

Air district will pay you to replace gas-burning mower

Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, June 8, 2005

On Saturday morning at Home Depot, your gas-burning lawn mower is worth \$130.

For each drained, gas-guzzling mower, the San Joaquin Valley air district will give out a voucher to buy a \$230 Black & Decker MM875 corded electric mower for \$100, plus tax.

The limit is one voucher per person and supplies are limited, so arrive early.

Individual gas mowers pollute as much as 40 cars driving simultaneously. Electric mowers don't pollute the air.

Saturday's event will be at Home Depot, 2655 Mount Vernon Ave., from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

State boards want landfill cleaned up

By MICHAEL G. MOONEY

Modesto Bee, Wednesday, June 8, 2005

In the mid-1980s, state experts determined that the Bonzi Landfill on Hatch Road was polluting the air around it and the groundwater beneath it.

Today, the 128-acre landfill — about three miles southwest of Modesto — continues to pollute the area's water and air, despite multiple cleanup orders issued by the state's Regional Water Quality Control and Integrated Waste Management boards.

The latest cleanup order from the water board was issued at the end of April. The landfill also received violation notices from the water board in October 2003 and January 2004.

A separate order, this one from the waste board, also demands the landfill solve its chronic landfill gas problem.

Both orders set specific timelines — the waste board deadline is Sept. 30, the water board's is Nov. 30.

If sufficient progress is not made in time, the owners and operators of the landfill — Ma-Ru Holding Co. Inc. and Bonzi Sanitation Landfill Inc. Partnership — could face tens of thousands of dollars in fines, the loss of their landfill permit and possible prosecution by the state attorney general.

Steve Bonzi, chief executive officer of both companies, did not return repeated telephone calls Tuesday. A spokeswoman for the landfill said Bonzi would be "in and out" of the office Tuesday. Though state and Stanislaus County officials don't know what long-term health effects, if any, the landfill's chronic pollution problems have caused the residents of nearby Riverdale Park Tract, they say there is no immediate cause for alarm.

Sonya Harrigfeld, director of the county's Department of Environmental Resources, said people living in Riverdale Park Tract shouldn't worry about their water.

"I don't have any evidence to be concerned about a significant health risk in that area," Harrigfeld said.

Residents of Riverdale Park Tract have access to city of Modesto water, Harrigfeld said, and also rely upon a well-based community water system.

Potentially harmful chemicals such as vinyl chloride and trichloroethylene, trichloroethane and benzene (all components of gasoline) have percolated into groundwater beneath the landfill for the past two decades.

Harrigfeld, however, said recent tests show that the community well serving homes in Riverdale Park Tract is safe. The well water is chlorinated, she said, but no other treatment is necessary.

Wet years can be a problem

Concentrations of chemicals coming from the landfill, state officials say, become more of a problem during wet years, such as this one.

The substances are commonly referred to as "volatile organic compounds" and can cause a variety of health problems when mixed into water supplies or released into the air.

Over two decades, state-required monitoring wells at the Bonzi Landfill also have turned up varying concentrations of other potentially toxic substances and metals such as barium, chromium, vanadium, manganese, nickel and zinc.

State and county officials concede that they don't know the exact size of the toxic water plume or how much of the tainted water drains into the Tuolumne River, which bends around Riverdale Park Tract about 1,000 yards north of the landfill.

But Victor Izzo, a senior engineering geologist with the water board, said he believes enough water flows through the Tuol-umne to dilute the chemicals without harming the river or the plant and animal life it supports.

Water heading north

Tests show groundwater and surface drainage moving generally north and northwest from the landfill, cutting below and across a corner of the Riverdale tract before entering the Tuol-umne River.

State officials say some of that water also could be migrating below the riverbed.

Bonzi's father, Rudy Bonzi, opened the landfill in 1967. It consists of nine "cells" covered with earth and vegetative materials.

From 1967 to 1978, about 2 million cubic yards of waste was dumped at the site, including municipal refuse, agricultural and industrial waste, and construction debris.

The landfill was closed to the public in the mid-1980s, but Bonzi's garbage trucks were allowed to continue dumping. Portions of the landfill site remain open today for the dumping of nonpolluting wastes.

In 1985, the Bonzi Landfill was identified as one of 150 potentially most hazardous of the 1,800 landfill sites in the state.

The landfill also has experienced chronic landfill gas problems. It has been placed on the Integrated Waste Management Board's list of solid waste sites that "violate state minimum standards."

Landfill accused of violations

Between Nov. 29 and March 28, according to the waste board, the landfill was found in violation of state rules and regulations governing explosive gas control.

As a result, the board recently issued its own order requiring landfill owners and operators to institute "control of the off-site migration of LFG (landfill gases) at the property boundary by Sept. 30."

Failure to do so, according to the board's order, could result in fines of up to \$10,000 per day and-or suspension or revocation of the landfill's permit.

The water board could levy similar fines and pursue legal action.

"If, in the opinion of the executive officer, the discharger (Ma-Ru and Bonzi) fails to comply with the provisions of this order, the executive officer may refer this matter to the attorney general for judicial enforcement or may issue a complaint for administrative civil liability," the order said.

Smog contributors

Of primary concern to the waste and water boards are the "volatile organic compounds" that have been found at the site.

The substances are found in a variety of products, everything from wall paint to deodorant.

They are believed to be a major factor in ground-level ozone, also known as smog.

Various experts and the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District contend that breathing air with high concentrations of ozone aggravates heart and lung diseases, especially asthma.

Experts also say that prolonged exposure to ozone can permanently damage lung tissue and may interfere with the functioning of the body's immune system.

Though there's no evidence that residents living near the landfill are in immediate danger,

Harrigfeld said the latest cease and desist orders issued against the landfill are unsettling.

"Yes, we are concerned about that. We are concerned about the health and safety of the people living out there and all the residents in the county."

In late April, the state water board served Ma-Ru Holding Co. Inc. and Bonzi Sanitation Landfill Inc. Partnership with another "cease and desist" order. The board issued its first such order in 1989.

Reports edited to play down climate findings

White House official's changes minimized link between emissions, global warming.

By ANDREW C. REVKIN

The New York Times

Published in the Orange County Register, Wednesday, June 8, 2005

A White House official who once led the oil industry's fight against limits on greenhouse gases has repeatedly edited government climate reports in ways that play down links between such emissions and global warming, according to internal documents.

In handwritten notes on drafts of several reports issued in 2002 and 2003, the official, Philip A. Cooney, removed or adjusted descriptions of climate research that government scientists and

their supervisors, including some senior Bush administration officials, had already approved. In most cases, the changes appeared in the final reports.

The dozens of changes, while sometimes as subtle as the insertion of the phrase "significant and fundamental" before the word "uncertainties," tend to produce an air of doubt about findings that most climate experts say are robust.

Cooney is chief of staff for the White House Council on Environmental Quality, the office that helps devise and promote administration policies on environmental issues.

Before going to the White House in 2001, he was the "climate team leader" and a lobbyist at the American Petroleum Institute, the largest trade group representing the interests of the oil industry. A lawyer with a bachelor's degree in economics, he has no scientific training.

The documents were obtained by The New York Times from the Government Accountability Project, a nonprofit legal-assistance group for government whistle-blowers.

The group is representing Rick S. Piltz, who resigned in March as a senior associate in the office that coordinates government climate research. That office, now called the Climate Change Science Program, issued the documents that Cooney edited.

A White House spokeswoman, Michele St. Martin, said Tuesday that Cooney would not be made available to comment. "We don't put Phil Cooney on the record," St. Martin said. "He's not a cleared spokesman."

Other White House officials said the changes made by Cooney were part of the normal interagency review that takes place on all documents related to global environmental change. Robert Hopkins, a spokesman for the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, noted that one of the reports Cooney worked on, the administration's 10-year plan for climate research, was strongly endorsed by the National Academy of Sciences.

And Myron Ebell, who has long campaigned against limits on greenhouse gases as director of climate policy at the Competitive Enterprise Institute, a libertarian group, said such editing was necessary for "consistency" in meshing programs with policy.

But critics said that while all administrations routinely vetted government reports, scientific content in such reports should be reviewed by scientists. Climate experts and representatives of environmental groups, when shown examples of the revisions, said they illustrated the significant if largely invisible influence of Cooney and other White House officials with ties to energy industries that have long fought greenhouse-gas restrictions.

In a memorandum sent last week to the top officials dealing with climate change at a dozen agencies, Piltz said the White House editing and other actions threatened to taint the government's \$1.8 billion-a-year effort to clarify the causes and consequences of climate change.

"Each administration has a policy position on climate change," Piltz wrote. "But I have not seen a situation like the one that has developed under this administration during the past four years, in which politicization by the White House has fed back directly into the science program in such a way as to undermine the credibility and integrity of the program."

Spare the Air season is here

Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, June 7, 2005

Starting today, *The Bakersfield Californian's* weather page in print and online will forecast the daily air quality level.

As the summer heat produces unhealthy levels of ozone, we will also announce Spare the Air days.

Spare the Air season begins

Hanford Sentinel, Tues., June 7, 2005

FRESNO - The ninth season of Spare the Air, the voluntary summertime program that fights air pollution, began today.

The 2005 season will run through September. The Valley Air District typically forecasts from 20 to 45 Spare the Air Days during that time period.

Valley residents can help Spare the Air through everyday activities such as:

- Carpooling, vanpooling or taking mass transit instead of driving alone;
- Postponing the use of gas-powered lawn-care equipment;
- Using an electric briquette lighter instead of lighter fluid; and
- Keeping the car tuned up.

For more information on how to Spare the Air or become an employer partner, log onto www.valleyair.org or call 230-5853.

Pesticide levels spur lawsuit against EPA

By Dana Nichols

Published Wednesday, June 8, 2005

STOCKTON -- An environmental group said Tuesday that it is suing the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for failing to consider farm children when it sets allowable levels for pesticide exposure.

The 1996 Food Quality Protection Act requires the EPA to keep pesticides in foods at low enough levels so they won't make people sick. The law also requires the EPA to take into account that people already are exposed to pesticides other ways -- whether through the air, or touching contaminated soil, or from the clothing of a family member.

The law says total exposure is what counts, and food levels should be set low enough to keep total exposure from being dangerous, especially for children.

Natural Resources Defense Council attorneys filed suit in U.S. District Court for Northern California on behalf of the NRDC and five other environmental and labor groups. The lawsuit seeks to force the EPA to respond to a petition the groups filed in 1998 asking the agency to consider the special risks faced by farm children when setting acceptable pesticide-residue levels for food.

Michael Wall, an attorney for the NRDC, said the EPA sent the group a letter in December 1998 saying the agency was reviewing the petition. He hasn't heard from the EPA since then, Wall said.

"That was almost seven years ago," he said.

An EPA spokesman in San Francisco referred questions about the suit to a spokeswoman in Washington. That spokeswoman, Enesta Jones, did not return phone calls seeking an interview. Instead, she sent an e-mail with the agency's response:

"Protection of infants and children is a foremost concern of the Agency. EPA applies rigorous scientific standards in its pesticide tolerance and registration decisions to ensure the protection of human health, including farm workers, and the environment, as well as the safety of the food supply. We believe that the agency's tolerance and registration decisions are protective of children's health and fully meet the toughest scientific and legal standards under the Food Quality Protection Act."

Rosenda Mataka, 52, of Grayson doesn't buy it.

Mataka has spent much of her life picking prunes, apricots and other produce. Now she's a trainer for the California Endowment, teaching farm workers and other Central Valley residents how to lobby government officials for clean air and other health improvements.

She's worried that her 11-year-old grandson, Daniel Chavez, is being harmed by pesticides applied to the fields around his home in Patterson.

"He gets bloody noses all the time," Mataka said.

She said other residents also complain that their children get sick when crop-dusters work near schools.

It is true that children who live on and near farms probably are exposed to higher levels of pesticides than children who live in suburbs, said John Knezovich, a scientist at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory who oversees the toxic-substance research program for the University of California system.

"The magnitude of it is what we don't know," Knezovich said.

He said the EPA has been trying to study questions about children's exposure to pesticides but suffered a setback last year when a public outcry halted a study in which families were offered household electronics such as videocassette recorders or video cameras if they agreed to participate in a study on babies and pesticides. Critics said the study would encourage the mostly low-income families to use more pesticides than they otherwise would. "They are not able to do the studies to produce the data, and now they are getting criticized for not being protective," Knezovich said. "At some point we need to protect children."

Vote on Gas Plant Draws Hundreds

By Deborah Schoch and Tonya Alanez, Times Staff Writers
LA Times, June 8, 2005

Four hundred people packed Long Beach City Hall on Tuesday night for a City Council debate over the future of a controversial liquefied natural gas terminal proposed for a pier in the city's harbor.

The crowd spilled out of the chambers as the council began the debate over whether to end talks with a subsidiary of Tokyo-based Mitsubishi Corp., which is planning a \$450-million gas terminal less than two miles from downtown.

Dozens of supporters and critics planned to address the nine-member council before the scheduled vote late Tuesday evening.

Terminal supporters, most of them union members, outnumbered opponents, judging from the bright orange T-shirts supporting the project and fluorescent orange "Yes! LNG" stickers. Critics held up anti-terminal signs.

The project has provoked strenuous opposition among residents who fear that an accident or terrorist attack could cause a catastrophic fire. But others have argued vehemently that Long Beach needs the jobs the terminal would provide.

Two proposed California gas terminals have been canceled because of public criticism. If the council votes to terminate negotiations, it will seriously undermine the Long Beach project.

Although the city's Harbor Commission holds the power to cancel the project, commissioners would have a difficult time forging ahead in the face of council opposition.

The council meeting attracted residents from across southern Los Angeles County.

Tom Miller, 40, came with his wife, Rebeca Shelley, 38. They are 10-year residents of Long Beach who own the Viento y Agua gallery and coffeehouse.

"We're frightened about the possibilities of liquefied natural gas coming to Long Beach - not only its presence but what could happen in a potential terrorist attack," Miller said. "I just don't trust big business anymore, and the way it works with local government."

Among those supporting the plant was Bobby Newman, 52, of Lynwood, president of Laborers and Plaster Tenders Union Local 507.

"LNG, number one, [will clean up the air](#) around here and get rid of the diesel. Number two, it brings the gas prices down. Utility rates are monstrous," he said. "There will be jobs from building it, with benefit packages and a living wage. And not only do they need to build it, but it has to be maintained. And those are long-term jobs."

The gas terminal debate in Long Beach is drawing national attention at a time when the energy industry is seeking to dramatically increase imports of liquefied natural gas. As prices rise and domestic supplies dwindle, importing the fuel from overseas has grown increasingly attractive. Only five gas import terminals operate in the United States, all on the East and Gulf coasts. But amid the current upsurge of interest in liquefied natural gas, companies have proposed or planned more than 40 terminals, including four in California: one onshore in Long Beach, two off the coast of Ventura County and one off Camp Pendleton in northern San Diego County. But safety concerns have caused a groundswell of public opposition in Long Beach and other coastal communities where terminals are planned.

Those concerns increased after a January 2003 explosion at an Algerian gas plant that killed 27 people, and after several scientific reports raised questions about the potential dangers of placing such projects in urban areas.

What makes the debate particularly divisive is the nature of liquefied natural gas. The liquid contains enormous potential energy. If it escapes from a tanker or storage tank, it creates a vapor that is flammable at some concentrations. Gas terminal critics say that if the vapor were ignited, it could create a major conflagration.

Liquefied natural gas is cooled to minus 260 degrees Fahrenheit, which allows it to be shipped by tanker.

A December 2004 report from Sandia National Laboratories warned that if terrorists attacked a tanker, the fire could seriously injure people and damage buildings within a third of a mile. People as far as a mile away could suffer second-degree burns within 30 seconds, the report said. But gas supporters call fears of a massive fire overblown, noting that countries in Asia and Europe have imported it for decades without a major leak or fire.

The Long Beach debate has been going on for two years.

Few people took note in May 2003 when the Port of Long Beach entered into an agreement with Mitsubishi subsidiary Sound Energy Solutions providing exclusive rights to develop the terminal on a pier. That same month, the City Council directed the city to begin talks with Mitsubishi about a planned pipeline and sales of the gas to the city-owned gas utility.

But as concern grew, some residents began lobbying council members to take a stand against the terminal.

The council was due to vote on whether to end the city's talks two weeks ago, when Mayor Beverly O'Neill abruptly delayed the vote so council members could gather more information.

That prompted a storm of public criticism. Three council members - Frank Colonna, Rae Gabelich and Bonnie Lowenthal - promised to introduce the motion Tuesday to halt the talks.

Two other members - Tonia Reyes Uranga and Val Lerch - then announced an alternative motion that would allow the vote to be postponed until the port and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission completed environmental reviews of the project by late summer or fall.

Rain Forest Myth Goes Up in Smoke Over the Amazon

By Henry Chu, Times Staff Writer

LA Times, June 8, 2005

REMANSO TALISMA, Brazil - The death of a myth begins with stinging eyes and heaving chests here on the edge of the Amazon rain forest.

Every year, fire envelops the jungle, throwing up inky billows of smoke that blot out the sun.

Animals flee. Residents for miles around cry and wheeze, while the weak and unlucky develop serious respiratory problems.

When the burning season strikes, life and health in the Amazon falter, and color drains out of the riotous green landscape as great swaths of majestic trees, creeping vines, delicate bromeliads and hardy ferns are reduced to blackened stubble.

But more than just the land, these annual blazes also lay waste to a cherished notion that has roosted in the popular mind for decades: the idea of the rain forest as the "lungs of the world."

Ever since saving the Amazon became a fashionable cause in the 1980s, championed by Madonna, Sting and other celebrities, the jungle has consistently been likened to an enormous recycling plant that slurps up carbon dioxide and pumps out oxygen for us all to breathe, from Los Angeles to London to Lusaka.

Think again, scientists say.

[Far from cleaning up the atmosphere, the Amazon is now a major source for pollution.](#) Rampant burning and deforestation, mostly at the hands of illegal loggers and of ranchers, release hundreds of millions of tons of carbon dioxide into the skies each year.

Brazil now ranks as one of the world's leading producers of greenhouse gases, thanks in large part to the Amazon, the source for up to two-thirds of the country's emissions.

"It's not the lungs of the world," said Daniel Nepstad, an American ecologist who has studied the Amazon for 20 years. "It's probably burning up more oxygen now than it's producing."

Scientists such as Nepstad prefer to think of the world's largest tropical rain forest as Earth's air conditioner. The region's humidity, they say, is vital in climate regulation and cooling patterns in South America - and perhaps as far away as Europe.

The Amazon's role as a source of pollution, not a remover of it, is directly linked to the galloping rate of destruction in the region over the last quarter-century.

The dense and steamy habitat straddles eight countries and is home to up to 20% of the world's fresh water and 30% of its plant and animal species.

Brazil's portion accounts for more than half the entire ecosystem. Official figures show that, on average, 7,500 square miles of rain forest were chopped and burned down in Brazil every year between 1979 and 2004. Over the 25 years, it's as if a forest the size of California had disappeared from the face of the Earth.

Such encroachment on virgin land is theoretically illegal or subject to tough regulation, but the government here lacks the resources - some say the will - to enforce environmental protection laws.

Loggers are typically the first to punch through, hacking crude roads and harvesting all the precious hardwoods they can find. One gang of woodcutters, in cahoots with crooked environmental-protection officials, cut down nearly \$371 million worth of timber from 1990 until it was busted in the biggest sting operation of its kind in Brazil, authorities said last week.

Close on the loggers' heels are big ranchers and farmers, who torch the remaining vegetation to clear the way for cattle and crops such as soy, Brazil's new star export, which is claiming ever larger quantities of land.

Prime burning period in the Amazon runs from July to January, the dry season. In 2004, government satellite images of the forest registered 165,440 "hot spots," fires whose flames can shoot as high as 100 feet and push temperatures beyond 2,500 degrees.

These tremendous blazes spew about 200 million tons of carbon emissions into the atmosphere each year, which translates into several times that amount in actual carbon dioxide. In contrast, Brazil's consumption of fossil fuels, the chief source of greenhouse gases worldwide, creates less than half what the fires send up.

During burning season, dark palls of smoke settle over parts of the jungle for days.

"It becomes hard to see, and your eyes have problems. The kids all get sick and have trouble breathing," said Joaquim Borges da Silva, 42, a rural worker who lives in a small encampment here in Remanso Talisma, on the forest's outskirts.

Smoke grew so thick at one point last year that two cars on the road into the camp barreled into each other head-on, killing two people, Borges da Silva said. The fires also kill the game that workers and small settlers rely on for food.

He pointed out a charred tract of land, littered with stumps and felled trees that looked like so many toothpicks, where tractors working 24 hours a day for a month cleared 1,000 acres last year. Trucks rumbled in and out, loaded down with mahogany and cedar.

Farmers subsequently burned the area. Two months later, at the first rain, a small plane swooped in and dropped seeds.

Even with the burning of the rain forest, Brazil's annual output of carbon pollutants is tiny compared with that of the U.S., which produces nearly 6 billion tons.

But Brazil's share still vaults it onto the Top 10 list of polluters, ahead of industrialized nations such as Canada and Italy.

However, under the international environmental treaty known as the Kyoto Protocol, Brazil and other poor countries are not required to reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases. Nor does the accord contain financial incentives to encourage nations such as Brazil and Indonesia to rein in the destruction of their tropical forests.

"This is a very sensitive issue in Brazil and among developing countries," said Paulo Moutinho, research coordinator for the Amazon Institute of Environmental Studies. "If you want to include developing countries, especially countries with large areas of tropical forests, in some kind of mechanism to mitigate climate change, you need to compensate deforestation reduction."

The federal government here has begun discussing ways of rewarding states for conserving the jungle, but little has been achieved.

In 2004, Brazil lost an estimated 10,000 square miles of forest, the second-worst year on record. Nearly the same amount was destroyed the year before. Environmentalists had hoped that the 2002 election of President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, Brazil's first left-leaning leader, would reverse the tide, not accelerate it.

Critics say that despite repeated promises to protect the Amazon, Lula's government has favored the huge farming interests fueling its destruction in order to keep Brazil's economy growing and to boost his chances of reelection next year.

Even without the massive burning, the popular conception of the Amazon as a giant oxygen factory for the rest of the planet is misguided, scientists say. Left unmolested, the forest does generate enormous amounts of oxygen through photosynthesis, but it consumes most of it itself in the decomposition of organic matter.

Researchers are trying to determine what role the Amazon plays in keeping the region cool and relatively moist, which in turn has a hugely beneficial effect on agriculture - ironically, the same interests trying to cut down the forest.

The theory goes that the jungle's humidity, as much as water from the ocean, is instrumental in creating rain over both the Amazon River basin and other parts of South America, particularly western and southern Brazil, where much of this country's agricultural production is concentrated.

"If you took away the Amazon, you'd take away half of the rain that falls on Brazil," Moutinho said.

"You can imagine the problems that would ensue."

A shift in climate here could cause a ripple effect, disrupting weather patterns in Antarctica, the Eastern U.S. and even Western Europe, some scholars believe.

This is what worries ecologists about the continued destruction of the rain forest: not the supposed effect on the global air supply, but rather on the weather.

"Concern about the environmental aspects of deforestation now is more over climate rather than [carbon emissions] or whether the Amazon is the 'lungs of the world,' " said Paulo Barreto, a researcher with the Amazon Institute of People and Environment.

"For sure, the Amazon is not the lungs of the world," he added. "It never was."

Academies Warn of Warming

Science organizations from 11 countries, including the U.S., call for global action against the changing climate.

By Miguel Bustillo, Times Staff Writer

LA Times, June 8, 2005

The National Academy of Sciences and 10 similar organizations from some of the world's most powerful nations released a statement Tuesday calling for a stronger international response to global warming, arguing there is now more than enough evidence of a changing climate to justify taking immediate action.

The unprecedented joint statement, politically timed to coincide with British Prime Minister Tony Blair's visit with President Bush in Washington, called on developed nations to "acknowledge that the threat of climate change is clear and increasing."

It also called on countries to begin setting stricter targets to reduce heat-trapping greenhouse gases to prevent the worst consequences of global warming from taking place.

The statement was signed by National Academy of Sciences President Bruce Alberts as well as the heads of science organizations from Brazil, Britain, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan and Russia. That includes science academies from the Group of 8 industrial nations, as well as from the three largest emitters of greenhouse gases in the developing world.

"There will always be uncertainty in understanding a system as complex as the world's climate," the joint statement began.

"However, there is now strong evidence that significant global warming is occurring."

The evidence includes direct measurements of rising air and ocean temperatures, retreating glaciers and changes to biological systems, the scientists wrote. They added that "it is likely that most of the warming in recent decades can be attributed to human activities," such as the release of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases from the burning of coal and other fossil fuels.

In releasing the statement, the president of the British Royal Society, Lord Robert May, sharply criticized the Bush administration's stance on climate change, which is focused on furthering technologies to cut greenhouse gas emissions and only asks that businesses make voluntary reductions.

The U.S., the world's largest emitter of carbon dioxide, was the only major developed nation other than Australia not to sign the Kyoto Protocol, a pact to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to roughly 5% below 1990 levels by 2012. Blair has vowed to make climate change a central issue at next month's G-8 summit in Gleneagles, Scotland. But the Bush administration appears firmly entrenched in its position that mandating reductions in greenhouse gases would hurt the U.S. economy.

"The current U.S. policy is misguided," May said. "The Bush administration has consistently refused to accept the advice of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences. President Bush has an opportunity at Gleneagles to signal that his administration will no longer ignore the scientific evidence."

The National Academy of Sciences first outlined the threat of global warming in 1979, when it published a now-famous report led by MIT scientist Jule Charney in response to a request by President Carter. It concluded that climate change was a serious threat and recommended that governments begin to reduce greenhouse gases as a precautionary measure.

Since the Charney report, the science academy has published several other reviews of global warming - including one in 2001 that had been requested by Bush - all of which have largely echoed the 1979 report's conclusions.

Bush administration officials on Tuesday strongly disputed May's criticism that the president had failed to heed scientific advice on global warming.

"We welcome the continued efforts and leadership of our U.S. National Academy of Sciences working with its sister societies to ensure that our response to climate change is informed by the

best available scientific knowledge," said Michele St. Martin, a spokeswoman for the White House Council on Environmental Quality.

"We are taking action," she added. "President Bush has committed his administration to cut our nation's greenhouse gas intensity by 18% over the next 10 years."

[Editorial, Merced Sun-Star and the Modesto Bee, June 8, 2005](#)

Go the extra mile for the Great Valley Center

If you're driving toward a precipice, you appreciate the sign that warns you away.

Our Valley is poised "on the edge of a cliff," in the words of Carol Whiteside. "You go down the list -- there are big decisions to be made in terms of land use; the ecological future of the region; and creating a regulatory environment that allows jobs to come in or we'll never reduce the poverty."

Fortunately, there are signs defining those dangers, identifying some of the solutions and pointing out a better path. The figurative task of posting those signs has been the role of the Great Valley Center, of which Whiteside is president.

Since its inception in 1997, the Great Valley Center has helped to define the Valley's issues. But the center, based in Modesto, is facing difficult financial issues of its own -- issues we hope it overcomes. No other entity is doing what the center does for the Valley.

"Nobody else has created a regional dialogue and thought broadly about the entire region the way people think about L.A. or the Bay Area," said Whiteside. "That's one of our unique roles."

When we begin to think regionally, we see that our most vexing problems -- from air pollution to jobs to demands on water -- are not unique, that solutions work best when shared.

Along with identifying problems, we also see more clearly the Valley's assets. Foremost among them are its people. The Valley is growing faster than any other region of the continent. New arrivals -- including those born here -- are more diverse than in any other region of the nation.

Through programs such as Catapult (for youngsters), the Great Valley Leadership Institute, the Institute for the Development of Emerging Area Leaders, the Great Valley Fellows and LEGACI Grants, the Great Valley Center has helped people from all corners of the Valley to see and to seize opportunities.

"We're trying to raise aspirations and make people more demanding of better outcomes," said Whiteside.

While looking within for solutions, the Center also helps the Valley reach out. Our congressional delegation is united in its efforts in part because the Center has helped our representatives identify the issues and solutions.

Among those priorities are Highway 99 improvements, better rural Internet connections, health care, solar energy and formation of trusts to protect ag land.

"We're this laboratory where all these problems are worked out," said Chief Operating Officer Mike Lynch.

The center's annual Great Valley Conference has served as a catalyst and facilitator for identifying both the problems and solutions.

Great costs are attached to great projects. This year, expenses neared \$5 million; last year they topped \$6 million.

The money comes from donations -- some as small as \$10 money orders, others much larger from major donors such as the James Irvine Foundation, Hewlett Foundation and Packard Foundation. Dozens of other foundations and businesses contribute, as well as hundreds of individuals. As Ellen Herod, director of development, points out, there are more \$100 donors than there are \$5,000 donors.

This year, the center is facing "funding challenges, that's not a secret," said Lynch. The foundations that provided the founding money eight years ago are turning to other priorities. "They've been tremendous; they have gone well beyond the extra mile."

Now it's time for others -- hopefully from within the Valley -- to go that extra mile. After all, we need someone out there putting up the signs that warn us of the dangers and help to point us in the right direction.

To get involved

There are several ways to help the Great Valley Center carry out its mission:

- To donate online: Go to www.greatvalley.org <<http://www.greatvalley.org>> and look for "Donate Today" at bottom right of home page.
- To donate by mail: Great Valley Center, 201 Needham St., Modesto 95354.

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Agriculture needs more room to grow

Agriculture in California might be a \$30 billion industry, but government regulations, environmental requirements and operational restrictions are threatening its productivity.

Farmers, ranchers and growers are puzzled that it's getting harder for them to prosper under the Republican administration of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

In an unprecedented move, members of 17 agricultural organizations got together to demand relief -- telling Schwarzenegger they were being regulated and taxed unreasonably.

Their strategy is unique because those who signed the letter of desperation varied so widely and included agricultural heavyweights such as the Wine Institute of San Francisco, the Farm Bureau Federation and the Alliance of Western Milk Producers.

Their demands were acknowledged at the highest levels of government.

"We understand where they are coming from," said state Resources Secretary Mike Chrisman, a Visalia-area rancher.

Chrisman and Food and Agriculture Secretary A.G. Kawamura, an Orange County strawberry farmer, are the agricultural community's representatives in Sacramento. If Schwarzenegger's not listening, it's probably because they aren't communicating as effectively as they should.

This is what happens when no one is regulating the regulators.

One diesel rule involving air pollution doesn't harm agriculture excessively. Guidelines regarding water use aren't so bad. Who can argue against pesticide restrictions?

It's the cumulative effect that takes its toll. Rules and regulations continue to be imposed without oversight or logic.

There's strength in a united front. Let's hope this effort impresses lawmakers and bureaucrats enough to re-examine the overall impact government regulation has on agricultural production. Maybe some rules and regulations can be altered, mitigated or eliminated.

If solutions can be found to ease some of the burden on agriculture, that might demonstrate that similar reform and reassessment are possible in other over regulated areas.