

Study: Diesel Exhaust Blamed for Deaths

By DEVLIN BARRETT, Associated Press Writer

in the S.F. Chronicle, L.A. Times and other papers

Wednesday, February 23, 2005

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Emissions from old diesel engines cause more than 20,000 Americans a year to die sooner than they would have otherwise, an environmental group estimated Tuesday.

An industry group criticized the findings as outdated and misleading.

The metropolitan areas with the highest number of early deaths from diesel engines were New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago, according to the Boston-based Clean Air Task Force. The study included the surrounding suburbs, so New York's estimated total of 2,729 deaths included parts of New Jersey and Connecticut.

The states with the most deaths were New York with 2,332, California with 1,784, and Pennsylvania with 1,170, according to the group.

The group said it based its figures on the most recent government emissions data — from 1999 — and from public health studies of the effects of various types of air pollutants.

Conrad Schneider, co-author of the report, said regulations designed to make new diesel engines cleaner don't affect millions of older trucks, buses and construction engines.

"Those are great rules, they will hold new engines to higher standards. ... In the meantime, we're stuck with a legacy of dirty diesel engines," said Schneider, advocacy director for the Clean Air Task Force, a coalition of regional and local groups.

The Environmental Protection Agency last year required new diesel engines on trucks and buses to cut in half the amount of nitrogen oxides produced. In 2007 emissions are to be cut further.

Since many older diesel engines can run for 30 years, more action is needed by federal, state, and local governments to retrofit existing diesel engines to run more cleanly, the group said.

Retrofits for a typical transit bus can cost about \$5,000 to \$7,000.

The head of a Washington-based industry group criticized the report's assumptions and conclusions.

"I think they have overstated the risk here using data that's six years old," said Allan Schaeffer, executive director of the Diesel Technology Forum.

Schaeffer said it takes eight modern tractor trailer engines to produce the same amount of pollution generated by one such engine made twelve years ago, and that diesel exhaust comprises just 4.4 percent of fine particle pollution.

"Our industry is getting cleaner faster than most other industries out there," Schaeffer said.

Diesel pollution is blamed for contributing to asthma, respiratory diseases, and heart attacks. The study estimates the risk of health complications from diesel exhaust for people living in cities is three times higher than the risk for those in rural areas.

On the Net:

Clean Air Task Force report:

Diesel Technology Forum:

<http://www.catf.us/goto/dieselreport>

<http://www.catf.us/goto/dieselreport>

<http://www.dieselforum.org> www.dieselforum.org <http://www.dieselforum.org>

Worst Cities, States for Diesel Exhaust

By The Associated Press

Sidebar to above

Tuesday, February 22, 2005

Estimated annual early deaths from diesel pollution, according to estimates from the environmental group Clean Air Task Force:

By state:

1. New York 2,332
2. California 1,784
3. Pennsylvania 1,170
4. New Jersey 880
5. Texas 879
6. Illinois 878
7. Florida 805
8. Ohio 769
9. Michigan 484
10. Massachusetts 475

By metropolitan area:

1. New York 2,729
2. Los Angeles 918
3. Chicago 755
4. Philadelphia 727
5. Boston 391
6. Houston 356
7. San Francisco 291
8. Miami 288
9. Baltimore 285
10. Detroit 279

Ideas in full bloom

Almond growers work to reduce pollution

By Dana Nichols

Stockton Record, Wednesday, Feb. 23, 2005

LIVINGSTON -- Almond grower Scott Hunter normally has his hands full tracking bees and blossoms this time of year.

Instead, he spent three hours Tuesday talking about pesticides and dust at his Livingston orchards.

The almond industry is trying to promote an environmentally friendly image, and Hunter is a point man in the effort.

"I believe we need to leave agriculture better than when we started," he told a dozen newspaper and ag-trade-magazine reporters gathered at his farm.

They were there for the first Environmental Stewardship Bloom Tour, sponsored by the Almond Board of California.

Some of the tour was salesmanship, including a section devoted to equipment dealers touting the dust-reducing features on their almond harvesters. But the tour was also a chance for the almond industry to get public credit for work it has been doing for years.

The Almond Board has been particularly successful at helping farmers to reduce their use of various sprays referred to as "dormants," because they are used in the winter when trees are dormant.

The board has poured \$500,000 of its own money into environmental research and has done extensive education to help farmers find alternatives to the sprays, said Chris Heintz, director of research for the board.

In the past, agricultural-extension agents recommended that almond growers routinely use dormant sprays containing powerful organophosphate chemicals such as diazinon. The sprays were used to prevent infestations of over-wintering pests such as the peach twig borer and San Jose scale.

But Almond Board research found that for many farmers, the sprays were wasted money.

"We can get by many times without using a dormant spray," said Roger Duncan, a University of California Agricultural Extension farm adviser in Stanislaus County.

Now, Duncan recommends that farmers put out traps for the pests and use the sprays only when the bad bugs are present.

Also, some farmers such as Hunter have hooked sensors to their spraying machines to make sure jets of pesticides are released only at trees. The nozzles close between trunks.

He said that cuts pesticide use 30 percent to 60 percent in his orchards.

The dormant sprays are a worry, because chemicals such as diazinon have been showing up in the San Joaquin and Sacramento rivers, sometimes at levels high enough to kill aquatic life, according to a 2004 report by the California Department of Pesticide Regulation.

The Almond Board's efforts have won it respect from pollution and pesticide regulators and at least one independent water pollution watchdog.

G. Fred Lee, a chemist and environmental engineer, said the Almond Board is among the more progressive ag industry groups at addressing water pollution.

But the decline in the past decade in dormant spray use does not mean the problem is solved. Bill Croyle, a unit supervisor at the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board, said he's keeping an eye on the shift to so-called alternative pesticides such as pyrethroids.

"Those potentially cause an even bigger impact on water quality," he said.

In the summer, however, almond orchards cause few water pollution problems and relatively little irrigation water leaves the orchards, Croyle said.

But it is during harvest from late August to early October when almond-related air pollution peaks.

"It just causes terrible dust clouds continually for more than a month," said Anthony Presto, a spokesman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Almonds are a major crop in San Joaquin County, with a value of \$126 million in 2003. Only milk and grapes brought in more dollars.

Presto said that at times in the fall more than half the dust in the air here is from farming and that nut harvesting is the single biggest culprit.

The problem is that ripe almonds need to stay dry. Spraying large amounts of water on the ground is not an option. And harvest machines traditionally use blasts of air to clean dust and debris away from the crop.

Machines on display at Tuesday's event used various features to reduce the dust. One used a brush to gather the nuts instead of the fan-powered vacuum on conventional models. Others reduce the air used in cleaning, or hold it in tanks that recirculate and remove the dust and debris on a conveyor belt rather than through blowing.

Hunter, meanwhile, is doing his part by following a plan he crafted to control dust on his farm's roads. He waters some key roads in the summer and posts signs warning drivers to keep their speed below 15 mph to keep dust down.

GM hones its Sequel fuel-cell system

Goal of marketable model by 2010 is nearer as range and acceleration improve.

By Mark Glover -- Bee Auto Editor
Sacramento Bee, Wednesday, Feb. 23, 2005

Three years ago, General Motors wheeled what looked like a giant silver skateboard onto a stage at the North American International Auto Show in Detroit, touting the creation as a glimpse of the automotive future.

Some "oohed." Some "ahhhed." Some laughed and walked away, muttering something about a one-time "Star Wars" gimmick assembled to get attention.

But GM did not walk away from its concept, initially dubbed the AUTOmomy but later renamed Hy-wire. The automaker has upgraded the vehicle, now called the Sequel, and is parading it around the country.

The Sequel made its formal debut at last month's auto show in Detroit, where GM officials and engineers outlined its array of high-tech features. Practical or not, the vehicle is a technological marvel, and it's likely that some Sequel features will ultimately make their way into a car you will drive.

GM's AUTOmomy and Hy-wire concepts touted interchangeable bodies; wire connections to control steering, brakes and acceleration, all managed by twisting, squeezing and guiding handles on a steering pod; electric motors; and a fuel cell that converted hydrogen to electricity.

GM Sequel attempts to go beyond what turned heads the first time.

GM engineers have doubled the vehicle's range to 300 miles and cut zero-to-60-mph acceleration to less than 10 seconds - or about half the time it took the original fuel cell-equipped concept.

Other fuel-cell concepts that have published test results and participated in sanctioned competitions have demonstrated ranges of 200 to 250 miles and posted zero-to-60 times of 12 to 15 seconds.

GM also said it has tweaked Sequel's electronic controls, added computer software and upgraded an advanced propulsion system. And with hydrogen/fuel-cell technology, [Sequel is an environmentally friendly transporter - emitting only water vapor.](#)

"Three years ago, our chairman and CEO, Rick Wagoner, challenged us to completely rethink the automobile," said Larry Burns, GM vice president of research and development and planning. "The AUTOmomy and Hy-wire concepts were the outgrowth of that challenge. ... But, they were concepts. Today, with Sequel, the vision is real - not yet affordable, but doable.

"GM's goal," Burns added, "is to design and validate a fuel cell propulsion system by 2010 that is competitive with current internal combustion systems on durability and performance, and that ultimately can be built at scale affordably."

Sequel still has the skateboard-like frame, but GM has topped it with more-conventional skin - giving it a look and size similar to the current Cadillac SRX crossover wagon.

Regulators accused of bowing to refiners Officials downplay gas emissions in air, watchdog group says

Henry K. Lee, Chronicle Staff Writer

S.F. Chronicle, Wednesday, February 23, 2005

Bay Area air quality regulators are bowing to pressure from the refinery industry and underestimating the amount of gases released by the region's refineries, a vocal watchdog group alleges in a report released Tuesday.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District also isn't doing enough to curtail a refinery procedure known as flaring, in which excess gases are burned off into the air to reduce pressure buildups, the West County Toxics Coalition said.

"The air district really has not told the public the whole truth," Denny Larson, coordinator of the National Refinery Reform Campaign, which is working with the coalition, said Tuesday. "They have been very clever in manipulating data and information, and that's unfortunate."

Air district spokeswoman Teresa Lee denied the accusations Tuesday, saying recently revised figures were the result of changes in methodology as well as a sharp decrease in emissions from 23 flares at the Bay Area's five refineries.

"Refineries are now under increased scrutiny, and they are doing all that they can to reduce emission from the flares," Lee said.

The air district, which covers seven Bay Area counties and parts of Solano and Sonoma counties, is developing a proposal to eliminate routine flaring, which does not include flaring that occurs during equipment startups, shutdowns or malfunctions.

"Routine flaring is prohibited except as necessary for the safe operation of the petroleum refinery or where, due to the quantity or quality of gas, it cannot reasonably be recovered, treated and used as fuel gas at the refinery," the proposed rule says.

If passed, the rule would require refineries to submit detailed plans mandating how each flare is managed.

Local environmental groups say the proposed rule isn't strong enough. But a group representing oil refineries said the rule, if approved, would be the first of its kind in the country.

The controversy began two years ago when the air district reported that refinery flares in the Bay Area occur almost daily and contribute 22 tons of gases daily that contribute to smog, which can be harmful to those with asthma or other respiratory illnesses.

But in an interview Tuesday, Dan Belik, rule development manager for the air district, said the figure should have been closer to 8 tons and that the most recent figure shows that Bay Area refineries are releasing an average of only 2 tons of gases a day. He credited the decrease in part to new compressors at refineries that reduce flaring by returning hydrocarbons to the refinery for use as fuel.

The 22-ton figure resulted because air-district officials made assumptions without analyzing actual data and included methane in their calculations, Belik said. Methane is a greenhouse gas but not an ozone-forming gas, Lee said.

Officials came up with revised figures after recalculating what percentage of the gas was burned, Belik said. Lee said, "There has been a lot of work refining the numbers."

Dennis Bolt, Bay Area coordinator for the Western States Petroleum Association, a trade group, said Tuesday that he believes the air district is still overestimating emissions from flares.

"And so if you're talking about succumbing to industry pressure, they're not doing a very good job about it," he joked.

Cow burps may force regulators to rewrite current dairy pollution laws

By Kerana Todorov

Lodi News-Sentinel, Tuesday, February 22, 2005

Cows' burps may cause more pollution than their manure, according to preliminary scientific data.

What's more, manure in the dairies' free stalls and exercise corrals contribute more to smog formation than manure-filled lagoons do, studies from the University of California, Davis, show.

That's good news for dairy farmers.

Michael Marsh, chief executive officer of the Western United Dairymen in Modesto, said the data means a dairy farmer can manage air pollution more effectively and more cheaply.

Instead of having to buy methane digester technology, which can cost as much as \$1.2 million, dairies could change the cows' feeding regimen and flush stalls more frequently.

Scientists presented the latest cow-pollution information last month to officials who regulate dairies under new state laws aimed to curb air emissions from agriculture.

But whether the preliminary data will be used to exempt larger dairies from more air-pollution control regulations remains to be seen, district officials say.

Under the law that took effect in 2003, large dairies are not defined.

"The jury is out on all this stuff at this point," said Dave Warner, director of permit services for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, the agency that regulates air quality in San Joaquin, Stanislaus and six other counties in the San Joaquin Valley.

The studies were presented after representatives from the dairy industry sued the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District in May.

The lawsuit was filed by Western United Dairymen and the Alliance of Western Milk Producers Inc., and stated that the data used to estimate emission from dairies were flawed.

Milk is the county's top commodity, with gross revenues of \$256 million a year, according to the county's 2003 agricultural report.

The suit was settled in September, and the settlement agreement called for more scientific data before new regulations to lower emissions are put in place.

A group of 12 district officials, environmentalists and dairy industry representatives met in January to review the latest findings and will come up with recommendations by April. The rules should be in place by July 2006.

The research of UC Davis' Frank Mitloehne concludes that cows may produce fewer ozone precursors than previously believed.

Under 1938 data, it was believed that every cow produces 12.8 pounds of pollutants each day. Under that scenario, 700 cows produce 4.5 tons of emissions a year -- the same as 60,000 cars.

Under the new law, dairies with more than 1,954 cows must seek a permit from air officials to meet ozone prevention rules.

San Joaquin County's 151 dairies average about 700 dairy cows each, according to state data from 2003. However, about 280 dairies in the district's eight counties may have more than 1,954

cows, Warner said. So far the district has received 230 applications, he said.

Dairies with 500 cows or more already must obtain permits to satisfy dust-emitting regulations.

Call grows to deregulate home building

Environmental law causing valley's sprawl, critics say

By ERIC STERN - BEE CAPITOL BUREAU

Modesto Bee, Sunday, February 20, 2005

SACRAMENTO - If paving over farmland has become "worse than clearcutting" forests, as Sierra Club leaders told state lawmakers this month, then maybe there's room to examine how a state environmental law might be encouraging sprawl.

It's called the California Environmental Quality Act, or [CEQA](#). It requires a public airing of how construction projects will affect air, roads, wildlife, sewers and the water supply, and it determines ways to offset consequences.

Developers and some city planners long have complained that the CEQA required environmental review process has been abused by "not-in-my-backyard" opponents less concerned about saving the planet and more interested in dragging out projects in costly court battles to scare away developers.

The result, as the builders tell it, is that new subdivisions and apartment complexes get pushed farther away and onto fertile farmland where opposition isn't as intense.

Meanwhile, the demand for housing closer to cities goes up - and with it go prices that push homeownership out of reach.

Now there's talk of eliminating some CEQA reporting requirements on a project-by-project basis to encourage housing closer to the urban core and on old industrial sites.

Although there is concern about giving developers unfettered access to build more homes, "I think there is openness in the environmental community in looking at CEQA as it applies to in-fill areas," said Karen Douglas, acting executive director of the Planning and Conservation League.

Gov. Schwarzenegger pledged during his State of the State address last month to eliminate "regulatory and legal hurdles that delay construction and increase the costs of new housing." He said too many people have been forced to buy cheaper, faraway homes and spend too much time in cars commuting to work, away from their families.

Schwarzenegger told Livingston native Sunne Wright McPeak, his secretary of business, transportation and housing, to work out the details with builders, planners and environmental groups. Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata is planning to introduce the legislative package this week.

A lot of attention is being placed on reforming CEQA. The general idea follows supply-and-demand logic: Build more houses and prices will drop.

Some exemptions exist now

In recent years, legislators have carved out CEQA exemptions to spur housing for low-income families and poor farmworkers. But builders say the effort hasn't been that successful because of rigid requirements. This year's effort is expected to target the middle class.

"It's for everybody who earns less than \$132,000 a year, which is what you have to earn for a median-priced home," said Tim Coyle, vice president of the California Building Industry Association, a home builders group. "Those are folks we're talking about. We're talking about everyone who's priced out of the market."

The median sale price of California homes was \$474,000 in December, according to the California Association of Realtors. It hit \$295,000 in Stanislaus County.

Dense housing is the future

Housing prices have gone up so much that the California dream of a ranch house on a spread of land is coming to an end, said Sande George, executive director of the California chapter of the American Planning Association, which is pushing for CEQA changes and other measures.

There needs to be opportunities for denser housing, such as condominiums and apartments, she said. Those are the projects that NIMBY activists often oppose.

"Not only can not everyone have the single-family house on a quarter acre, they can't afford it," George said. "And if you want to move up, you've got to provide people with at least some limited part of the dream."

Homeownership in California is the third lowest in the country, behind New York and Hawaii.

The Schwarzenegger administration and Senate Democratic leaders also are pushing a plan that would have cities map out how much land they'll need in 20 years to accommodate population growth and then encourage housing within that area, possibly with some shortcuts around CEQA.

Vince Bertoni, vice president of the planning association, said the idea is to get cities to reconsider, for example, having land set aside for the hope of luring businesses one day.

"The need for housing is today," Bertoni said. "Zone for it now. Don't reserve this land for other uses that you hope to get in 20 years."

Some worry about more sprawl

But opening more land for development in wider areas is troubling to slow-growth proponents. And if proposals to ramp down CEQA aren't narrowly tailored to deal with spurring projects only in the urban core, environmentalists expect to wage a serious fight.

"I think developers would like nothing better than the Legislature to throw up their hands and say it's a crisis, it's time to have less planning, less environmental review," said Bill Allayaud, state legislative director of the Sierra Club.

Douglas, of the Planning and Conservation League, said CEQA cannot be blamed for holding up development in California, especially with so many examples of sprawl.

"CEQA has been around for 35 years," she said. "It's been around for real estate booms and real estate busts. It's constantly been there. I wouldn't buy into the rhetoric."

Local activists also argue that CEQA needs to be protected to keep the public involved.

Steve Burke of Protect Our Water in Modesto and Lydia Miller of San Joaquin Raptor Rescue Center in Merced have filed CEQA lawsuits for years to press planners for more information about the impact on water supplies and loss of farmland. They've been involved in some of the biggest fights over new communities in Salida, the Diablo Grande project near Patterson and the University of California at Merced.

Burke said CEQA has helped fight "massive sprawl efforts against a background of inadequate resources that were not studied properly."

Ron Freitas, director of planning and community development for Stanislaus County, was briefed by McPeak about the legislation at a recent meeting for county planners.

Freitas said CEQA "has been used as tool to stop development anywhere from downtown San Francisco to the most remote part of Modoc County ... in many instances, based on a technicality."

But he's not so sure that the Legislature can do much to beat back the Bay Area spillover into the valley.

Just look at the new marketing campaign from one out-of-town homebuilder, he said. Centex Homes is advertising valley farm country as the "Inland Bay."

"I don't think you'll ever stop them from moving over," Freitas said.

S.J. buses could get much cleaner

Transit district expected to spend \$15M on fleet of hybrids

By Erin Sherbert
Stockton Record, Tuesday, February 22, 2005

STOCKTON -- By next year, passengers could be riding on more environmentally friendly buses as the San Joaquin Regional Transit District prepares to buy a fleet of diesel-electric hybrids.

The San Joaquin Council of Governments is expected Thursday to award \$15 million to the district to buy 34 hybrid buses that will serve Stockton city and routes connecting cities in San Joaquin County.

The money will come from the federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality improvement program as well as local money, including Measure K, the county's half-cent sales tax that voters approved in 1990.

With the money, the district plans to replace its oldest and dirtiest diesel buses, officials said.

"We're trying to reduce emissions and the hybrids are allowing us to do that," district spokesman Paul Rapp said. "Hybrid buses allow RTD to continue reducing the environmental impacts to our region's air, land and water."

San Joaquin County is one of two transit districts in the state that has hybrid buses, Rapp said. Last year, the district rolled out two hybrid buses purchased through federal and local funds. It plans to ask for more federal money to continue replacing the diesel buses with hybrids, Rapp said.

Hybrid buses are designed to save fuel and lower emissions with the use of electric motors and a smaller diesel engine. By using less gasoline, hybrids will not emit as much carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide, both of which pollute the air.

Bus riders such as John Vandervort says hybrids are a good idea, especially since they are known for being more fuel-efficient and safer for the environment.

"They're quieter, that's the nice thing about them," said Vandervort, a Stockton resident and daily bus rider. "The buses are noisy and I'd like to see them get a lot quieter and make the air cleaner."

The new hybrids are also better designed, with wheelchair ramps instead of lifts and larger doors.

Scott Butler, regional planner for COG, said the district is getting most of the \$24.2 million that was made available for countywide projects aimed at getting cars off the road or for projects that call for alternative fuels sources.

Other projects that have been recommended for funding include Manteca's bus system, two new commuter cars for the Altamont Commuter Express and new dial-a-ride vehicles for Lodi, Butler said.

Green waste a burning rural issue

Some Granite Bay residents are fed up with neighbors who set their yard scraps and foliage on fire

By Niesha Lofing -- Bee Staff Writer
Sacramento Bee, Tuesday, February 22, 2005

Temperatures are rising in Granite Bay over residents burning their green waste, a typically rural practice that continues to thrive in this changing community.

While burning yard scraps and fallen foliage has been outlawed in most of the state, the age-old practice is shedding light on a growing disconnect in Granite Bay between longtime residents of rural acreage and owners of expensive, upscale homes.

Debate on the issue, which prompted a contentious change in regulations more than a year ago, has been rekindled now that the policy is being re-examined by the Granite Bay Municipal Advisory Council and Placer County supervisors.

"This is one of the most polarizing issues in Granite Bay," said Sean Corcoran, an advisory council commissioner and chairman of the subcommittee on burning. "People either want it or are staunchly against it."

Lori Ryan, who is opposed to green-waste burning, said she was shocked to learn that burning was still allowed when she moved to Granite Bay 10 years ago.

On burn days, she and her children do not venture outside, she said. "You can see the smoke filling up the yard and the whole neighborhood."

Some longtime Granite Bay residents say burning green waste is an economical way to dispose of dry tree trimmings, leaves and brush that need to be cleared in part for wildfire prevention.

Kevin Kemper, who lives in Hidden Valley, said burning is an effective vegetation management tool, especially for people whose properties can't be accessed by tree service and chipping machinery.

"We should compost as much as possible, but fire is another tool for us to use," Kemper said.

Jim Bryan, who has lived in the Granite Bay area for more than 30 years, likened people who oppose green-waste burning to those who move next to a ranch and complain about smells that accompany farm life.

"When you move to the country, what do you expect?" Bryan said.

While Roseville and Rocklin have banned green-waste burning, the practice is allowed with permits in Placer County as long as the county's Air Pollution Control District deems the air quality good enough for a burn day.

The green-waste burn rules were changed in Granite Bay about 18 months ago after an outpouring of resident complaints.

Green-waste burning is allowed in the community from 8 a.m to 5 p.m. the first 15 days of the month if the homeowner has a permit and if the day has been deemed a burn day.

Placer County Supervisor Ted Gaines said the compromise seems to be working well for the community, though small adjustments to the rules still may be necessary.

"This is the sort of issue you're never going to have complete satisfaction with," said Gaines, whose district includes Granite Bay. "In a perfect world, there would be no burning."

While there isn't a lot of harm to the environment associated with burning green waste - mostly because of quick burning and smoke dispersal - the smoke can contribute to hazy conditions and aggravate certain health problems, air quality officials said.

"The larger particles will drop off, but the smaller particles can carry a longer distance and, if inhaled, can be lodged in the respiratory system," said Ann Hobbs, Placer County air quality specialist.

The tiny pollutants are particularly harmful to those suffering from asthma, emphysema or heart disease.

The health risk alone should warrant more caution toward burning green waste, said Granite Bay resident Martha Brandon, who is opposed to burning.

"I think burning has probably outlived its usefulness," she said.

Burning opponents also argue that people often abuse the privilege, adding garbage or waste that should be taken to the dump. Burning garbage is illegal statewide.

South Placer Fire Protection District Chief Tony Corado said the department frequently receives calls regarding Granite Bay residents burning illegal material, ranging from household garbage to tires.

Illegal burns often are spotted because of the thick, dark gray or black smoke they emit. Residents found to be burning waste or other illegal material are subject to fines, Corado said.

For those who don't want to burn green waste, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection provides a free chipping service, and many tree service companies also will chip or compost green waste, Corado said.

Meanwhile, the county is working to institute a green-waste canister program, similar to the one in Sacramento County.

At the advisory council's burn subcommittee meeting Thursday night, members suggested burn times be increased by two hours in May to accommodate property owners trying to clear their land before fire season.

Many pro-burn residents at the meeting said there often aren't enough burn days to get all the brush and green waste cleared.

"I do feel I'm entitled to burn to make my place fire-safe," said John Daniels, who lives in Hidden Valley.

The suggestion will be considered at a future municipal advisory council meeting and eventually by county supervisors.

City drops emissions study

Funds to be spent actually cutting greenhouse gases

By Edie Lau -- Bee Science Writer
Sacramento Bee, Sunday, February 20, 2005

Illustrating how tricky it can be to get a local grip on global warming, the city of Sacramento has bowed out of a voluntary effort to account for its greenhouse gas emissions.

Sacramento was one of 23 charter members when the California Climate Action Registry took shape in fall 2002. The registry is composed of businesses, organizations and governments that want to quantify their output of gases associated with climate change, with an eye toward reducing those emissions.

Two years and many frustrating calculations later, Sacramento city officials concluded the effort was more work and expense than it was worth.

"The city does many things to reduce greenhouse gases every day. We thought that instead of calculating and reporting emissions, we actually could put the money into doing things (to reduce further)," said Brad Shirhall, an environmental projects coordinator assigned the job of greenhouse gas accounting.

Shirhall said the city anticipated having to pay \$88,000 to a third-party certifier to confirm the accuracy of the city's figures - a sum perhaps better spent elsewhere. "You could get three hybrid vehicles out of that, I'd think," he said.

Calculating greenhouse gas emissions has become serious business around the world, particularly in the countries participating in the Kyoto Protocol, which took effect Wednesday.

The United States is not a party to the protocol, a treaty that aims to limit worldwide emissions of carbon dioxide and other gases that trap heat in the atmosphere. Nevertheless, individual states including California have taken steps to address concerns that human-caused climate change may bring severe harm to the environment, public health and the economy in coming decades.

Last year, California was the first state to require automakers to control greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles sold here, beginning with model year 2009.

Two years before that, lawmakers created the Climate Action Registry, a quasi-governmental group that would recruit members from the private and public sectors to calculate their greenhouse gas emissions, report them publicly, then consider ways to cut back.

Sacramento and 22 others signed on immediately, drawn by the idea of being environmental leaders.

Today, most of the original members are still in the registry, with a few notable exceptions. Cities, in particular, have had difficulty participating, said Joel Levin, the registry's vice president of business development.

"Cities do have substantial emissions, but they're desperately broke," Levin said.

Besides Sacramento, San Diego and San Francisco dropped out, he said. Los Angeles and Santa Monica remain.

Levin said the registry has been most successful in recruiting members among utility companies, whose power plants represent major contributors of greenhouse gas emissions. Industrial societies produce carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases chiefly by burning fossil fuels such as oil, coal and natural gas.

Utility members of the registry include the state's largest power companies - Pacific Gas & Electric, Southern California Edison and San Diego Gas & Electric - and many municipal districts and departments, including the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power and the Sacramento Municipal Utility District.

Levin said power suppliers are especially interested in grappling with their emissions voluntarily, fearing that if they don't, government mandates will follow.

"For a city that's completely strapped, they see this (registry) as more of an environmental reputation thing," Levin said. "They don't have the fear of God they'll be regulated."

Nevertheless, Levin said, cities may have significant emissions - potentially from their vehicle fleets and from equipment used in water and sewage plants, among other sources - and the registry is hoping to find a less expensive way for them to participate.

He said the cost of certifying emissions varies greatly depending upon the complexity of the calculations.

In Sacramento, the city ran into bookkeeping problems that portended trouble.

"We had been collecting the data and finding issues in the data: numbers that didn't make any sense; issues that would have probably taken a lot of time to resolve," Shirhall said.

For example: "Why were there records showing garbage trucks getting 700 miles per gallon?"

Shirhall suspects the problem lay in all the numbers employees must key into a computer when they fuel their vehicles: odometer readings, Social Security numbers and vehicle identification numbers. Any mistakes, and the computer rejects the input. After a third attempt, Shirhall said, the computer inserts a default odometer reading of zero.

Shirhall said he never confirmed the hunch, because after he consulted with the city manager's office, the city decided to forgo the exercise and put its efforts elsewhere.

One example: The city adopted a policy last year to buy low-emission vehicles whenever available and practical, even if the cost is higher than for standard vehicles, according to city fleet manager Robert Summerset.

Summerset said out of the city's 112 garbage trucks, for example, 46 are certified low-emission trucks fueled on liquefied natural gas. The city also owns four hybrid sedans, with more on order, he said.

The Sacramento Municipal Utility District's experience with the registry has been quite different from the city's. SMUD was the first registry member to certify and report its emissions.

Bud Beebe, a mechanical engineer who led SMUD's emissions accounting, said the project wasn't easy - the utility, too, ran into discrepancies on vehicle mileage records - but it was doable.

"Once you organize things in the right way, that's the key, of course," Beebe said. He said registry members who struggle with past record-keeping can try to do better in the future, and calculate their emissions when more reliable data are available.

Beebe said it took a full-time employee three months to take stock, and it cost less than \$20,000 to certify the figures.

The calculations found SMUD produced 1.1 million metric tons of carbon dioxide in 2002, and 1 million metric tons in 2003, mainly from its power plants.

To put that in perspective, consuming a 15-gallon tank of gasoline produces nearly 20 pounds of carbon dioxide.

Beebe said taking inventory of emissions is a first step toward making real reductions. "If you don't even know what you're putting out, why do you think you can do a good job reducing them? You've got to know where they're coming from," he said.

Certifying emissions also allows for public accountability, he said. Beebe said that under a voluntary emissions reporting program run by the federal government in the 1990s, some power plants reported sham reductions. For example, he said, a company that replaced an old generator with a more efficient plant could claim reductions even if the new plant was larger and didn't actually have lower emissions.

"There are reductions against business-as-usual, and real reductions relative to some known quantity," Beebe said. "That comes out when you have consistent rules that are publicly reported."

[Modesto Bee editorial, Tuesday, February 22, 2005:](#)

San Joaquin Valley Air District can tell National Park Service when to burn

The valley's air district has aggressively asserted its prerogatives as the arbiter of when it's OK to burn outdoors.

Apparently, the National Park Service hasn't noticed.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District levied a \$25,000 fine on the NPS for a controlled burn in June in Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Park. We hope payment of the fine will lead to better cooperation and closer coordination between the agencies, and all others working in the valley and nearby mountains.

This is the first time the Park Service has been cited for such a violation, much less fined.

The brush-clearing fire that sparked the confrontation was part of a larger forest-thinning effort. The program is one of the most highly developed such efforts in the nation, and seeks to forestall larger, catastrophic wildfires by clearing the forest floor of underbrush. It also helps younger trees grow.

Park Service experts determined that conditions were good for a burn on June 30 and gave crews the order to start the fires. But the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's experts thought otherwise, and ordered the burn be postponed. The Park Service went ahead and, as it happened, there was no major problem downwind. But the air district issued a citation and a \$75,000 fine.

Negotiations brought that amount down to \$25,000, but the point was made.

"The decision about burning is ours to make," said Wayne Clark, the air district's compliance manager.

Critics of the air district cite the value of controlled burns, but that misses the point. The air district isn't against controlled burns. It just doesn't want them to happen on days when they might do even more damage to those of us who breathe the air.

Both sides sounded conciliatory, and we hope that's sincere. There will be areas of disagreement among scientists, agencies and residents as we grope our way toward cleaner air. But as long as we keep our collective eye on the main purpose, we should be able to ride out such turbulence.

After all, the valley has some of the most polluted air in the nation; it sickens and kills those of us who live here and costs billions of dollars in lost crops and other damage.

Improving that situation is in everyone's best interest.

[Modesto Bee editorial, Friday, February 18, 2005:](#)

Bush administration leaves world to clean up America's mess

Good manners requires that when you create a mess, you help clean it up. Well, the Bush administration is acting with intolerably bad manners.

People all over the world - including our allies, every credible scientist doing climate research, Pentagon planners and even actuaries of insurance companies - know the planet is warming. Scientists have a laundry list of evidence, including melting polar ice caps, rising sea levels, million-year-old glaciers sliding into the sea, dying coral reefs, disappearing species. It's quite a mess.

After more than 30 years of accumulating data, most scientists agreed that greenhouse gases were responsible for global warming and, hence, the mess.

Briefly, anything that burns gas, oil or coal emits a greenhouse gas. That includes vehicles, smokestack industries and coal-fired electricity plants. When these gases collect in the atmosphere they reflect heat back to earth; they also reduce ozone, which acts as the planet's protective shield.

The United States is responsible for emitting a quarter of the greenhouses gases produced in the world today, and has been for generations.

In 1997, most of the world's most powerful politicians were convinced that action was necessary to combat global warming. Meeting in Kyoto, Japan, they signed the Kyoto Protocol, which obligated the world's industrial powers to emit no more greenhouse gases in 2010 than they had in 1990. It was the first step to cleaning up the mess they had helped create.

Originally, the United States was a signatory to the Kyoto Protocol. But when President Bush took office in 2000, he withdrew from the treaty, essentially leaving the rest of the world to clean up a mess that we, in large part, were responsible for making.

Wednesday, 140 nations began enforcing provisions of the protocol. The United States was not among them.

The administration won't even admit the environment is threatened. Measures to reduce greenhouse gases - by increasing vehicle efficiency standards, scrubbing smokestack emissions, finding nonpolluting fuels - aren't even being discussed. Instead, the Bush administration prefers to sneer at international efforts and claims that cleaning up industry would cost jobs.

That particular notion has been proved false. Major corporations such as DuPont, Alcoa and BP, who operate internationally, have already taken steps to reduce carbon emissions without cutting jobs. In the process, they've actually increased energy efficiency, improved technology and saved money.

Most Americans want to help clean up this mess. If President Bush can't lead on this issue, he should get out of the way.

[Letter to the Modesto Bee, Monday, February 21, 2005:](#)

County careless of environment

I would like to thank The Bee for publishing an insightful article on Feb. 7 titled "Counties go solar to save" (Page A-1). You would think that in an area such as this, solar energy would be a hot commodity. The Central Valley offers an abundance of sunshine and has an ever-growing problem with pollution; solar energy is the obvious choice. Rather, it seems that the (Stanislaus) County Board of Supervisors does not see things the same way. Turning to renewable sources of energy should not be looked at as an expense, but rather an investment for the future. The Modesto and Turlock irrigation districts may provide us with energy that is lower in cost than neighboring counties, but for that to become the sole argument in not pursuing solar energy is disgraceful. In addition, the fact that the county has not lived up to its promise to convert its vehicle fleet to alternative power only shows that priorities are in no way to become better stewards of the environment. It's time to take a walk outside to take in the sunshine and a deep breath of the lovely - smog.

MICHAEL C. MOORE

Modesto

[Letter to the S.F. Chronicle, Monday, February 21, 2005:](#)

Freedberg's 'smogmobile'

Editor -- Louis Freedberg's guilt ("My polluting car," Personal Perspective column, Feb. 21) is probably unfounded. His Volvo passed the smog test, so any guilt would have to be based on poor gas mileage. Smog tests measure the percentage of certain pollutants in the exhaust, but not total pollutants. Volume of exhaust isn't measured. A 35 mpg auto might fail a smog test while a 12 mpg vehicle could pass while exhausting three times the quantity of pollutants.

To improve air quality, smog tests should measure total pollutants exhausted. This could be accomplished by including a measurement of exhaust volume, or with the current equipment by introducing a factor based on published gas-mileage data for each vehicle. Exemptions could be granted for vehicles documented for business use.

As "pollution-busting-efforts" go, these changes would do much more for air quality than buying older autos.

Ervin Jindrich, Mill Valley

Editor -- Like Louis Freedberg, I own a 20-year-old Volvo that I have no intention of giving up.

Would my modernizing improve California's air? I suppose. But it would also require producing more iron, copper, aluminum, plastics, rubber, and other commodities too numerous to mention. All of these activities pollute our environment and consume limited energy.

What Freedberg should have asked the Bay Area Air Quality Management District is: "What is the life-cycle environmental cost of retaining this automobile compared with buying a new one?" I suspect the answer would have been "That's not our problem."

The balkanization of our environmental management efforts often produces unresolvable conflicts among resource issues, with no one taking responsibility for overall planetary health.

John T. Nichols, Oakland