

Fireworks light up air pollution monitors

By Mark Grossi

In The Fresno Bee & The Modesto Bee Wed., July 6, 2005

For about an hour, there was more than the rockets' red glare in the San Joaquin Valley sky. Fireworks also lit up air monitors on the Fourth of July with a huge shower of pollution particles from Modesto to Bakersfield. The tiny specks, containing metals from the coloring in the fireworks, are considered dangerous for those with lung and heart problems.

In Fresno, pollution jumped three times higher than the daylong health standard for about an hour. In Modesto, it was four times higher, and in Corcoran, it was six times. But no Valley city was bombarded worse than Bakersfield.

The pollution climbed nearly 10 times higher than the daylong health threshold for microscopic particles, called PM 2.5, or particulate matter 2.5 microns or less in size.

Thirty of these specks would fit along the width of a human hair, and they are known to trigger heart and lung problems when inhaled. With little wind to break up the pollution, the air remained murky enough to keep Bakersfield air unhealthy on Tuesday morning. Residents were subjected to a double whammy of the particles and lung-corroding summertime smog.

Oddly, most cities did not violate the daylong standard, which is an average over 24 hours. In other words, a city could have a huge one-hour spike but still not break the standard if the pollution dropped for the rest of the day.

Bakersfield and Corcoran violated the daylong health standard.

"We're not sure if we're getting those high numbers because the monitors are downwind of a fireworks display or what," said meteorologist Shawn Ferreria of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. "We're not sure yet why two cities had violations."

Such violations are unusual in summer, which is dominated by smog that forms as tailpipe and other emissions bake in the sun. PM 2.5 is usually a winter-time problem often related to wood burning in fireplaces.

The Valley, which annually has one of the country's worst air quality problems, remained clean in spring and early summer, compared to previous years.

Last year, the Valley had recorded 38 violations of the smog standard by the Fourth of July. This year, the state reports only 15 for this area.

The cleaner air largely is a result of unsettled weather, officials said. But the stormy spring and mild June extended allergy season, a Fresno allergist said.

"Usually we see fewer patients by the third week of June," said Dr. Malik Baz. "But we're still busy. Now the pollution has begun, and that adds to the problem."

A few days before July Fourth, the weather turned seasonably warm, and steady breezes calmed down. The stage was set for fireworks to load the air with tiny specks from smoke.

On July 3, Bakersfield's daylong average for particle pollution was only 16 micrograms per cubic meter, far below the standard of 65.

On July 4, after peaking at a whopping 630 micrograms per cubic meter for one hour after sunset, Bakersfield's daylong average shot up to 69.

About 100 miles north, Fresno's daylong average was 39 micrograms on July 4, far below a violation but more than double the average from the previous day.

"Shortly after midnight, the air cleaned up quite a bit in Fresno," Ferreria said. "But there obviously were some lingering effects from the fireworks the next day in Bakersfield."

Fireworks lit up night sky -- and pollution sensors

Sarah Ruby

Bakersfield Californian Wed., July 6 2005

Skyrocketing air pollution on the Fourth of July was no coincidence, according to preliminary data collected by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. "The early part of the day was a typical summer day," said Shawn Ferreira, a meteorologist with the air district. "As soon as night hits -- bam!"

At 8 p.m. Monday, the level of fine particulate pollution soared to 24 times what it had been at 7 p.m. That's not normal, Ferreira said, and early signs point to fireworks as the source of extra "PM 2.5," fine particulates.

"They're screaming at me," Ferreira said of readings from an air monitor on California Avenue, north of Stockdale Highway. It's the only real-time PM 2.5 detector operating in Kern, according to Ferreira.

Whether it tells an air quality story for the entire southern basin is debatable. Two fireworks stands were located nearby, and evening displays sent billows of smoke into the sky.

This kind of pollution spike "happens every Fourth of July," said Gennet Paauwe, a spokeswoman for the state air board. This year's pollution in Bakersfield was worse than last year's, probably because on Monday there was less wind to blow the pollutants away, Ferreira said.

Monday's particulates were enough to make the air "unhealthy," according to federal limits. Last year it was less severe -- unhealthy for people with asthma and other lung problems.

Study of Air Pollutants Continues in Sequoia

Valley Voice Wed., July 6, 2005

Sequoia National Park - Smog, pesticides and other airborne contaminants like mercury are riding the airwaves to the Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks. The question remains - how much and at what level of harm?

Research on these contaminants has gone on for a few years - at first focusing on smog's effect on the famous Big Trees themselves and now a closer examination of all kinds of pollutants some locally generated and some who ride the jet stream from the Orient that may be harming both plants and critters in national parks.

Park officials have known for several years that smog is hurting the big stands of Jeffrey pine trees on the western face of the Sierra as well as stunting seedlings of Sequoia trees.

Local air resources specialist Annie Esperanza says she has been monitoring Sequoia's airshed for several years noticed recent reports that the mountain air had shown a deterioration from 1999 to 2003 with the number of days exceeding the state and federal ozone standard generally rising. That was true until last year when cooler temps helped by more air movement cleared out the haze that is typically found on stagnant summer days. Breezy cool weather so far this year has helped again in 2005. "Is this a trend? Only time will tell," suggests Esperanza.

Chief interpreter for the park Bill Tweed notes that while focusing on pollution sources has meant cleaner cars for example, the valley's growth may well be offsetting the gains made by clean technology. He quips that "The air has already gone from broth to stew and if we aren't careful our stew will turn to chowder."

Esperanza says long range studies on the effect of pollutants on park resources includes work being done at eight US national parks carried out by the Western Airborne Contaminants

(WACAP) project, monitoring of trans Pacific dust carried from Asia and China to the Western US. The highest jet stream winds hit the Sierra where researchers are finding worrisome persistent organic pollutants, volatile organic compound and compounds like mercury being deposited.

Mercury is a big problem back east from coal fired power plants. But mercury laden dust also rides the wind coming from large scale open burning, says Esperanza. She says while mercury is being measured at a new station in Giant Forest, the comparison to other regions is not yet known.

The WACAP project collected data from Sequoia park in 2003 and some of that raw data has been released now that shows pesticides locally generated from the valley floor as well as banned pesticides found in snow and water samples at several high elevation lakes.

Data shows higher concentrations of the pesticide dacthal in snow in Sequoia found in 2003 than found in other western national parks. Dacthal is a pre-emergent herbicide used in both speciality crops and on turf like golf courses and works by killing germinating seeds. Focusing on a banned pesticide HCH, levels are similar at all western national parks showing the widespread distribution of these world-traveling airborne contaminants. By contrast, some of the contaminants clearly are being generated from the farms sitting just below Sequoia.

Researcher Tamara Blett with NPS says they found residues of a pesticide used widely in the valley - the herbicide endosulfan in Pear Lake in Sequoia found only at the upper level of the lake. Much further down in the sediment of the lake they found the banned pesticide dieldrin deposited apparently in 1963 but not at upper levels. "That tells us the banning of the chemical reduced the disposition," says Blett.

Esperanza says EPA is gathering information on fish and amphibian tissue this summer to see if the toxic substances magnify as has been the case of other contaminants that can reduce reproductive success and become what is called endocrine disruptors. That may be what happened to the historic mountain frog population.

Also worrisome are the flow of toxic materials from Asia on prevailing air currents found in snow in Sequoia and elsewhere including nasty materials like polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) long banned here but still used overseas.

What's the effect of long banned chemicals? For example the peregrine falcons that nest at Moro Rock in Sequoia National Park have never been able to produce offspring. Abandoned eggs contained high quantities (13 mg/kg wet weight) of DDE (the breakdown product of the US-banned pesticide DDT), and eggshells averaged 15% thinner than they should be. More recently, the peregrines produced eggs that lacked the normal smooth waxy brown-spotted shell; instead the shells were white and chalky. Additionally, the foothill yellow-logged frog completely disappeared from these parks in the 1970s, and today exists in the Sierra Nevada only in a handful of widely scattered populations along the western foothills.

Lodi seeks EIR for Westside plans

NEIL GONZALES

Lodi News Sentinel Wed., Jul 6, 2005

LODI -- Lodi wants a Stockton-based developer to conduct a comprehensive environmental study of about 470 acres in the west and southwest parts of town before the City Council grants the company permission to build more than 2,300 houses on the sites.

City staffers have asked Frontiers Community Builders to pay about \$217,000 to prepare an

environmental impact report for the proposed Westside and Southwest annexation and development projects, according to city documents. Frontiers has agreed to do so.

The study would look into how the Westside and Southwest projects would influence traffic, [air quality](#), noise, public services and various other concerns.

The City Council is scheduled to consider an agreement with Frontiers on the study this evening.

"The scope of the project, number of acres, number of houses and the annexation along with other unanswered questions justify a thorough environmental preparation," City Manager Blair King said. "It's important enough for the community to have the highest environmental review we can. We think it'll be helpful to the public and decision-makers to have all the information."

An initial draft could be ready in about three months, King said, and the city could certify a final report by the end of the year.

Mayor John Beckman said the projects fall within the city's General Plan for growth and development.

The Westside project would involve 152 acres and 821 housing units. The Southwest project would be on 319 acres and have 1,533 units.

Frontiers President Tom Doucette said construction on the first houses could start in about 18 months. It would take at least five to eight years to complete the project, he said.

Farmworkers support legislation on pesticides

Faster inquiries, higher fines proposed whenever chemicals drift from fields

By Julian Barbassa

Tri-Valley Herald Tues., July 5, 2005

A bill that would speed up investigations into pesticide drift incidents and enhance fines for those responsible will get its first Assembly hearing this week.

Farmworkers who have been poisoned by chemicals drifting from fields are coming out in support of the Pesticide Safety Enforcement Act, which should go before the Agriculture Committee on Wednesday.

"Farmers need to know that when (pesticides) drift on somebody ... they will be fined, there will be consequences," said Teresa DeAnda, who had to pile three kids, two uncles and two dogs into a van in 1999 to escape a cloud of toxic chemicals that wafted over her hometown of Earlimart, sickening 250 people.

Wilbur-Ellis, the company found liable, settled with the state Department of Pesticide Regulation for \$150,000.

But farmworkers and clean air advocates said most pesticide drift investigations result in little more than a warning. Fines are only assessed in the most public cases, in which dozens or hundreds of people are harmed, said Martha Guzman, legislative advocate for the California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation. And farmworkers said most pesticide drift accidents aren't even reported.

"Our head hurts, and our nose bleeds sometimes, but we put that to the exhaustion from work, or the heat," said Sandra Garcia, who has been sprayed several times in the 25 years she's been picking fruit in the Central Valley, composed of the nation's highest-grossing farm counties. "But when 30 people have headaches, I don't think it's just the work."

Now Garcia has asthma, and said she feels her lungs closing up when she approaches vines that have been recently sprayed.

The current language in Senate Bill 879, authored by Sen. Martha Escutia, D-Norwalk, calls for pesticide drift investigations to be completed in two months unless the state explains the delay. It would also make fines mandatory when a pesticide violation threatens someone's health, and creates a process for victims to appeal a decision by a local agricultural commissioner to the state's pesticide regulation agency.

The measures would create a financial incentive for farmers and applicators who are often in a hurry to do a lot of acreage to be more careful, DeAnda said. They get sloppy sometimes, she said. If they're looking at a big fine, it might prevent that sloppiness.

Several farm industry groups, including the Nisei Farmers League, the Western Growers Association, and the Wine Institute, did not immediately return telephone calls for comment.

A spokeswoman with the Western Plant Health Association, a trade group representing the fertilizer and crop protection industry, declined to comment on the bill. Avoiding injuries after drift incidents often means doing things that cost farmers and applicators money — like waiting for workers to clear out of a nearby field before spraying.

Lax enforcement puts law-abiding agricultural and pest control businesses at an unfair disadvantage, Escutia said. Sprayed pesticides can easily be blown off course, exposing anyone downwind.

In 2002, residents in the small Kern County town of Arvin were exposed twice to drifting pesticides. The company at fault in the first instance, Wilbur-Ellis, was fined \$15,000. A month later, chemicals again drifted into town, sickening 252 residents. That applicator, Western Farm Service, was fined \$60,000.

In October 2003, pesticides sickened more than 130 people in nearby Lamont. In May 2005, nineteen workers in a peach orchard near Bakersfield were overcome by a pesticide cloud that drifted from a neighboring field. That accident is still being investigated.

Farmworkers hope this bill will change the culture in rural areas, tightening enforcement of existing laws and making any drift incident punishable by a fine.

"We know farmers have to take care of their fruit," Garcia said. "We don't want them to lose money either — we need those jobs. We just want there to be safe ways of doing things."

Chemical plants pose risk to communities

By Lara Jakes Jordan, Associated Press
In the Fresno Bee Wed., July 6, 2005

WASHINGTON - Plants in 23 states that store lung-melting or otherwise lethal chemicals are in some of the nation's most populous communities and could each endanger more than 1 million people in a worst-case disaster, congressional researchers say.

Officials are concerned that the more than 100 chemical plants are tempting targets for terror attacks.

The tally of plants possessing large amounts of 140 toxic and flammable chemicals was compiled by the Congressional Research Service using Environmental Protection Agency data from May, the most recent available. It represents one of the first public state-by-state breakdowns of how close potentially deadly facilities are located to the nation's largest population centers.

"Chemical facilities are at the top of the terrorists' target list, and I thought it would be helpful for the full picture to be presented," Rep. Edward J. Markey, D-Mass., said in an interview Tuesday.

The survey provided state-by-state figures but did not specify the names of the facilities or the cities in which they are located. However, researchers called it "unlikely" that the entire population would be affected by a single chemical release.

A 2003 database compiled by environmental watchdog groups said chemical facilities near major American population centers include the AMVAC America plant in Los Angeles, the Infineum USA Bayway Chemical Plant in northern New Jersey, and six plants that store chlorine and sulfur dioxide in Houston.

The EPA refuses to release its own list of detailed locations of the chemical manufacturing plants, oil refineries and storage facilities for fear doing so could aid terror plans. Environmental watchdog groups have compiled incomplete or outdated tallies of chemical facilities.

"Nobody wants us handing out information that people with nefarious things on their minds would use to their advantage," said EPA spokesman Dale Kemery.

The report also tallied the numbers of chemical plants in smaller and rural areas. About one-fifth of the nation's chemical facilities - which exceed 10,000 - are close to population centers. Experts said the number of injuries or deaths caused by emissions of chemical explosives or toxic gases would depend largely on unpredictable factors like wind current or the extent of the leak. But they agreed the report highlights the continued danger of questionable security practices at plants.

If released, the toxic chemicals can "cause poison gas clouds to kill people," said Andy Igrejas, a chemical industry watchdog at the National Environmental Trust. "It's violent deaths you're talking about - it melts your lungs, essentially."

The report, completed at Markey's request, comes as the Homeland Security Department considers tougher federal regulation of the chemical industry, which has largely policed its own security procedures.

Last month, Homeland Security Acting Undersecretary Robert Stephan told congressional committees that "it has become clear that the entirely voluntary efforts of these companies alone will not sufficiently address security for the entire sector."

Stephan also estimated that fewer than 10,000 people would be killed and 40,000 sickened in a worst-case chemical release. Homeland Security officials have said only a small number of facilities - perhaps as few as a handful - have the capacity to cause widespread damage.

Several industry representatives contacted Tuesday declined immediate comment.

The report estimates at least 106 and as many as 111 plants are located near population centers of 1 million people or more. Congressional researchers could not provide a single number of facilities in question because they said they lack updated information in some cases, such as the types and volumes of chemicals produced.

Up to 29 of the plants were located in Texas - more than twice as many than in any other state. Illinois and California each had up to 13 such plants, Ohio had eight, and Florida and New Jersey had seven apiece.

Kemery, the EPA spokesman, and environmental experts agreed that the overall estimate represents a drop from 123 plants five years ago - partially because of industry efforts to use alternatives to the deadly chemicals or to move away from densely populated areas.

But Markey said the industry still has not gone far enough to seek safer alternatives, test its security measures and protect employee whistleblowers. Nor has the Bush administration pushed hard enough to demand those precautions, he said.

The administration "still has refused to put its money where its mouth is and commit to any meaningful upgrades," Markey said.

G-8 Leaders Scale Back Goals at Summit

By MARTIN CRUTSINGER, AP Economics Writer
in the S.F. Chronicle Wed., July 6, 2005

GLENEAGLES, Scotland (AP) -- World leaders scaled back goals for relieving African poverty and combatting global warming under U.S. opposition to British Prime Minister Tony Blair's ambitious objectives.

The leaders of the Group of Eight nations began arriving Wednesday at this posh golf resort for three days of discussions. Blair, as the host, was the first to arrive, coming from Singapore where he had engaged in a round of last-minute lobbying on London's successful bid to serve as host for the summer Olympics in 2012.

Speaking to reporters shortly after London was awarded the games, Blair called the decision a "momentous day" and acknowledged he was having trouble concentrating on the G-8 agenda.

"I've been trying to work on the G-8 stuff, but I have to say that my mind has been in two places today," Blair said.

President Bush and his wife arrived in Scotland aboard Air Force One a few hours before the summit was to begin with a dinner among G-8 leaders hosted by Britain's Queen Elizabeth.

Thousands of protesters took the streets in Auchterarder, a village near the resort. They were led by a bagpiper dressed in a traditional Scottish kilt and chanted "Power to the people."

Scottish police at first called off the march because they said public safety could not be guaranteed after a smaller band of 100 protesters smashed car windows, threw rocks and attempted to block one of the main roads leading to the resort. However, the police relented and allowed the march to proceed after organizers complained that their free speech rights were being denied.

Leaders' aides, meanwhile, met behind closed doors on the two issues Blair has made the main focus of this year's meeting - support for Africa, the globe's poorest continent, and increasing efforts to deal with the pollution that scientists believe is linked to planet warming.

Blair challenged G-8 countries to double aid to Africa from a current total of \$25 billion to \$50 billion by 2010 and to increase giving for all foreign aid to the equivalent of 0.7 percent of national incomes by 2015.

Bush, after initially resisting Blair's call, announced last Thursday that he would seek to double U.S. aid by 2010, to \$8.6 billion from \$4.3 billion in 2004. But Bush opposes the 0.7 percent target. Anti-poverty activists said that Bush's goal of \$8.6 billion fell about \$6 billion short of what was needed from the United States to meet Blair's \$50 billion target.

As a consequence, the final communique was expected to drop any reference to a \$50 billion goal in favor of talk more generally of a "doubling" of assistance.

Bush, stopping in Denmark on the way to Scotland, warned he would emphasize the need for African nations to commit to good governance in order to get increased support.

"I don't know how we can look our taxpayers in the eye and say, this is a good deal to give money to countries that are corrupt," he said. "We want to make sure that the governments invest in their people, invest in the health of their people, the education of their people, and fight corruption."

The differences were even starker on global warming. Blair wanted a plan to curb emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. But U.S. officials lobbied to prevent the inclusion in the G-8 communique of any specific reduction targets as called for in the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. The United States is the only G-8 country that has refused to ratify the Kyoto treaty, with Bush saying that doing so would have "wrecked" the U.S. economy.

Sir Michael Jay, Blair's representative in the discussions, called the negotiations on global warming "pretty intense." He predicted the G-8 would reach an accord that recognized the problem and the need to combat it without mentioning specific targets.

Bush said in Denmark that "the surface of the Earth is warmer and that an increase in greenhouse gases caused by humans is contributing to the problem."

However, he made plain that mandatory targets are off the table. He referred repeatedly to the Kyoto treaty in the past tense, even though it took effect in February, and said the goal for his plan is to control greenhouse gases merely "as best as possible."

Bush said he "can't wait" to talk with summit colleagues about the United States' alternative proposed approach, which stresses spreading clean-energy technologies to both developed and developing nations.

"I think there's a better way forward," Bush said. "I would call it the post-Kyoto era, where we can work together to share technologies."

Blair was expected to try to salvage the climate change issue by shifting debate away from disagreements with the United States and toward gaining support for emission controls in China. The country's surging economy has made it the world's second biggest producer of greenhouse gases after the United States.

In addition to boosting aid for Africa, the G-8 leaders were expected to endorse a deal their finance ministers reached in June to wipe out \$40 billion in debt that 18 poor countries - 14 of them in Africa - owe international lending agencies including the World Bank.

Blair also was pushing the rich nations to reach agreement on cutting the farm subsidies that they give their farmers but which depress imports from poor nations.

Bush has said the best way to deal with agricultural subsidies is for Europe and the United States to jointly agree to get rid of them through the Doha Round of global trade talks.

In addition to the two key issues Blair selected, the discussions are expected to cover the world's political hot spots, from Iraq to the Middle East peace process and the nuclear ambitions of Iran and North Korea.

Leaders also were expected to grapple with global oil prices that have surged to unprecedented heights, briefly topping \$60 per barrel, and threatened to slow the global economy.

The G-8 comprises the U.S., Canada, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and Russia.

Family pioneers hydrogen fuel

Californians agree to test \$1 million car that doesn't pollute

By TIM MOLLOY - THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Modesto Bee Wed., July 6, 2005

TORRANCE - No-pollution cars powered by hydrogen fuel cells are at least a decade away for most people - but not one California family.

In a long-term road test, John Spallino, his wife and two daughters are leasing a silver and blue, four-seat Honda FCX to get them to work, school and anywhere else they want to roam.

The Spallinos will provide reports about the car's performance to Honda as part of the auto industry's first private test of the promising technology that produces only one byproduct: water clean enough to drink.

"Maybe this is the technology of the future. Maybe it isn't," said the easygoing Spallino, a financial officer who plans to use the FCX for his 80-mile round-trip commute from his home in Redondo Beach to Irvine.

"But if I can be part of the evolution of this technology, that would be a lot of fun."

The test could give a push to pollution-free cars, said Lindsay Brooke, a senior analyst for CSM Worldwide, an automotive forecasting company.

Honda, however, won't say when it might mass market the FCX, being built one by one without the economic efficiency of an assembly line.

Honda chose the Spallinos for the test in part because they own a Honda Civic GX powered by natural gas and are accustomed to the inconvenience of finding fueling stations that provide alternatives to gasoline.

The family pays \$500 a month to lease the FCX. That includes maintenance and insurance on the car, which cost Honda more than \$1 million to design and build using technology that turns hydrogen and oxygen into electricity.

Government agencies and universities have tested hydrogen vehicles for Honda and other automakers in the past, but the FCX will be the first hydrogen fuel cell car in private hands.

It meets all government safety standards and drives like a regular car, though its electric hum is quieter than a gas engine.

The FCX can accelerate and maintain speeds comparable to gasoline-powered vehicles.

One difference can be found in the trunk. The Spallinos will have to pack light because their new car has less than a third of the trunk space of a typical car.

The biggest difference is in the fuel tank. The FCX uses hydrogen gas instead of gasoline and can go only about 190 miles on a tank of fuel.

There now are about 30 hydrogen fueling stations across the country, with more than half of them in California. But Spallino counts at least four on his way to work, including one at Honda's U.S. headquarters in Torrance and another at Los Angeles International Airport.

The LAX station won't open to the public for at least five years, but can be used by government vehicles and the Spallinos.

President Bush, Gov. Schwarzenegger and others say cars run by converting hydrogen to electricity will one day wean the nation of its oil dependence while reducing pollution.

Environmentalists counter that some automakers are using that promise to avoid improving fuel efficiency in current models. But Honda's record of making gas-electric hybrid cars suggests it's as interested in research and development as in public relations, environmentalists said.

The good life means more greenhouse gas

Robert Collier, staff writer

S.F. Chronicle Wed., July 6, 2005

Beijing (First of two parts) – Pi Heyang gingerly closed the door of his first car -to-be. Then, he ran his hand slowly along the shiny hood, touching the Chinese-made Tianjin Weizi sedan as delicately as if it were made of gossamer.

"This will change our lives," the Beijing bus driver said solemnly while his wife and young son stood at his side in the dealer's showroom.

Several miles away through Beijing's smoggy streets, an exhibition hall was jammed with thousands of people perusing booths with displays for new homes in suburban subdivisions. Videos played, dancers gyrated, and neon signs in English touted developments with names such as "Rich Garden" and "Canal Side Upper Strata Life."

"We want space, greenery, freedom," said Han Yu, a mobile phone salesman, after he and his wife signed papers to buy a three-bedroom condominium on Beijing's eastern outskirts for \$105,000. "This is it."

This is the new Chinese Dream: cars and suburbs. Like the American counterpart, it is good news for many people -- but perhaps bad news for Planet Earth. The same economic boom that is catapulting millions of Chinese each year into the middle class has made their country the world's fastest-growing source of the greenhouse gases linked to global warming.

As China's thirst for fuel helps push world oil prices to record highs, the country is emerging as a key factor in the debate over climate change -- as well as a wild card that could determine the health of the world's economy.

Chinese leaders acknowledge global warming as a serious problem, and they have begun a concerted campaign to cut the country's greenhouse gas output, which is largely driven by energy consumption. The government is spending billions of dollars -- nobody knows exactly how much -- to increase energy conservation, shut fume-belching factories and reduce power plant emissions. At the same time, however, the resulting efficiency improvements have been outpaced by unrelenting growth in automobile use, power generation and industrial activity.

Although the Chinese government does not publish data about carbon emissions, most foreign analysts estimate that the country's carbon dioxide emission levels are now second only to the United States worldwide and are growing by anywhere from 5 to 10 percent a year, the fastest increase of any major nation. China is expected to overtake the United States for the No. 1 spot by 2025, with its share of total world greenhouse-gas output rising from 12 to 20 percent during the period.

Under the Kyoto Protocol, China and other developing nations are exempted from the mandatory cuts in emissions of global-warming gases that rich nations must obey. Chinese officials say such limits would prevent them from rising from poverty, and they point out that rich industrialized nations are responsible for the vast majority of global-warming emissions.

The Bush administration says China's exemption is unfair, and it is one reason that President Bush withdrew the United States from the Kyoto Protocol in 2001. Global warming is a top agenda item at the summit of the Group of Eight richest industrialized nations opening today in Scotland. The other seven members of the G-8 have promised to adhere to the Kyoto treaty.

Administration supporters say China's economic boom is fueled by profligate waste. China uses three times more energy per dollar of its gross domestic product than the global average and 4.7 times more than the United States, according to a recent study by the U.S. Department of Energy.

But Beijing officials defend the government's record.

"China wants to do its part against global warming, and we have taken many actions," said Zhou Dadi, director general of the Energy Research Institute, the central government's main policy agency on the subject. He cited several key steps in recent years, including these:

- A new law was approved in February to support the adoption of renewable energy sources such as wind and small-scale hydroelectric plants.
- Widespread energy-saving standards have been enacted for household appliances.
- Auto emissions standards will be stiffened by 2007 to a level tougher than current U.S. rules.
- Construction has started on nine high-speed passenger railway lines -- the nation's first -- to connect major cities.

Yet Zhou admitted that these moves were counteracted by broader economic forces.

"In the media there are lots of ads trying to convince people to adopt some kind of American life, a fancy car, a very big house," he said. "This is what everyone wants now. It is part of development; it is a historical process. Energy efficiency is a function of this."

Because of the nation's red-hot economic growth, which is averaging about 9 percent annually, even working-class Chinese such as Pi, the bus driver, are able to buy a car. Pi said he and his wife, Feng Xiaoe, an accountant, had saved for years, and with some help from his brother and parents, they were able to pay the new car's entire \$9,000 sticker price.

"We can go out of the city on weekends," he said, smiling. "We can go fishing, go fly kites."

Bare-bones models are even more accessible to average wage-earners. A Geely sedan with no air conditioning or radio and with a one-liter engine sells for about \$3,600. Government officials say they hope that eventually every Chinese family will own a car -- a goal that is championed by China's powerful domestic auto industry.

As a result, the broad freeways that have been built recently in Beijing and other cities are often gridlocked until late at night. The number of cars in the capital alone has doubled in the past five years to 2 million, and China's auto sales are expected to grow 17 percent this year, after 15 percent growth in 2004 and 37 percent in 2003. There still is lots of room for growth because car ownership is estimated at only 12 million -- less than one per 100 people, a tiny fraction of the U.S. rate of 74 per 100.

Bicycles, once the main mode of transportation, now are forbidden on many principal avenues in big cities. Bicycle lanes and sidewalks have been sacrificed in many places to allow more road space for autos.

Cities nationwide have spun off suburbs as municipal governments sell undeveloped rural land, evict tenant farmers and foster construction of suburban housing developments, golf courses and shopping malls. In the past few years, the ever-familiar signs praising the ruling Communist Party have been replaced by slick billboards hawking real estate -- "Grand Luxury!" "Country Mansion Living!" "Bucolic Repose!"

Many international analysts say this new emphasis on consumption is addicting China to high energy use.

"The world's front line for sustainable development is not in the Amazon jungle. The front line is in cities," said Nicholas You, the chief of strategic planning for Habitat, the U.N. housing agency, who recently completed a study of 10 mid-size Chinese cities.

Chinese urban sprawl, You said, is more carefully planned and less energy-intensive than the anarchic, uncontrolled explosions of cities such as Nairobi, Kenya, or Lagos, Nigeria. But he said China's unparalleled size, with more than one-fifth of the world's population, made even small mistakes gargantuan.

"It's obvious that if China continues urbanizing for the next 20 to 30 years, with another 300 million people moving into the cities and with suburbs being built everywhere, it will cause irreversible changes in energy consumption patterns," You said.

Nationwide, energy use is growing about 15 percent annually, and local governments are building scores of coal-fired power plants to try to stave off the blackouts that have plagued cities in recent summers. The central government predicts that there will be a 5 percent gap between electricity production and consumption nationwide this summer, producing more blackouts and brownouts.

China obtains 67 percent of its electricity from coal, and with an estimated 500 years of reserves at current production levels, it has little economic incentive to use alternative fuels.

Nor is there much public awareness of global warming or the need to switch to cleaner energy sources, say leaders of China's tiny environmentalist movement, much of which is subsidized by foreign groups.

"Knowledge of renewable energy is still very low," said Yu Jie, an energy policy analyst for Greenpeace in Beijing. "This is a problem."

But the government's highest circles include many officials who see energy waste and pollution as a severe long-term threat to China's economy and public health. These leaders pushed the new renewable-energy law into fruition in February, an achievement that many foreign analysts call unprecedented for a developing nation.

The law requires power-grid operators to buy electricity from producers of wind, solar, geothermal and small- and medium-scale hydro energy, and will offer financial incentives such as a national fund to foster renewable energy development. It sets the goal of raising renewable energy's share of national consumption from the current level of 3 to 10 percent by 2020. But construction and operation of renewable energy technologies is much more expensive than for conventional coal, oil and gas, and the cost of this switch is estimated at \$80 billion.

Industrial lobbies are fighting hard to water down the law's all-important implementation regulations, scheduled to be announced in November. Among the most controversial issues is whether grid operators will be forced to pay an artificially high price to renewable energy

producers -- as is the case in Germany, which has become the world's leader in renewable energy since it mandated such built-in subsidies in 2001.

China's environmentalists say the devil is in the details.

"It all depends on how ambitious the central government is," said Yu, the Greenpeace analyst. If pricing decisions are left in the hands of local authorities, she said, the implementation may be gutted by provincially owned utility companies, known as the "electrical tigers."

As part of its drive to add nonpolluting power sources, the government also is starting the world's largest nuclear energy construction program since the 1970s. As many as 40 new nuclear plants are scheduled over the next 15 years, supplementing the country's nine existing plants, to create a capacity of 40,000 gigawatts. This campaign may become partly financed by the Bush administration -- the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission has approved a bid by Westinghouse Corp. to construct four of the reactors, and the U.S. Export-Import bank has approved \$5 billion in loan guarantees. Westinghouse's main competing bidder is a French-German consortium.

Last week, however, amid growing anti-China sentiment in Congress, the House voted 313-114 to block the Westinghouse financing. The prospects for similar legislation in the Senate are uncertain.

Even with the new expansion program, nuclear energy will contribute only 4 percent of China's power supply by 2020, up from 2.3 percent now. In contrast, nuclear plants provide 20 percent of electricity in the United States and 35 percent in Europe.

But the main weakness of China's campaign for energy efficiency and emissions reduction may be the government's inability to enforce its own edicts.

For example, the energy conservation campaign is being roundly ignored in Beijing and other major cities. Lights in many commercial buildings are on all night, and even structures under construction are often brightly lit from top to bottom as if decked out for a festival.

In December, the State Environmental Protection Agency gained headlines nationwide by shutting 32 new coal power plants that had been built by local governments despite violating the federal agency's air emissions standards. Chinese and foreign environmentalists viewed the move as a sign that the country was finally getting serious about clean-air regulations.

Yet the shutdowns had little impact. All the power plants simply paid fines of 200,000 yuan (about \$24,000), the maximum that the federal government could levy, and restarted operations within a few months -- in most cases without any attempt to comply with the federal rules. "We have a saying that if you obey the law, you will have a higher cost, but if you violate it, your cost will be lower," said Ren Haiping, a policy researcher for the environmental agency.

He noted that the agency's officials outside Beijing were under the direct control of provincial and city officials rather than the agency's own headquarters. "If our officials in a province shut down a power plant, for example, they can be fired by the local mayor," said Ren. "It is very sad. We do the best we can, but it is not much."

Our View: Panel's cow data is mostly hot air

[Editorial in the Merced Sun-Star Wed., July 6, 2005](#)

All this time we've been looking at cars, trucks, planes and trains as the villains that leave the Valley's air pollution among the worst in the nation. Now, some are shifting the blame from transportation to the tail ends of cows as the overall smog culprit.

Seriously, folks at the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District apparently think "emissions" from cows have dirtied our air more than any other source. We think they're grazing in the wrong field with that pronouncement. Which pollutes more: a cow or a Kenworth?

Just imagine. If cows' "exhaust" is what is turning our air into a barely breathable gas, maybe we need to step up to the next level. Agriculture and technology need to get together to come up with mufflers for cows. Yes, that's it. This could be the next big industry as great minds invent the cow-catalytic converter, the modern-day Midas of methane. Not only would such a device curb the

continual outpouring of field gasses into the atmosphere, but these Holstein-halters or Guernsey-governors could provide the precise empirical data everyone's craving now about pollution sources.

The same inventive souls who would fabricate fanciful Flowmasters or ozone odometers for Bossy can figure out how to install, monitor and replace these dairy air filters as they wear out, fill up or their "hosts" are put out to pasture, so to speak. It would create more jobs in ag and add some more layers of regulation that some officials desperately crave.

While these methane- mitigating maneuvers may be off in left field, we'd have to say that the air district's estimate that each cow produces more than 20 pounds of volatile organic compounds a year is somewhat ambitious and difficult to support. That's why it's so important that more research is conducted to produce a number that is definitively accurate. Requiring dairies to pony up even more fees due to a supposed pollution burden is another example of the smog target being unfairly placed around ag's neck when we really don't know for sure whether it should be placed there at all.

Let's stop grasping at straw and put the focus on what we know causes pollution. We need tighter, stricter standards on fossil fuel-burning engines and incentives to seek alternative energy power sources -- and an accurate assessment of cows' impact on our foul air.

Help for valley promised

[Editorial in the Bakersfield Californian Wed., July 6, 2005](#)

There's been too much talk and not enough action to cure the San Joaquin Valley's unique problems. Former Gov. Gray Davis came to Bakersfield to focus attention on the valley's problems and talked about the state taking action to improve the area's economy and quality of life. Nothing happened.

Now Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger is talking about helping the valley solve its problems.

He came to Fresno to address the Central California Mayors Conference. The governor noted that, "The valley is the heart of California but has a history of neglect by the state and federal government."

So true. The area receives less state and federal assistance than any other region in the state, according to the governor's office.

The valley is beleaguered by high unemployment, suburban sprawl and some of the nation's dirtiest air.

Schwarzenegger optimistically proclaimed: "This will be a time of action. I guarantee you that -- action, action, action."

We'll see.

It's easy to be skeptical about the action speech after benign neglect of the valley.

But maybe this time it will be different. By executive order, Schwarzenegger has created the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley.

The partnership will include eight state cabinet secretaries, two deputy chairpersons, eight governor-appointed local government officials and eight business leaders, also appointed by Schwarzenegger.

"I want to make this task force a model for how state governments can work together more effectively with local governments and the regional economy," the governor told the mayor's

conference. "The valley is home to the richest agricultural region in the world, a pathway for interstate commerce and one of the fastest-growing regions in our state."

Democratic Sens. Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer issued statements of support.

Assemblywoman Nicole Parra, D-Hanford, who is sponsor of a bill that would have created a similar task force, said her proposed legislation was prepared in case it is needed to improve or extend the timeline of the governor's order.

She is also firm about action being taken. "We don't need another plan, we don't need another study," she said. "We're beyond that."

Parra wants the group to target ways to create jobs. "We have a huge unemployment rate," she said. "But we don't have the job training programs."

The valley unemployment rate in the winter often hits the 12 to 14 percentage mark compared with a statewide average of 5.8 percent.

The San Joaquin Valley partnership is expected to meet soon and focus not only on jobs but also education, air quality and health care.

Its goals include:

- * Identify projects for public dollars.
- * Gain federal support for key valley initiatives.
- * Partner with universities and colleges to study topics of interest to the valley.
- * Review state regulations and their impact on the valley.

The partnership is in effect until Nov. 6, 2006. At that time members will submit a plan on how to improve in the region that extends from Kern County north to San Joaquin County.

Until then, the partnership should issue regular progress reports to let us know that action really is being taken.

Focus on Africa

[Editorial in the Fresno Bee Wed., July 6, 2005](#)

Britain's Blair has the right idea on path world powers should take.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair once grumbled that the scattershot approach to global issues by leaders of the seven major industrial powers at their annual summit meetings diluted the real-world impact of their deliberations. He was too polite: What began in 1975 as an informal discussion soon turned into oversized photo ops that usually achieved little.

As host this year, starting today in Gleneagles, Scotland, Blair decided to make the Group of 8 summits - illogically, Russia is now included - focus on two main subjects: Africa and climate change.

Getting President Bush to join in a concerted plan to tackle global warming is unlikely. But Africa deserves the spotlight. Of all regions, it is the poorest, the worst afflicted with rampaging diseases - HIV/AIDS and malaria most devastating - and one whose well-being is more critical to the rest of the world than many may suppose. Terrorism and deadly contagious diseases recognize no boundaries.

The entertainment world raised the world's consciousness two decades ago with fund-raising concerts to combat famine in Ethiopia. It is back with more, this time seeking not direct cash

contributions but a sustained campaign to end poverty and its associated maladies once and for all, with primary emphasis on Africa. Such an ambitious agenda, such a daunting task. No doubt many will be unhappy with whatever emerges from the meeting.

Bush has been much maligned for being stingy with aid. That's mostly unfair: Although U.S. aid is lower as a percentage of U.S. gross domestic product than that of most wealthy countries, he has increased aid, especially to Africa, more than his predecessors. He has agreed to billions in debt relief, and last week added \$1.2 billion to fight malaria and \$500 million for education. But having rejected Blair's call for doubling aid to Africa, Bush goes to Scotland on the defensive.

Yet he has a case to make: As important as more aid is, it can succeed only if it includes stringent controls over how it is used (the central and most criticized feature of his Millennium Challenge Account), demonstrable attempts by recipient governments to attack corruption and to develop effective management systems and a sustained, multilateral effort to coordinate aid.

That said, America still gives too little, given its resources and the magnitude of the need. And the failure of both the United States and the European Union to slash subsidies to their farmers, which put African farmers at a huge competitive disadvantage, is a major barrier to Africa's progress. Aid is important; expanding fair trade is even more so.

Having been put on the spot as at no previous summit, G-8 leaders this year must respond to Blair's challenge by committing to aid programs, to their early implementation, to fairer terms of trade for all poor countries and to meeting the necessary cost.

This could be a turning point in history, if today's leaders have the vision and courage to make it so.

Bring on LNG

[Letter to the S.F. Chronicle, Wed., July 6, 2005:](#)

Editor -- Your editorial, "LNG coming near you?" (July 5), shows a great lack of understanding of basic physical and chemical processes.

California should be importing as much natural gas as possible, because it is a much cleaner fuel than many other fuels that it replaces, and its use will reduce our [air pollution](#).

LNG (liquefied natural gas) has only slightly more problems than other gaseous hydrocarbons like butane and propane that we use every day in large quantities.

An LNG terminal for the Bay Area could help us achieve [cleaner air](#).

James Gingrich, Lafayette