and then you look at the amount of money they plan to spend on marketing, the numbers don't pencil out very attractively," Freedman said. If the utility signs up 4% of its customers — a fairly lofty goal — "then they'll spend \$16 million to get \$20 million."

California utility regulators, holding their last meeting of the year and the last meeting before Geoffrey F. Brown leaves his commission post, also approved utility budgets and programs that provide 20% discounts on energy bills as well as energy-efficiency services to low-income customers.

In other action, regulators tightened state rules designed to prevent each of the state's utility holding companies from compromising market competition by relaying confidential business information about a regulated utility to sister companies that want to sell power to the utility. The commission also approved five PG&E contracts for renewable power.

GOP misses chance to reshape environmental laws

By Bettina Boxall, Times Staff Writer

L.A. Times, Friday, December 15, 2006

If ever there was a Congress in which Republicans were positioned to remake the nation's environmental laws, it was the 109th. But by the time the session ended last week, the GOP's environmental agenda had been largely thwarted.

Whether it was rewriting the Endangered Species Act, opening up most of the nation's coastline to oil and gas drilling, or selling off public lands in the West, Republicans failed to enact a range of ambitious proposals.

"It was the best chance for Republican-shaped initiatives for as long we can remember," said Daniel Kemmis, senior fellow at the Center for the Rocky Mountain West at the University of Montana.

Republicans began the session with majorities in both chambers, a sympathetic president, and a tough-talking property rights champion in charge of a key environmental committee.

That they went home empty-handed, Kemmis and others say, is testament to a changing, greening West; the pitfalls of overreaching; and an emerging alliance between environmentalists and a traditional GOP base, hunters and anglers.

"The so-called hook-and-bullet constituency has become more concerned about protecting public lands, protecting open space in general. I don't think that's going to change," he said.

Though Republicans came close to opening up Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling, the goal eluded them.

Ben Lieberman of the conservative Heritage Foundation called it "quite striking" that the legislation died despite \$3-a-gallon gasoline, an oilman in the White House and growing public support. The GOP expanded oil drilling in the Gulf of Mexico but did not muster enough votes to lift a long-standing federal ban on new oil and gas drilling off much of the nation's coastline.

"I just don't think the Republicans made the case that these changes could be made in an environmentally friendly way and in a way that would make a real difference at the pump or in terms of electricity prices," Lieberman said.

A proposal by House Resources Committee Chairman Richard W. Pombo (R-Tracy) to slash royalty payments on oil shale production on federal land died. So too did a House-passed bill that would have restricted environmental reviews of salvage logging to remove dead or dying trees in national forests.

Legislation tying the designation of new federal wilderness areas in Utah and Idaho to the sale of public lands for development never reached Bush's desk. The administration proposal to raise money for a rural schools program by selling off national forest parcels was scrapped in the face of congressional opposition.

And Pombo's legislation to overhaul the Endangered Species Act, requiring the government to pay property owners if the law restricted their land use, was blocked in the Senate by moderate Republican Lincoln Chafee of Rhode Island.

Neither Pombo nor Chafee will return to the Capitol to continue their duel, as both were defeated in the midterm election.

As House resources chairman, Pombo, a passionate foe of the Endangered Species Act and a defender of property rights, was in a key position to advance his agenda. But his reputation for anti-environmental rhetoric made the seven-term incumbent a polarizing figure.

"I think anything Pombo did would have been perceived as overreaching because people expected his committee to gut the ESA. But I really don't see his bill as overreaching," said Terry Anderson, a senior fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution. "I think it was in large part a dose of what conservative conservation would be about."

Pombo also talked of revamping another pillar of environmental law, the National Environmental

Policy Act. That effort never made it out of committee.

"It's really hard to get controversial bills passed; it takes a long time," mused Myron Ebell, an energy expert with the Competitive Enterprise Institute, a pro-market group.

Wilderness Society Executive Vice President Don Barry, an Interior Department official under the Clinton administration, said the GOP had its own boldness to blame for the string of defeats.

He cited the Bush administration's proposal to auction national forest parcels. The idea inflamed sportsmen groups concerned about losing access to public land and was eventually disowned by even conservative Republican senators in the West.

"I think it was a huge miscalculation," Barry said. "They found the hunting and fishing community just totally in revolt. It blew up in their faces, and the next thing you know, you have people like [Montana GOP Sen.] Conrad Burns denouncing it."

The GOP won passage of forest thinning legislation in 2003, and made a variety of other gains, though most of them resulted from the Bush administration's use of executive power.

The administration revoked a ban on snowmobiles in Yellowstone National Park; expedited oil and gas drilling on western federal lands, including areas nominated for wilderness protection; and rewrote air pollution regulations at the oil industry's request. It also dropped a Clinton-era road-building ban in national forest backcountry, although that move was recently overturned by a federal judge.

The interior West has traditionally been a stronghold of anti-government sentiment favoring development of public lands. But the political landscape is shifting as newcomers migrate from the coasts, more Democrats get elected, and local economies diversify beyond ranching, mining and logging.

"There's been a maturing of political perspective in this part of the world," Kemmis said. "Some of it comes from new people moving in. But a lot of it just has to do with an awareness that the economy has changed. And if you're going to protect the economic viability of your community, you've got to be looking at protecting open spaces and protecting ecosystems. I think that is the deeper transformation."

Such thinking helped win last-minute passage of measures stopping new energy leasing on more than 400,000 acres on the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains in Montana, as well as barring oil drilling and mining in northern New Mexico's Valle Vidal, an area popular among hunters and anglers.

If the Republicans hurt their interests by pushing for too much in the last session, therein lies a lesson for the Democrats, said Richard M. Frank, executive director of the California Center for Environmental Law & Policy at UC Berkeley.

"It is the middle on which either end of the political spectrum has to focus in actually getting any legislation of this type done," Frank said. "Only the future will tell if they'll be any more successful in developing that kind of consensus."

Pollution declining in parts of eastern U.S.

Michael Kanellos, for News.com

N.Y. Times, Thursday, December 14, 2006

Controls imposed on coal-burning power plants have reduced nitrogen-oxide pollution in the Ohio River Valley over the last six years, according to a new study from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

High-precision European satellites have detected a 38 percent decrease in compounds such as nitrogen dioxide and nitric oxide in the valley between 1999 and 2005, the study found.

During the same period, electricity demand in the region increased, the study noted.

"The reduction in NOx emissions from these large eastern power plants is dramatic," Greg Frost, the lead author of the study, said in a prepared statement. Nitrogen oxides come from burning fossil fuels.

When combined with other gases and sunlight, they can form ozone. While ozone is a component of the outer atmosphere, ozone is also a key component of smog when closer to the earth.

Results of the study were released at an American Geophysical Union meeting taking place this week in San Francisco.

Coal-burning power plants are more common in Ohio and Pennsylvania than other parts of the country and are a major contributor to air pollution. In those states, a plug-in hybrid car, which mostly runs on electricity and can get up to 100 miles a gallon, can produce as much overall pollution as a standard hybrid, according to advocates of hybrid cars. This is because the power plants those cars draw electricity from tend to be coal-burning.

Several politicians and researchers have called for regulations to curb greenhouse gas emissions, and some states, such as California, have already passed such laws. Some businesses claim that those regulations can hurt the economy. Many investment bankers and scientists, however, have countered that history does not necessarily bear that out. Energy efficiency, they assert, could in fact help kick off an economic boom.

In the 1970s in California, manufacturers fought regulations requiring more energy-efficient appliances, claiming that appliance prices would skyrocket.

Instead, refrigerator prices have declined (after adjusting for inflation) while electricity use has curbed. Refrigerators are also larger than they were in 1973.

"They all claimed it was the...end of civilization as we knew it," said Art Rosenfeld, a researcher who helped kick off the campaign for energy efficiency in the 1970s.

Asian nations urged to improve air quality

Summit identifies key areas to curb pollution; enforcement is crucial

By Michael Casey, Associated Press

Contra Costa Times, Friday, December 15, 2006

Yogyakarta, Indonesia - Asia's rapid economic expansion has turned its skies into some of the world's most polluted, and the region must do more to fight a scourge that is blamed for more than 500,000 premature deaths annually, delegates told a clean air conference Wednesday.

Some 900 experts and government officials from 20 countries urged the region to impose tighter regulations on emissions, boost investment in public transportation, and introduce fuel efficiency standards to tackle air pollution.

"There are hundreds of millions of children and adults suffering from air pollution in Asia," said Andrew Steers, the World Bank's country director in Indonesia. "It's not necessary, and it's our job to do something about it."

Increased burning of coal to fuel the economies of India and China, millions of new vehicles clogging the roads in places like Manila and Jakarta and haze-inducing land clearing fires on Borneo island were cited as the main culprits behind for the dirty air.

Pollution is having an economic effect. China recently estimated that bad air was cutting into its growth, and Hong Kong expressed fears that pollution drifting over from China is scaring off investors and tourists.

The World Health Organization said increased outdoor pollution in Asia is estimated to be causing as many as 537,000 premature deaths each year as well as an increase in cardiopulmonary and respiratory illnesses.

"We can improve health by improving air quality," said the WHO's Michal Krzyzanowski, noting a study in Dublin, where a 1990 ban on coal resulted in a 15 percent drop in cardiac deaths.

The three-day meeting is not expected to produce any binding agreements, but government officials from 17 countries are expected to acknowledge the need to crack down on a problem that "is a serious threat to the well-being of people in the region," according to a draft of the final statement seen by the Associated Press.

They will also embrace calls for harmonizing fuel efficiency and vehicle emission standards across the region, increased use of clean and renewable energy and the building of energy-efficient homes and buildings.

Speakers said progress was being made. Cities such as Bangkok and Singapore are embracing subways and skyways, while three-wheeled taxis and public buses in many cities in India, Bangladesh and Nepal have switched to compressed natural gas.

A study released Wednesday by the British-based Stockholm Environment Institute concluded that Asia is managing the problem better than in the 1990s. But it also found that the majority of the 20 Asian cities it surveyed still don't meet international air quality guidelines.

Dieter Schwela, the report's lead author, recommended that governments first tackle the transportation sector because it is the biggest problem. He urged countries to adopt stringent vehicle emissions and fuel efficiency standards and regulate the import of polluting secondhand cars.

Schwela and others called on coal-fired power plants and factories to use cleaner fuels, invest in technology to reduce sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide emissions and improve their operating efficiency.

But introducing tougher air quality measures is not enough, delegates said. There must be a concerted effort to enforce whatever measures are approved -- something that has proven difficult in many countries because of political pressure or weak capacity.

Eco-friendly hotel caters to conscientious travelers

By Barbara E. Hernandez

Contra Costa Times, Friday, December 15, 2006

American Canyon - Today's hotels are trying for a new kind of audience: those who put their bucks where their beliefs are. And if you're thinking "green," chances are you want to stay green when you travel, too.

The developer of the Gaia Napa Valley Hotel is hoping to attract the more environmentally-conscious travelers..

Developer Wen-I Chang's motto is placed behind the front desk: "Our mission is to change the world one traveler at a time."

The hotel, which fuses natural light and recycled materials into a sustainable and environmentally sound motif, is hoping to cash in on travelers making their way to the plentiful Napa Valley.

From recycled carpets to low-emissions paints, the Gaia Napa Valley Hotel hopes to be Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design-certified. The LEED designation is a stamp of green approval by the U.S. Green Building Council, based in Washington, D.C. The level of certification is based on the score of each project. The higher the score, the higher the level. The certification goes from the basic certification up to LEED Platinum.

The 132-room Gaia Napa Valley Hotel wants to go for the gold, making it the highest-rated hotel in the state and the nation.

The hotel integrates scrap metal, recycled wood and rainwater runoff to create Swan Lake, home to two "territorial swans" that will run off any other birds looking to nest, said James Soule, general manager.

Other than the unique design that mimics the surrounding hills, the inside of the hotel looks like many others: rooms with a large television, large bed and high-speed wireless Internet access.

The LEED Green Building Rating System is a voluntary, consensus-based national standard for developing high-performance, sustainable buildings, developed by the U.S. Green Building Council. LEED conforms to and surpasses California's 2005 Building Energy Efficient Standards, or Title 24, that took effect Oct. 1, 2005.

According to the California Integrated Waste Management Board, building construction accounts for a sixth of the world's fresh water withdrawal, one-quarter of its wood harvest and almost half of its energy and materials. Building green is a way to use resources more efficiently and create healthier buildings that improve savings.

A 1998 study by the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory reported that increased ventilation, low-emission products and good heating and cooling filtration can create better indoor air quality and reduce symptoms of allergies, asthma, respiratory disease and "sick building" syndrome -- in which people frequently get sick from poorly ventilated air.

According to Lynn Simon, the Gaia Napa Valley Hotel's LEED building consultant in San Francisco, the hotel should make silver if not gold by spring.

The Taiwanese-born Chang decided to place the hotel in American Canyon, where he said he was "embraced" by the city. "In Napa, (the response) was not so hot," he said. "And where else could I get 4.6 acres?"

The \$20 million hotel is only about a block from Napa. The city of American Canyon promised Chang a \$1 million tax credit and a break on transient occupancy tax.

Chang, who is the head and founder of the south San Francisco-based Atman Hospitality Group, also plans to create other LEED-certified hotels in Anderson, downtown Merced and Mt. Shasta.

Chang said his life changed about 10 years ago in Santa Cruz when he had to ask a waitress for water during a water shortage. That night, he shortened his shower from 10 minutes to two and realized that he had a role to play. As a hotel developer, he said, he also has a responsibility to the planet.

"Conscientious businessmen have to do something," Chang, 62, said.

His first attempt at a green hotel in Half Moon Bay stalled, and he changed his focus to the Gaia Napa Valley Hotel, which broke ground in 2001. The hotel, designed by Mickey Muenning and Todd Jersey, will have a restaurant and spa to go with the hotel's meeting and conference facilities by February. Green does not mean guests will go without pampering.

Soule said the hotel will offer everything any other high-end Napa Valley hotel does, only with better air quality and environmentally-friendly products. The emphasis is on the "New Age traveler," who wants the chance to make an ecological choice, Chang said.

Consultants said Chang's project shows courage and foresight.

"It all comes down to the free market," said Brian Gitt, executive director for the Berkeley-based Build It Green. "You either plan for the future and be an innovator or be a follower and drag your feet the whole way."

According to U.S. Green Building Council spokeswoman Taryn Holowka, only three hotels have achieved LEED status: the University of Maryland University College Inn & Conference Addition in Adelphi, Md.; the Georgia Department of Natural Resources' Len Foote Hike Inn in Dawsonville, Ga.; and the Snowmass Golf Clubhouse in Snowmass Village, Colo., in which only the clubhouse has been certified gold. The Orchard Hotel in San Francisco is in the process of being certified by the agency.

Traffic summit sought

'Little problems' in Valley at issue

BY RICK ORLOV, Staff Writer

LA Daily News, Thursday, December 14, 2006

Concerned that smaller projects that could help ease local commutes are being overlooked, Los Angeles City Councilman Tom LaBonge called on Thursday for a summit of San Fernando Valley officials to set priorities for local freeway improvements.

"I support the major programs like subways and mass transit, but I don't think we can forget what people use the most to get to and from work - our freeways," LaBonge said. "There are a lot of little things we can do, that we should be doing to make it easier for traffic to flow and to make the lives of people easier."

Driving from downtown through the Valley, LaBonge pointed out problem areas that create what traffic engineers describe as "pinch points," where vehicles slow for no apparent reason.

"You see it everywhere," LaBonge said. "All they need is a little engineering work to straighten out the problems. But they never get the priority because all the money is going to the big projects."

"I think we need to take care of some of the little things that make people's lives easier."

LaBonge said he envisions Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa leading a summit of Valley representatives from city, county, state and federal agencies, as well as officials from neighboring cities. The goal would be to create a list of projects that could be submitted to Caltrans for funding under Proposition 1B, the \$4.5 billion bond measure approved by voters last month.

"We're all in this together, and it's the local officials who know where the needs are in their area," LaBonge said.

Councilwoman Wendy Greuel, who chairs the council's Transportation Committee and whose district is based entirely in the Valley, said programs are already under way to promote Valley-area projects.

"We have been working on this, but it might be worthwhile to put together a bigger program to emphasize what our needs are," Greuel said. "What we have done is put together a citywide task force to look at projects and how to spend our dollars on transportation programs."

"What we've done with that is ask the departments to bring up lists of the projects that will be eligible for state funding and push those to the top of the list."

LaBonge noted the Valley was promised improvements for the Ventura Freeway years ago, but they never were completed.

"Caltrans never talked to the community and then, all of a sudden, they were talking about tearing down homes for the widening," LaBonge said. "When that didn't fly, all that money was taken away. I don't want to see us shortchanged any further."

[Tracy Press, Commentary, Friday, 15 December 2006](#)

A wicked wind from Site 300

By John Mendelson

Why Jon Mendelson isn't happy about Lawrence Livermore Lab's newest round of explosives testing.

What's wrong with a little depleted uranium Nothing, judging by the recent actions of Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory.

The lab recently obtained a permit allowing it to increase the amount of explosives it tests annually by the equivalent of 7,000 pounds of TNT, and the aforementioned radioactive substance might be part of the mix. These planned blasts will be at Site 300, a bomb-testing area with a boundary about a mile away from the future Tracy Hills development.

The explosions the lab plans for Site 300 won't endanger the public — none will be larger than the equivalent of 350 pounds of TNT, the maximum limit allowed by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. What the explosions throw into Tracy's air, however, could be an entirely different matter.

Along with its decision to up the explosion ante at Site 300, LLNL has agreed to not use tritium — a radioactive form of hydrogen — in its explosions. But depleted uranium — a radioactive form of uranium commonly used in munitions — is still on the approved-substances list.

The Tracy Press has reported that the lab has refused to go on record against using uranium in its test blasts, a stark contrast to its tritium policy.

Reading between the lines, I come to one conclusion: Tracy residents can expect depleted uranium to be part of LLNL's expanded test program.

But given the properties of depleted uranium, one might think there isn't much to worry about. It is less radioactive than the purified form of natural uranium one might find walking through the Australian outback, and the radioactivity it does give off is harmless outside the body, says the World Health Organization.

The alpha particles depleted uranium emits are so weak they're blocked by human skin, and emitted beta particles won't get through a heavy jacket or a thick piece of aluminum foil. Gamma rays, the type of deep-penetrating radiation usually associated with radiation sickness, etc., are almost a non-factor.

So why worry about depleted uranium

Well, polonium-210 is also relatively harmless outside the body. But, as former Russian spy Alexander Litvinenko discovered, once inside the body it has devastating effects. Although polonium-210 is several orders of magnitude more toxic than uranium, the illustrative effect is the same.

It turns out that alpha and beta particles wreak havoc when the substance emitting them is ingested or — even worse — inhaled.

And what's that I feel Ah, it's a steady breeze blowing through Tracy from the southwest, right where Site 300 is. And could that be depleted uranium I smell

A 1994 report available online that was put together by Site 300 operators details the prevailing winds that blow across the bomb testing area and toward Tracy. This regional weather pattern hasn't dramatically shifted in the past 12 years. That means the depleted uranium that will likely be present in the LLNL tests will be lifted high into the air and carried right over our city.

Uranium is a heavy metal. Like lead or mercury, it can cause a variety of symptoms once inside the human body, including brain damage, if accumulated in significant amounts. Add on top of that the destructive force of emitted alpha and beta particles inside the body, and it can be a truly nasty problem if you're unlucky enough to breathe the stuff in. Which is a decent possibility if you're living downwind of a test facility where depleted uranium is thrown into the air by explosions.

If the lab's operators are smart — and one would assume they would be, given that they're in charge of explosives and radioactive materials and all — they'd make sure the wind was blowing away from Tracy when conducting their test blasts. But is that enough of a safeguard

Heavy metals — especially radioactive ones — are serious business. Living in an area where I could be exposed to depleted uranium is less than appealing. And somehow, the reassurances of a government agency that depends upon secrecy aren't going to ally my concerns in this area.

It'd be more responsible to move such testing away from population centers rather than counting on the right type of wind to protect Tracy. And one would hope that a government agency charged with testing and maintaining weapons of mass destruction would be responsible.

I expect that nothing will change and my concerns will go unaddressed. But I hope that Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory will prove me wrong.

Jon Mendelson is a copy editor at the Tracy Press

[Editorial in the Merced Sun-Star, Dec. 15, 2006](#)

Our View: Yellow flag needed for racetrack

Which makes more noise: A B-52 accelerating for takeoff, or 40 cars at full throttle chasing each other around a racetrack? Well, they didn't call the movie about NASCAR racing "Days of Thunder" for nothing.

Worse than the noise from internal combustion is the residue -- faintly sweet-smelling blue smoke that pollutes the air.

For all its noise and commotion -- maybe because of it -- racing is the most popular spectator sport in the world. Its fans are devoted, dedicated and legional. That's as true here as anywhere. That's one of the reasons why we support the decision early Wednesday morning by Merced County supervisors to move forward with plans for Riverside Motorsports Park.

The track will give thousands of fans and racers an outlet. Without it, a sport that has long thrived in this area will suffer and so will the businesses that have grown up around it.

The vote to accept developers' environmental impact report was but the first step of many more to come. If Foster Farms and the U.S. Penitentiary take their objections to court, the track might never open. It would be better to resolve differences through negotiation.

Our support for this track is tempered with the knowledge that racers are famous for many things -- including cutting corners. Many are fond of the saying, "If you ain't cheatin', you ain't trying." That's why it is vital that Merced County hold track developers to every promise they've made -- and then some. Plans for traffic mitigation aren't nearly good enough. A mass-transit plan should be required. Neighbors must be shielded from the worst impacts of noise.

Motorsports fans are devoted and appreciative. We also want them to be respectful of what they have been granted -- a fantastic place to play.

The Merced County board of supervisors made a difficult but good choice. As we applaud their decision, we also offer a warning: Proceed with caution.

[Sacramento Bee Editorial, Friday, December 15, 2006](#)

Editorial: Short grass, clean air Coming: Lawn mowers that pollute less

For four years, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency dithered while lawn mowers and leaf blowers sold in California continued to belch smog-forming chemicals that state regulators had sought to control. Under pressure from a Republican Congress reluctant to impose new environmental rules on their allies in industry, the federal EPA bottled up California's proposed new rules to control small engine emissions.

State regulators wanted those manufacturers to do what car makers have done for two generations: install catalytic converters. This week, EPA finally relented.

It granted California the waivers the state needs to impose its unique, toughest-in-the-nation standards on companies that build mostly garden equipment powered by engines under 50 horsepower. Such engines account for 7 percent of the emissions coming from all mobile sources in the state, the equivalent of about 3 million cars.

California's new rules will go into effect next year. Unfortunately other states will not be able to benefit from them. Congress passed a law barring other states from adopting the California rule and ordered EPA to set its own federal standard to regulate small engines. The agency has not yet issued that standard, but it is widely anticipated to be far more permissive than California's.

Still, the California rule could lead companies to build cleaner garden equipment on their own. A number of foreign manufacturers have done so for a long time, in compliance with higher standards in place in many other parts of the world.

For years, California regulators have wanted makers of lawn mowers and leaf blowers to sell equipment here that is at least as clean as the equipment they sell in Europe and Japan. It's taken much too long, but federal EPA has given the state the go-ahead. It may take a while longer, but one way or another the rest of the nation should follow suit.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Friday, December 15, 2006:](#)

Time to get those old school buses off the roads

Thanks to \$200 million from Proposition 1B, thousands of school children will be riding on cleaner, safer, more modern school buses than ever before.

School Bus One, the oldest of nearly 200 other Elvis-era buses built before laptops, cell phones or Blackberries were ever crammed into backpacks, was officially retired on Dec. 8 in Mojave and will be placed in a museum as a reminder of days gone by.

It is also a reminder of progress in cleaning up air pollution, in part caused by older, high-polluting vehicles. Those buses are now being replaced with newer, safer, cleaner models that better protect our children from toxic diesel emissions.

An Air Resources Board study that tracked cars and trucks along Los Angeles freeways demonstrated that many drivers get their biggest dose of air pollution during commuting to and from work. For some children, the bus ride to school can also expose them to diesel emissions, as toxics seep into the vehicle from the engine compartment.

It's time to provide children with newer, safer and less polluting buses, so that the next time we see an older school bus, it will be in a museum and not at the bus stop.

Dr. Robert F. Sawyer, Chairman, California Air Resources Board, Sacramento