

Air bill irritates

By Seth Nidever

Hanford Sentinel, March 16, 2005

HANFORD -- A repeat California Senate bill to shake up the local air district's board of directors is once again drawing opposition from the Kings County Board of Supervisors.

SB 999, proposed by Mike Machado (D-Linden), would increase the size of the 11-member San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District board by adding three "at-large" state appointments from a list of nominees provided by medical and environmental organizations.

That part of the proposal prompted the Kings County Board of Supervisors Tuesday to send a letter to Machado voicing its unanimous opposition to his bill.

In the letter, drafted by County Administrative Officer Larry Spikes, the board said that the list of nominating organizations was too narrow and that the bill unfairly excludes employers or business owners regulated by the district.

The board also opposes another part of the bill that would reduce Kings and Madera counties to one combined appointment. Currently, each county has its own representative on the board.

Virtually the same letter was sent last year to oppose the bill, which returns to the state senate this year after dying in committee in 2004, said Mary Gallegos, deputy county administrative officer.

Gallegos said the bill runs the risk of making the district board dangerously unaccountable.

"Folks who are appointed that haven't been in an elected capacity can be there for other agendas," Gallegos said.

The current 11-member district board consists of three representatives from district cities and one from each of the district's eight counties.

But the bill's defenders say it is designed to make district board members less beholden to interests that slow down implementation of clear air targets.

The district is currently facing a pending lawsuit for its failure to meet rule-generating targets for so-called PM 10 pollution from dust particles, waste burning and automobiles.

Such rules, and the attainment deadlines that go with them, are necessary to get the district out of the Environmental Protection Agency's non-attainment category.

According to the EPA, the San Joaquin Valley has the most polluted air in the nation. Heavy fines could be imposed if the district doesn't clean up its air by established deadlines.

"If you take a look at some other districts, they've made significant progress in meeting air quality targets," said Colin Grinnell, a legislative aide to Sen. Machado.

Grinnell said the change would give the current board needed expertise.

Currently, the only requirement for serving on the board is appointment by a city council or county board of supervisors.

SB 999 would require the three at-large appointments to have "demonstrated interest and expertise in air quality," Grinnell said.

"You'll get a more diverse debate," he said.

Air district staff scoffed at the notion that there wasn't enough expertise on the current board.

"That's what you have staff for. Board members collectively have decades of experience. Putting a scientist on the board isn't going to change that," said Phil Jay, district counsel.

Jay said the bill amounted to an attempt on the part of the bill's supporters -- which includes such groups as the Sierra Club and the American Lung Association -- to "pack it with people who they think might reflect (their) political views."

But new viewpoints are precisely what is needed, according to Grinnell.

"I think that any additional board members will help the board craft better rules," he said.

For Grinnell, the issue is the district's failure to meet rule-making deadlines in eight PM 10 target areas it submitted to the Environmental Protection Agency.

Jay disputed that, saying the district was only out of compliance in two areas at press time.

Jay also disputed the notion that district tardiness reflects a failure to deal with air pollution. Separate programs implemented during the delayed rule-making process are more than making up for the shortfalls, he said.

"Technically, (the district) is behind on the rules, but it's not affecting the progress of the district in meeting its goals," he said.

Local officials make virtually the same argument.

"We're doing the best we can with the air, and we're going to continue to do the best we can," said Tony Barba, Kings County's District 4 supervisor who also serves as Kings' appointment on the air district's board of directors.

Would changing the board's makeup alter its performance? Not according to air district and Kings County officials.

"Air quality is essential. But changing the (board) composition at this point in time, there just doesn't seem to be any reason for it," Gallegos said.

It remains to be seen whether the bill will see the light of day. The same version died in committee last year -- the second time it was introduced, according to Gallegos.

Proponents like Grinnell say they'll make changes to build a broader coalition as the bill comes up for consideration.

Gallegos hopes they aren't successful. "I hope (its) chance of passing is zero," she said.

Pacific Ethanol To Break Ground In Madera, Focus On Visalia Next

Valley Voice Newspaper, March 17, 2005

Visalia - Fresno based Pacific Ethanol is ready to break ground on their 137 acre Madera site on a 35 million gallon ethanol plant after completion this month of its public share offering. That should be wound up March 23, says Tom Koehler, vice president of the company.

The new Madera plant with a 10 megawatt cogeneration plant and a carbon dioxide plant next door, will be operational by June 2006.

Besides making about \$50 million annually in ethanol-blended for motor fuel it will make several byproducts - about \$5 million worth of distillers grain for cattle feed and some 100,000 tons of CO2 used in the bottling industry. While most Midwest ethanol plants vent their CO2 into the air, the company has formed a "strategic partnership", says Koehler, with another firm to make the byproduct.

The start up company is the second major ethanol plant to begin construction in central California, with the first being Phoenix Biosystems' Goshen ethanol plant expected to be operational later this year.

Most important for Visalia Koehler says once the project breaks ground in Madera the company will focus on Visalia where they own over 100 acres across from the Visalia airport on Highway 99. "We plan to make Visalia the first cellulose based ethanol plant in the state - a technology that after years of research Koehler says is ready to take to production stage.

Most ethanol is made from corn distilled like moonshine down to its component parts and used primarily as a fuel and fuel additive. While corn is abundant primarily in the Midwest, its supply is not inexhaustible compared to ethanol made from cellulose - farm waste like orchard prunings or other woody products like corn stalks. This turns what would be waste material, says Koehler, into fuel for the future in large volume.

In California the ethanol is blended in the gasoline at 5.7% and its use has risen to nearly 1 billion gallons annually in the state. That's why Koehler and others suggest there is plenty of room for growth in the ethanol industry. At least four plants are planned in the central valley right now with total production of under 200 million gallons - one fifth of the current state need.

Ethanol prices have risen as gasoline prices have gone up in recent years having risen some 40% in the past two years, says the Wall Street Journal, helping to stir interest across the Midwest in rural communities to invest in the plants all over the corn belt helping to revive small towns.

While much is made in the US of the fact no new gasoline refineries have been built in the US to produce more gasoline in the past 20 years the number of new ethanol plants making motor fuel is now over 80 with some 40 more under construction. Ethanol production was near zero in 1980 and will reach 4 billion gallons in 2005.

But Koehler says a California Energy Commission report suggests California's production of ethanol could reach 3 billion gallons in the future - about what might be needed if the state approves increasing the blend of ethanol with gasoline to 10% instead of 5.7%. Koehler has been lobbying the state - the governor's office and CARB to allow the increase - a blend found across the US but not allowed here as yet. "I predict in the next 12 months CARB will approve the increase," says Koehler, citing the strong support of the governor for renewable fuels like ethanol.

Motorists are already shocked by gasoline at \$2.30 a gallon this March - a number likely to go up substantially this summer with the increased demand in the driving season. Oil companies cite tight supply as the reason. But an increase to 10% means more fuel and cleaner air too, notes Koehler, citing the lower emissions for the fuel including green gas related CO2 emissions.

"If all gasoline were blended at 10% the state would reduce CO2 emission by 6.4 million tons per year compared to standard gasoline," says Koehler.

In the meantime, ethanol plants can help local economies with Pacific Ethanol promising to use 20,000 acres of locally produced corn per year, creating 30 jobs at their Madera plant, plowing in about \$110 million into the local economy each year and being an economic stimulus to other industries.

Near Pixley, Calgren continues work on a \$70 million 40 million gallon ethanol facility on 99 at Rd. 120. Matt Schmitt, principal with Calgren says they are nearing completion of their financing negotiations and expect to break ground in June and be running about a year later - the same timetable as Pacific Ethanol.

Schmitt says the plant in between California Milk and JD Heiskell has "certain synergies" with both facilities in that they all have need of water run power. All use steam. "Cogeneration makes a lot of sense for all of us," says Schmitt, as it would "any user in California of over one megawatt." California Milk is already installing a cogen adjacent their plant. The Valley Voice has reported the company may expand at the site. Calgren also will market the feed byproduct and the CO2.

New Liquid Natural Gas Plant Headed For Harris Ranch

Valley Voice Newspaper, March 17, 2005

San Joaquin Valley - Valley school buses, garbage trucks and other municipal fleets will have a local source of liquid natural gas for fueling their vehicles once a new Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) plant is built in the next 2 years at Harris Ranch on I-5. Southwest Transportation Agency, a joint power entity that runs school buses and other public vehicles in the valley has contracted to build

a 30,000 gallon per day liquidization plant on Harris property taking supply from high pressure natural gas lines that run along I-5 owned by PG&E.

Harris Ranch itself is a big LNG user with 20 large trucks paying about \$1.08 per gallon for its fuel currently. But fuel is now trucked in from Wyoming that costs 40 cents per gallon now. Other users, like the City of Fresno who run their garbage trucks on LNG, will save big time for a nearby supply along with an end to fear of not being able to pick up garbage all over Fresno if those Wyoming truckloads of LNG are snowed in up there. The City of Fresno uses one million gallons per year. They have 7 LNG garbage trucks and are converting the rest of their fleet to the new fuel.

Known as the cleanest burning fossil fuel, natural gas is also a less costly fuel per gallon than gasoline or diesel or other fuels. The problem has been supply on the West Coast. But now this new technology allows production on a much smaller scale, says Lew Nelson Public Works director for the City of Tulare who has adopted LNG technology.

There should be adequate LNG supply for other public fleets, says Lew Nelson, who sits on the San Joaquin Valley Clean Cities Coalition board. Because the project is partially funded with public monies, other jurisdictions use the fuel will get it at below market rates as well, says Nelson.

Tulare made a huge commitment to LNG technology in their \$2 million natural gas fueling station that powers the city's buses and other city vehicles.

The Harris Ranch plant, that is similar to a Sacramento facility based on new technology developed by the Idaho National Laboratory. Nelson says the Clean Cities group is hopeful that LNG technology can help move the trucking industry in California to cleaner burning fuel and is applying for a grant to try to fund several milk trucks that use LNG as their fuel source.

The possibility of LNG as a fuel source could take a big jump in the next few months as Honda releases a home fueling station technology, named Phil, that allows you to at least partially fill up at home from your natural gas supply each night. The South Coast Air District promises an incentive of \$500 for installation of Phil units.

Besides Fresno and Tulare, Bakersfield uses LNG along with Waste Management.

The US Department of Energy is working to connect a "Clean transportation corridor" that includes I-5 and Highway 99 to encourage the conversion of long haul trucks to much cleaner burning LNG technology. Big companies Ralphs, Vons and American Stores along with UPS and Perrier Arrowhead have vowed to use the natural gas fueling stations available on 99. Fowler and Tulare each have stations available to the public.

Liquid natural gas can be made for as little as half the cost of compressed natural gas and as low as a third of the cost per gallon of diesel. The clear, colorless, odorless liquid must be super cooled to be liquified, but is neither corrosive or toxic, says the California Energy Commission.

Possible Mercury, Autism Connection Found in Study

Texas school districts with the highest level of the toxic metal had the highest rate of the disorder, researchers say.

By Thomas H. Maugh II, Times Staff Writer
LA Times, March 17, 2005

Texas researchers have found a possible link between autism and mercury in the air and water.

Studying individual school districts in Texas, the epidemiologists found that those districts with the highest levels of mercury in the environment also had the highest rates of special education students and autism diagnoses.

The study does not prove that mercury causes autism, cautioned the lead author, Raymond F. Palmer of the University of Texas Health Science Center in San Antonio, but it provides a "provocative" clue that should be further investigated.

"Mercury is a known neurotoxin," said Dr. Isaac Pessah of UC Davis' MIND Institute, who was not involved in the study. "It's rather intriguing that the correlation is so positive," meaning that there was a strong, direct relationship between mercury and autism levels. "It makes one worry."

California has the highest environmental burden of mercury of any state in the country, and it also has what appears to be the highest rate of autism as well — although some critics attribute this perceived high rate to enhanced surveillance associated with the state's special education program.

Autism is a severe developmental disorder in which children seem isolated from the world around them. There is a broad spectrum of symptoms, but the disorder is marked by poor language skills and an inability to handle social relations.

The incidence of autism has grown dramatically over the last two decades, from about one in every 2,000 children to as high as one in every 166. Researchers have been hard-pressed to explain the increase, but many believe mercury to be the culprit.

The purported link between autism and mercury has been a subject of intense debate. In the past it has centered primarily on the mercury-containing preservative thimerosal, which was once widely used in vaccines.

Many parents have argued that thimerosal causes autism because their children seemed to develop the neurological disorder shortly after they received childhood vaccinations.

That link has been largely discredited, and researchers are beginning to look at the potential effects of the metal from other sources.

Mercury is routinely released from power plants burning fossil fuels, and it spreads widely in air and water. Much of the fish consumed in some regions is contaminated with mercury. In California, gold mining was a big mercury source, and there are many mercury hot spots near mines and downstream, such as in Clear Lake.

In the new study, Palmer and his colleagues used Environmental Protection Agency data about the release of mercury in 2001 in Texas' 254 counties and correlated that with the number of special education cases and autism diagnoses in the 1,200 school districts. Texas is fourth in the amount of mercury released into the environment annually, trailing California, Oregon and West Virginia.

The study, which will appear in the journal *Health & Place*, found that for every 1,000 pounds of mercury released into the environment, there was a 43% increase in special education services and a 61% increase in the autism rate.

The exception to the rule was Brewster County, which had a high autism rate but did not report significant mercury levels to the EPA. When Palmer investigated, however, he found that the county had been home to one of the largest mercury mines in the nation.

"Perhaps [the mercury] just stays in the environment forever. We don't know," Palmer said.

More work will be required to determine whether mercury is the agent that causes the disorder. Palmer is expanding his studies to look for historical correlations — attempting to determine, for example, if increases in the rate of autism over time can be associated with increases in mercury release.

Dr. Irva Hertz-Picciatto and her colleagues at the MIND Institute, meanwhile, have begun a potentially more definitive study in which they are measuring the levels of mercury and other toxic metals, such as cadmium and lead, in children with autism to see if they are higher than in healthy children. Results will be available in a couple of years.

EPA Watchdog to Investigate Drilling Method

The technique, used by Halliburton and backed by the White House, was ruled safe in a U.S. study. But an agency engineer says the science was bad.

By Alan C. Miller and Tom Hamburger, Times Staff Writers
LA Times, March 17, 2005

WASHINGTON — The Environmental Protection Agency's inspector general has decided to investigate a whistle-blower's complaint about the Bush administration's handling of hydraulic fracturing, an oil- and gas-drilling technique pioneered by Halliburton Co.

The review was requested by Democratic lawmakers following a Los Angeles Times report in October that included the EPA employee's challenge of an agency study that found hydraulic fracturing posed "little or no threat" to drinking water.

The lawmakers applauded the decision by Inspector General Nikki L. Tinsley, the EPA's internal watchdog.

"Not only are there important environmental questions at stake, but the credibility of a federal agency is also at risk," said Rep. Mark Udall (D-Colo.). "The Bush administration should be using sound science to determine whether or not hydraulic fracturing is polluting our water supplies. It shouldn't rig the process to give special treatment to special interests."

Hydraulic fracturing, a widely used drilling technique, allows access to hard-to-reach oil and gas deposits by pumping liquids underground at high pressure. The liquids sometimes include hazardous chemicals, some of which remain in the ground.

Halliburton is one of three U.S. companies that dominate the fracturing market. Vice President Dick Cheney headed the Houston company from 1995 until 2000. During that time, the company filed a legal brief opposing EPA regulation of the practice.

Halliburton and other energy companies say the technique has proved safe for decades. However, a growing number of geologists and other experts say more study is needed as the practice proliferates.

A Halliburton spokeswoman declined to comment on the decision to look into the complaint.

Tinsley's review comes at a politically sensitive time. A sweeping energy bill backed by the Bush administration includes a provision that would exempt hydraulic fracturing from federal regulation.

The Times had reported that some EPA employees complained about the agency's study of hydraulic fracturing in coal-bed methane fields completed in June.

One of them, Weston Wilson, an environmental engineer in the EPA's Denver office and a 30-year agency veteran, sent Tinsley an 18-page statement challenging the study's findings and methodology. He criticized the EPA for failing to conduct field research and for relying on a panel heavily tilted toward the energy industry to review the study.

Wilson called the review timely.

"Congress is considering a national energy bill, which would allow the oil and gas industry to keep its hydraulic fracturing practices secret," he said. "If this bill passes, American citizens will not know if toxic fracturing fluids are injected into their groundwater supply."

Tinsley has not determined the scope of the review, inspector general spokesman John Manibusan said Wednesday. "There's a lot of issues that were raised. I can't say if we're going to review everything."

In response to Tinsley's decision, EPA spokeswoman Cynthia Bergman said: "We stand behind the report's conclusion that the potential threat to underground sources of drinking water posed by hydraulic fracturing of coal-bed methane wells is low and doesn't justify additional study.... None of the concerns raised by Mr. Wilson would lead us to a different conclusion."

Bergman has defended the panel that reviewed the agency's report as "a representative group." Six of the seven panel members were current or former energy industry employees.

An industry spokesman expressed support for the EPA's handling of the study, as well as its conclusion that hydraulic fracturing did not jeopardize drinking water.

"We were satisfied that EPA did follow the right process with the study," said Bill Whitsitt, president of the Domestic Petroleum Council, a trade association representing large independent natural gas exploration and production companies. "Hydraulic fracturing itself is regulated by states. It is not an environmental issue. And that's essentially what the study found."

Shell Oil's Bakersfield Refinery, Once Set to Close, Changes Hands

By Elizabeth Douglass, Times Staff Writer
LA Times, March 17, 2005

Shell Oil Co. has quietly handed its Bakersfield refinery, once slated for closure, to new owner **Flying J** Inc., a Utah truck stop operator.

Flying J paid a reported \$130 million for the refinery and plans to spend at least that much on an expansion that would sharply increase the plant's gasoline and diesel output. In its current configuration, the facility makes 2% of California's gasoline and 6% of its diesel.

Shell Oil had planned to close the facility in October, but public officials pushed for a sale instead so fuel-hungry California would not lose a source of gasoline and diesel. In January, Shell said it would sell the plant to Flying J.

The deal's final hurdle was cleared last week, when the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District granted Flying J a one-year extension to comply with an emissions rule affecting a few of the refinery's heaters. Shell Oil and Flying J signed the final paperwork for the sale Tuesday and the facility was transferred without fanfare.

"We're officially the owners now," said Jeff Utley, senior vice president of refinery operations for Flying J's refining unit, Big West Oil. "We're pretty excited about moving forward."

Flying J named Gene Cotten the Bakersfield refinery's top manager. Cotten most recently managed two Texas refineries owned by **Valero Energy** Corp. until he left that post in 2003.

The Bakersfield refinery is idled for maintenance; Flying J hopes to have the refinery back to normal production by the end of next week, Utley said.

Privately owned Flying J, based in Ogden, Utah, owns a small refinery in that state and is the nation's largest supplier of diesel fuel.

Pollution plan proposed

Governor says goal is to remove 15,000 polluting vehicles from road

By Hank Shaw, Capitol Bureau Chief
Stockton Record, March 17, 2005

RANCHO CORDOVA -- Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger wants to scrap one polluting car for every California kid hospitalized with asthma.

Schwarzenegger on Wednesday proposed to nearly quadruple the state fund for retiring or repairing "gross polluting vehicles," a move he hopes will go a long way toward cleaning up the state's air.

California's air quality is fragile, and the San Joaquin Valley suffers particularly because smog and other pollutants get trapped in the low-lying region and cannot easily be blown away by the wind.

Experts say pollution in the Valley contributes to more than 1,000 deaths a year

State officials say air pollution also contributes to asthma suffered by roughly 15,000 children who spend time in California hospitals each year. Schwarzenegger says his goal is to retire that many polluting vehicles annually.

To do this, he plans to spend \$16.3 million in the next fiscal year for the Consumer Assistance Program, up from

\$4.5 million this year. The program, which began in 1998, was suspended for two years beginning in 2002 due to budget cuts.

Anyone with a car or truck that fails a smog check can apply to the state for grant of up to \$1,000 to scrap the jalopy, or as much as \$500 to get it up to code.

Most such vehicles are at least 15 years old and emit at least twice as much pollution as allowed under the law. According to the state Bureau of Automotive Repair, a car built in 1980 belches about 30 times as much pollution as one built today.

Schwarzenegger showcased his proposal Wednesday by crushing a 1987 Chrysler New Yorker at the Rancho Cordova Pick-N-Pull auto yard, where old cars and trucks are crushed for scrap or laid out for parts.

"When it comes to the environment, status quo is not an option," he said. "We have to leave things better than the way we found them."

Holding up a 40-pound container of rusty dirt, Schwarzenegger said some of the worst-offending cars can throw that much particulate matter into the air every year.

"This is why we have to get rid of the dirty, polluting cars," he said.

Schwarzenegger's proposal dovetails with similar legislation sponsored by Assemblyman Dave Cogdill, a Modesto Republican whose district includes Calaveras County.

Still in its infancy, Cogdill's plan would focus on the Valley -- home of the nation's foulest air -- and confine the program to gross-polluting vehicles. Cogdill would not raise taxes or fees to fund the program. State registration fees fund the program that Schwarzenegger wants to expand.

Cogdill is toying with offering tax credits or write-offs, but his bill will probably not be ready for debate until next session. Schwarzenegger declined to give an opinion on Cogdill's proposal Wednesday.

The Legislature must agree to spend more on the Consumer Assistance Program before it can take effect, and the state budget is not due until June 30.

Meanwhile, information and applications are available on the Internet at www.smogcheck.ca.gov or by calling the Department of Consumer Affairs at (800) 952-5210.

Decaying cows sent to landfill

Shipments forced by glitch at tallow plant

By JOEL HOODBEE, STAFF WRITER
Modesto Bee, March 17, 2005

Truckloads of rotting cow carcasses were shipped to the Fink Road Landfill for disposal Wednesday after a boiler malfunction at the Modesto tallow plant.

But Stanislaus County officials said they weren't sure whether that was the cause of Wednesday's sour stench in downtown Modesto.

"It was an emergency situation and (Fink Road) was the only place we could take them," said Stanislaus County's Environmental Resources director, Sonya Harrigfeld.

According to the county's Public Works Department director George Stillman, the rendering plant's boiler broke over the weekend, prompting plant officials to store the dead cattle outside.

On Wednesday, the county received a waiver from the state's Integrated Waste Management Board to allow for the dumping of the stripped carcasses at the county landfill.

As many as 10 truckloads of cattle were routed to Fink Road, beginning around 10 a.m., Stillman said. To meet the state's disposal requirements, the carcasses were buried with at least 12 inches of soil on top, Harrigfeld said.

Tallow plant officials declined comment.

Stillman said the state has allowed them to continue dumping carcasses at Fink Road until Friday.

The tallow plant, built near the banks of the Tuolumne River in south Modesto in 1917, is the source of scores of odor complaints to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District each year. But air district spokesman Anthony Presto said the number of complaints has been lower in recent weeks. There were no complaints called in Wednesday, he said.

Oakdale-Riverbank bypass wins vote Homeowner objects to Claribel Road proposal

By JOEL HOODBEE, STAFF WRITER
Modesto Bee, March 16, 2005

A short-handed Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday night designated Claribel Road as a preferred route for study to become the new State Highway 108.

The Claribel corridor is one of seven projects earmarked for study to redirect east-west traffic off the main roads through Riverbank and Oakdale.

The proposed Claribel route would split the city boundaries of Modesto and Riverbank, and skirt Oakdale with the long-term design of connecting to an Oakdale Bypass northeast of town.

There is no timeline for the study, which will be partially financed with \$300,000 set aside by the Stanislaus Council of Governments in 2004.

The vote was 3-0, with Supervisors Ray Simon and Jeff Grover absent. Simon's absence was scheduled, but Supervisor Tom Mayfield said Grover missed the meeting because of a shoulder injury he sustained in a fall earlier in the day.

"At this point, we have to do something; we can't rule in or rule out Claribel," said Supervisor Bill O'Brien, whose district includes Riverbank, Oakdale and most of the upper east side of the county.

The board had been scheduled to vote on the Claribel route March 1 but suspended its decision to allow property owners along the corridor to have a voice in the process. Two property owners spoke Tuesday night, asking supervisors to eliminate Claribel as an option.

"There have been so many road projects that have been proposed and never started, what makes you think Claribel Road will fix the problem of traffic?" asked Steve Andrade, a homeowner on Claribel. "This is our livelihood. I want to live out there. I want to be able to bring my grandkids there to look at the stars."

The Claribel route had already garnered support from the Riverbank City Council, Modesto Chamber of Commerce and some Oakdale City Council members.

The existing Highway 108 extends east from McHenry Avenue north of Modesto along Patterson Road, running through the downtowns of Riverbank and Oakdale.

Also Tuesday, supervisors heard from residents of Patterson, Grayson and other West Side communities over rising concerns about airborne pollutants being emitted by the Covanta Waste-to-Energy plant in Crows Landing. Some residents spoke about an increase in asthma and other breathing ailments among residents living near the facility, which was built in 1989.

Prior to Tuesday night's meeting, John Mataka, a Grayson community activist, organized a rally with about two dozen concerned residents in the courtyard of Tenth Street Place. Many held signs calling for an end to garbage-burning.

"We want clean air and we want it now," said Mataka, a frequent critic of the board over clean-air issues. "The Covanta incinerator is a dying technology. (The board) needs to consider other ways to reduce waste - developing a large recycling center (at the proposed Fink Road landfill site) that would bring jobs to this area. We need to invest in solar energy and wind power, make some clean money."

Sonya Harrigfeld, Stanislaus County's director of environmental resources, and Jim Healy, Covanta's plant manager, responded to the comments made by Mataka and others, saying the plant's emissions are well below the standards allowed by the Environmental Protection Agency.

Ag News

Valley Voice Newspaper, March 17, 2005

Air Pollution Control District has proposed a new rule that would force farmers with 50-plus horsepower, internal combustion engines to replace them in the next two to four years. The rule could be finalized next month.

Ban on **open field burning** will start June 1, 2005 at least for field crops, pruning and weed abatement in the central valley with prohibitions on orchard removals coming in 2007 and other materials in 2010. In order to burn field crops you have to prove there is no alternative that is feasible. The rules come after a proposal of Senator Dean Florez's bill covering ag operations.

Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, March 17, 2005

New candidate needed

Ray Watson correctly claims that we consume some products in Kern County which produce a waste problem somewhere else. But I can't figure out how that statement is supposed to justify our accepting human waste from L.A., which will most likely contaminate our air, soil and groundwater and lower our quality of life.

This confused person should resign because he is not making any sense. Watson has worked hard to dump dairies on Wasco and Shafter, a tire burning plant on Frazier Park, an expanded toxic waste dump on Buttonwillow, a sludge plant on Taft, zero tax dollars on Lost Hills (from the looks of things) and who knows what else is to come?

We on the west side need a representative who responds not only to developers, dairies and sludge importers but to our needs concerning future quality of life issues like cleaner air and protected ground water.

I hope a progressive candidate such as Larry Pearson, city councilman of Wasco, can step up soon to take Watson's place, before it is too late.

TOM FRANTZ, Shafter

Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, March 17, 2005

Place issues on ballot

I am very fortunate to have many good friends in the city of Taft. I was so disappointed to find out that our county supervisors are attempting to locate a sludge project in their area.

The most amazing thing is that residents of Taft had no prior knowledge about the project. Where were the public hearings? Who will protect the concerns of the Taft residents?

Taft and the city of Wasco are in the same boat -- nobody represents us at the county level. A responsible supervisor would know the value of public meetings to gather the spirit and feelings of those he was elected to represent. A responsible supervisor would have called a town hall meeting in Taft as soon as he became aware of this project.

Our County Supervisor, Ray Watson, has stated over and over that people get too emotional over the dairy/sludge issues.

He is absolutely right! Wasco and Taft residents are emotional over the dairy/sludge concerns. We love our communities and we work hard to improve them.

At least in Wasco, with the help of Sen. Dean Florez, we held three public hearings. During those public hearings, local residents were able to hear air, water quality and mosquito experts give scientific evidence.

The evidence was so convincing that over 80 percent of our community supported Measure "U", a 10-mile no-dairy buffer. Watson still has not openly supported the overwhelming stance of our community.

Perhaps it is time for the Kern County Board of Supervisors, to place the dairy/sludge issues on the ballot. It is the only way to find out how all county residents feel about these projects.

LARRY ALONSO PEARSON, Councilman, Wasco