

Rally melds Chavez tribute, environmental protest

By Susan Herendeen, staff writer
Modesto Bee, Sunday, April 2, 2006

PATTERSON -- Activists took to the streets here Saturday morning, marching down East Las Palmas Avenue, about 250 strong, chanting "Viva Chávez" and "Sí se puede" and "We want clean air."

The trail ended at North Park, where participants held a rally in honor of César Chávez, the man whose nonviolent protests brought bathroom breaks and drinking water to farmworkers.

There was little talk of grape strikes or union contracts, the work that made Chávez and his United Farm Workers union famous 40 years ago.

Instead, speakers wanted to focus on environmental justice.

Participants said they are worried about emissions from the Covanta Stanislaus Inc. plant, an incinerator at a landfill along Interstate 5, which meets federal and regional air-pollution requirements.

Organizers said Stanislaus County should launch a better recycling program, so it can reduce the amount of trash that must be burned. They also passed out postcards addressed to the Board of Supervisors.

Grayson's Rosenda Mataka, who spearheaded the event, said organizers melded the two themes, a memorial to a hero and concerns about the environment, because they think Chávez would have done the same.

"César Chávez Day is supposed to be a day of action," she said.

César Chávez Day, a state holiday, fell on Friday this year. Thirteen years after the union leader's death, his rallying cry, "Si se puede" or "Yes, we can" remains a hallmark of the farmworkers movement.

In Patterson, the commemorative day began with a march from Felipe Garza Park to North Park. After the rally, a smaller crowd drove to the Covanta plant for an afternoon demonstration.

Clean air is a particularly touchy subject on the county's West Side, where residents remember a tire fire that smoldered for weeks in 1999, leading to a massive cleanup effort and lots of litigation.

More than 5 million tires burned for 34 days after lightning struck a pile at a tireburning plant. A black blanket of smoke spread across the valley and into the foothills.

Keith Douglas Warner, a professor at Santa Clara University, said the Patterson area provides a case study for the environmental justice movement, because several polluting entities are gathered in one place.

Warner, who took part in the rally, said low-income communities with many minorities offer the least resistance when undesirable businesses seek to set up shop.

"The burdens of pollution need to be shared equitably," said Warner, who brings his students on field trips to Patterson.

Carina Morales, 8, of Patterson said she worries about the air because her brothers have asthma, and her mother thinks dioxins from the incinerator could be the cause.

The outspoken third-grader also knew that Chávez lived in Delano and led many people on marches. She thinks her town needs a man like him.

"We want to know more about him," Carina said.

Fernando Quintana, 17, said he was a bit confused by the dual nature of the event, which he attended to honor Chávez.

He said he is more worried about immigration bills being discussed in Washington, D.C., which have led to widespread student protests in the past week.

Like other detractors, he believes a bill approved by the House of Representatives is aimed at "criminalizing" about 12 million undocumented immigrants. He thinks those workers deserve amnesty.

"People shouldn't be called criminals just because they crossed the border to live better," said Quintana, a senior at Patterson High School.

Many people in the crowd wore white shirts with the Huelga bird, the symbol of the UFW. Speeches were given in Spanish and English and there was plenty of "Spanglish" spoken in the crowd.

Somehow, Chávez was a unifying force for their varied concerns.

Luis Molina, a school readiness coordinator with the Stanislaus County Office of Education, said he would like to see smarter dialogue on immigration, rather than angry talk.

He urged participants to learn their history and get involved in community activities.

"Today shouldn't be just one day that you get involved," Molina said. "It should be the beginning of a lifetime of involvement."

21 senators press EPA on emissions standards

By Erica Werner, Associated Press Writer

In the Washington Post, Fresno Bee, S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Friday, March 31, 2006

WASHINGTON (AP) - Twenty-one senators called on the Environmental Protection Agency on Friday to let California implement stricter restrictions on vehicle emissions, which other states could then enact.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said this week that new gas mileage rules would pre-empt state emissions standards, leading to fears that EPA would refuse to give California the waiver it wants to restrict greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles.

Because California began regulating pollution before the federal government did, it has special authority under the Clean Air Act to set its own vehicle pollution standards if it gets a waiver from EPA. Other states can adopt either the federal standards or California's rules.

California air regulators approved rules in 2004 to cut exhaust from cars and light trucks by 25 percent and from larger trucks and sport utility vehicles by 18 percent starting in 2009. Ten other states have also adopted those standards, which are opposed by automakers, but the rules can't be implemented until California gets a waiver. EPA has yet to grant one.

"In the face of federal inaction on global warming, California, Maine and the other states have stepped forward to begin reducing the pollution that causes global warming. We are concerned that you may be preparing to argue that the states lack authority to do so," said a letter to EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson signed by Sens. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., Olympia Snowe, R-Maine, and others.

Snowe was among five Republicans who signed the letter, as did independent Sen. James Jeffords of Vermont and 15 Democrats.

"Rather than attempting to thwart such state efforts, the federal government should encourage states to develop innovative solutions to serious public health and environmental problems," the letter said.

EPA spokesman John Millett said he had no immediate comment, noting that the agency still was reviewing the waiver request.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration on Wednesday rolled out tighter gas mileage rules for pickups and sport utility vehicles. The agency argued in its rule that Congress has

"expressly pre-empted" states from issuing their own rules on mileage standards, and that any state law limiting carbon dioxide emissions would qualify as such because it would have the direct effect of regulating fuel consumption.

The 10 states that have adopted California's vehicle emissions rule are Maine, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington.

Governor Is Urged to Push for Monitoring of Emissions

By Marc Lifsher, Times Staff Writer
Los Angeles Times, Monday, April 3, 2006

SACRAMENTO — Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's top environmental advisors, in a report on how to combat global warming, are recommending that the state require power plant operators and other heavy industries to report the amount of greenhouse gas they emit.

The report, which is expected to be released by the Schwarzenegger administration today, is the first step in fulfilling the governor's pledge last year to enact firm targets for reducing carbon dioxide pollution beginning as early as 2010.

"Mandatory reporting is something we need to get started on as soon as possible," said Terry Tamminen, the governor's advisor on energy and the environment. "You can't make targets if you don't have anything to measure."

Schwarzenegger, who is free to embrace or reject all or part of the recommendations from his Climate Action Team, is expected to signal the direction he wants to take at a global warming summit he's called for April 11 in San Francisco.

Environmentalists and Democratic lawmakers said they were heartened by the report. Business groups, however, said they were concerned that mandatory reporting of carbon dioxide pollution could lead to limits on greenhouse gas emissions that could destroy jobs in California by driving manufacturers to other states and countries.

"This is not about reporting. It's about caps," said Allan Zaremberg, president of the California Chamber of Commerce. Global warming is not a local problem and greenhouse gas emissions shouldn't be regulated by the state, he said.

The chamber and allied groups, including the California Farm Bureau, the Western States Petroleum Assn. and the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, have asked the state to study how the governor's greenhouse gas initiative might affect jobs.

The release of the administration report is designed to coincide with the planned unveiling today of a bill by Assembly Speaker Fabian Nuñez (D-Los Angeles) and Assemblywoman Fran Pavley (D-Agoura Hills). The bill would direct the California Air Resources Board to set mandatory caps on industry that would meet the governor's target of lowering greenhouse gas emissions by 25% over forecasted levels by 2020.

The governor is committed to working with the Legislature to meet the greenhouse gas reduction targets he set in a June 2005 executive order, Tamminen said.

"By setting binding limits, the bill will make the governor's targets real," said Devra Wang, an energy expert with the Natural Resources Defense Council.

The climate team's recommendations, signaled in a draft report released in December, include a proposal to levy a small tax on gasoline sales to finance research in alternatives to fossil fuels, but Schwarzenegger has said he won't pursue that option.

Most scientists believe that global warming is caused in part by pollution from burning coal and other fossil fuels. According to the administration report, the rapid buildup of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere is raising temperatures around the globe, causing the polar icecaps to shrink and raising ocean levels.

Backers of both the bill and the climate team recommendations agree that California needs a market-based solution for fighting greenhouse gas pollution. They contend that reporting emissions and allowing trading of rights to emit carbon dioxide in limited amounts would create incentives for California scientists and companies to develop new technologies to counter global warming.

They cite a UC Berkeley study released in January predicting that the governor's greenhouse gas reduction target could create over 20,000 new jobs and add \$60 billion to California's gross state product by 2020.

Though mainline business groups question the upbeat economic analysis, a number of other business groups, particularly venture capitalists and high-tech entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley, are enthusiastic about the proposed campaign to combat greenhouse gas.

"We don't want to be dismissive of potential negative impacts to certain sectors of the economy, but at the same time, we recognize that there are potential opportunities as well," said Margaret Bruce, environmental program director for the Silicon Valley Leadership group.

Mexico City a Living Laboratory for Smog Study

Atmospheric scientists are studying the reach and repercussions of pollution in the capital, thought by many to have the dirtiest air in world.

By Sam Enriquez, Times Staff Writer
Los Angeles Times, Friday, March 31, 2006

MEXICO CITY — Whether this city has the most polluted air in the world is a matter of debate: Indignant Mexican officials lobbied to have it stricken from the Guinness Book of World Records this year after it held the title two years running.

What's not in question is its attraction for the hundreds of atmospheric scientists who are wrapping up a monthlong study of the reach and repercussions of Mexico City's pollution: Where does it go? What does it become? What is its effect on climate and weather?

The answers could prove useful in cleaning up the air in other smog capitals, such as Cairo, Beijing, New Delhi and Los Angeles.

"We don't want to say that Mexico City is polluting the whole world," said Eric Hintsa of the National Science Foundation, one of the sponsors of the \$25-million study. "But together, all the mega-cities are having an impact."

Picking Mexico City was a no-brainer, scientists say. The air here stinks.

Like a giant San Fernando Valley, Mexico City is surrounded by mountains. This valley, though, is 7,000 feet closer to the sun — better to cook the effluence of an estimated 9 million vehicles, oil refineries, a volcano and hundreds of thousands of leaky propane tanks hooked to stoves.

More than 20 million people are crammed into the greater Mexico City metropolitan area. By comparison, Los Angeles County is about twice as large but has only about half as many people. And everybody here seems to be burning something. Tiny particles lodge under contact lenses and deep in lungs, stoking allergies and worse. Colds last longer. And asthma sufferers really suffer.

It's got the whiff of the familiar to chemist Jeffrey Gaffney, 56, who grew up in Riverside and is here studying how soot affects weather for the U.S. Energy Department. Mexico City, he said, is a lot like Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s.

Although it has improved in the last few years, Mexico City's air quality most days still falls short of basic standards. This, despite the cleansing effect of a rainy season that runs from June to September.

Scientists already have tracked urban pollution as it moves from continent to continent — from China to the West Coast of the United States, and from the Eastern Seaboard to Europe. This study examines regional movement.

Scientists and graduate students have been working 14-hour days to measure the giant plume of gases, dust and particles that rises out of Mexico City each day and generally drifts to the northeast, sometimes as far as the Gulf of Mexico.

Over the course of hours, the emissions mix and are altered by sunlight to create so-called secondary pollutants — some only irritating, others carcinogenic. Using instrument readings from ground equipment, weather balloons, airplanes and NASA satellites, scientists hope to figure out how they form and how far they travel.

"I'm sure we'll learn things we didn't expect, answer some hypotheses and in some cases end up with more questions," said Sasha Madronich, a chemist from the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colo.

Madronich and colleagues from U.S. and Mexican universities and labs have collected enough pollution data to keep them busy for years — compiling, comparing and double-checking. They expect to announce their findings in 2007 or 2008, said Luisa Molina, an MIT chemist and one of the study's organizers.

Getting lab-quality measurements in the field was one of daunting tasks for the project, whose unwieldy name shortens to the acronym MILAGRO — miracle in Spanish. But the first job was moving the equipment across the border.

"We got all the stuff to the border a month early but it was still delayed four to six weeks," said Barry Lefer, a geosciences professor at the University of Houston, who worked at a measurement site about an hour's drive north of Mexico City.

He spoke from the roof of the Technological University of Tecamac, where he pointed out some of the exotic gear that to the layman — and probably to customs officials — looked sinister: sun photometers, cloud cameras, ambient particulate samplers, aerosol samplers and devices to measure solar radiation, ozone, temperature, humidity, wind and particles smaller than the width of a human hair.

Some are made by specialty manufacturers, others by hand.

Chika Minejima tinkered with her thermal decomposition laser-induced fluorescence device set up on the roof of a nearby trailer. It looked like a prop in a sci-fi thriller, but in fact measured trace amounts of a rare nitrate gas that neutralizes some pollutants overnight.

"I've been working on this for 3 1/2 years with another graduate student, who had been working on it three or four years before me," said Minejima, 28, who is studying at UC Berkeley's College of Chemistry. "I inherited it and made it more sensitive."

It was unique, until a second one was built by scientists in Japan. "But ours is better," said Minejima, who also built its wooden shipping container for the trip south.

In the equipment-packed trailer next door, Peter McMurray, head of mechanical engineering at the University of Minnesota, collected data for studying the transformation of airborne particles.

Clouds form when water condenses on these tiny specks. McMurray and others want to understand how pollutants create new particles over the course of a day and to be able to predict, for example, whether they will trigger more or less rain in a region. "My life's dream is to explain these processes," he said.

Some of the work was more old-school.

Robert Long, a graduate student in meteorology at Penn State University, was inflating an oversized weather balloon to carry an ozone monitor packed in a plastic foam six-pack holder sealed with duct tape.

"It will go up a little more than 20 miles and that will take about two hours," he said. "It will end up over the Gulf of Mexico."

The midday launch attracted a small group. When the balloon inflated to a diameter of about 8 feet, the plastic foam box was tied on with string. At the count of three, the balloon was released and flew skyward. And the box fell to the ground with a thud.

The scientists gathered briefly and came to a consensus: It needed stouter string.

"Let's try it again," Long said.

Plant's Restart Not Near

Edison drops a bid to quickly reopen a giant generating station that supplies electricity to Southern California.

By Marc Lifsher, Times Staff Writer
Los Angeles Times, Friday, March 31, 2006

Southern California Edison Co. said Thursday it had given up an effort to quickly restart its giant Mohave power plant, which was shut down Jan. 1 for failing to comply with pollution standards.

The utility had hoped to cut a deal with environmentalists to put the coal-fired power plant back on line within the next few months. Located in Laughlin, Nev., the plant had been a cheap source of electricity for Southern California for 36 years.

But Edison, which holds a 56% controlling interest in Mohave, said in a statement that it had "reluctantly concluded" that it faced "too much uncertainty to warrant continued aggressive effort" to reopen the plant in the near future.

Edison said it continued to negotiate with two northern Arizona Indian tribes and a mining company about coal and water supplies for the generating station. Peabody Energy Corp., which mines the Indian land, uses the water to push pulverized coal through a 273-mile pipeline to Mohave.

Once an agreement is reached, the utility would begin the process of installing \$1.1 billion in pollution equipment in the hope of restarting the plant by 2010.

The high-tech scrubbers are needed to comply with a 1999 legal settlement of a lawsuit brought by the Grand Canyon Trust and two other environmental organizations under the U.S. Clean Air Act. The plant, which produced about 7% of Southern California's electricity before being mothballed, was one of the biggest sources of sulfur dioxide emissions in the West. It also created haze that obscured views at Grand Canyon National Park.

Edison, a unit of Rosemead-based Edison International, also said it would be forced to lay off 82 of Mohave's 306 employees by July 1.

The environmental groups said Edison approached them in late December and early January about reaching an interim agreement that would allow the plant to keep running without pollution controls.

"They, in fact, floated a proposal, but it was a nonstarter," said Bill Hedden, executive director of the Grand Canyon Trust.

The environmentalists told Edison to sort out the water supply issues with the Navajo Nation and the Hopi tribe before trying to even temporarily waive the federal court consent decree on pollution controls, Hedden said.

Since then, "they have not come back with any stronger proposal," he said. Edison declined to elaborate on its written statement.

A continued shutdown of Mohave should not affect Southern California's ability to obtain sufficient electricity, even if hotter-than-normal temperatures stress the region's power grid this summer, said Joseph Desmond, chairman of the California Energy Commission.

"We assumed it would not be available," he said.

[Fresno Bee, Editorial, Sunday, April 2, 2006:](#)

A price tag on bad air

Health costs of pollution in Valley more than \$3 billion annually.

A new study has put a price tag on the health problems Valley residents face because of air pollution, and it's a whopper -- \$3.2 billion annually.

That's the total cost of medical bills, student absences from school, sick days for grown-ups, chronic suffering and early death caused by pollution in the Valley, one of the nation's most polluted regions. The average is about \$1,000 for each person in the Valley.

The study was conducted by Jane V. Hall and Victor Brajer, economics professors at California State University, Fullerton, and air expert Frederick W. Lurmann of Sonoma Technology Inc. Its scope was the eight counties that make up the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. The \$80,000 cost was funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

The \$3.2 billion figure represents how much would be saved, according to Hall, "If you snapped your fingers and suddenly had clean air," which the researchers defined as meeting current federal standards for the tiny particulate matter known as PM-2.5, as well as smog-forming ozone.

The figure doesn't represent the entire savings available to us if we can manage to clean up our air.

The study, for instance, did not address costs such as the loss of crops to air pollution -- a figure measured in the many millions annually -- or the cost of sick and dying trees in the Sierra Nevada.

The researchers did lay out some specific estimates of the annual benefits of compliance with existing federal rules:

- 460 fewer premature deaths among those age 30 and older.
- 325 fewer new cases of chronic bronchitis.
- 188,400 fewer days of reduced activity in adults.
- 260 fewer hospital admissions.
- 23,300 fewer asthma attacks.
- 188,000 fewer days of school absence.
- 3,230 fewer cases of acute bronchitis in children.
- 3,000 fewer work days lost.
- More than 17,000 fewer days of respiratory symptoms in children.

The study's authors and local health advocates said the research demonstrates the need for the Valley's leaders to move aggressively to clean up the air. Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the Valley air district, agreed: "The essence of the study is important. There is an economic cost." Yes, there is, and it's huge.

[Modesto Bee, Editorial, Saturday, April 1, 2006:](#)

New school buses will help us all breathe easier

The San Joaquin Valley has some of the worst air pollution in the nation, and some of the oldest school buses. There's a connection.

Now there's some progress to report. For years, the state has replaced old buses based on population. No surprise, Southern California received a lot of money and our valley far less.

The California Air Resources Board is spending \$4.3 million for 31 new buses to replace some of the valley's oldest. Most of that money is going to the southern part of the valley, but the Ceres

Unified School District has learned it will get money for at least one new bus. Transportation director Ken Hines hopes to receive money for three more.

The first bus to be replaced will be the oldest -- a 1973 Gillig. Buses as old as this emit as much as 60 times more particulate matter or soot into the air. The replacement will use what's referred to as clean diesel.

The Atwater Elementary School District also is getting \$140,000 for one new bus, and the Merced Union High School District twice that amount for two.

The districts that receive the money must agree to see that the old polluters are destroyed. Good. One more small step to cleaning up the valley's air.

[Tri-Valley Herald, Commentary, Sunday, April 2, 2006:](#)

Loss of tree canopy could be hazardous to your health

Bruce Taylor Seeman, Newhouse News Service

American cities are short of trees, and the overload of concrete and asphalt landscapes has become a drain on people's well-being, experts say.

Aside from transforming carbon dioxide into life-giving oxygen, researchers say trees and greenery clean air and water, help the sick get well, encourage children to pay attention and give hope to those living in despair.

As national Arbor Day approaches April 28, experts estimate the nation's tree population has declined by one-fourth in the last 25 years. The consequences are significant.

"The psychological benefits of trees are just not getting the attention they deserve," says Deborah Gangloff, executive director of American Forests, an environmental group.

University of Michigan researcher Stephen Kaplan says exposure to trees has been shown to help people recover from illness faster and reduce irritability and other signs of modern "mental fatigue." One study showed living near trees helped public housing residents bounce back from troubled lives.

"Nobody knows how to help these people," said Kaplan, a professor of psychology and computer science. "But a tree does."

For a healthy ecosystem — enough trees to improve air and water quality — an urban area should have a canopy that covers about 40 percent of its land mass, according to American Forests. That includes a 15 percent canopy in city cores, 25 percent in suburbs and 60 percent farther out.

"We estimate it would take 634 million new trees nationwide for every city to be 40 percent," Gangloff says. "We call that the urban tree deficit."

Disease and fire are to blame for some of America's tree loss. But most of the shortage can be traced to growth — trees removed for new shopping centers, office buildings, parking lots and houses, Gangloff said.

Cities that cleared land without protecting or replacing trees now pay the price, urban foresters say. Trees absorb rains that otherwise must be carried away by expensive storm water drainage systems. They filter pollutants from the air and water. They shade buildings, reducing air-conditioning costs.

Using satellite images, American Forests estimated the impacts in about three dozen urban areas with shrunken tree canopies.

The tree canopy in metropolitan Montgomery, Ala., for example, shrank 7 percent between 1986 and 2002. Jacksonville, Fla., lost more than 12 percent of its forest and woody wetlands between 1992 and 2002. San Diego lost 27 percent of its tree cover between 1985 and 2002.

In one dramatic example, the tree canopy around Charlotte, N.C., dropped 27 percent between 1984 and 2003, American Forests concluded. A tree canopy that absorbed 22 million pounds of air pollutants in 1984 dropped to 16 million pounds in 2003. The loss of water-absorbing leaf canopies and roots required about \$1.5 billion in spending on new storm water runoff systems, American Forests estimated.

In Atlanta, city temperatures increased because so many shade-producing trees were replaced by heat-absorbing structures and concrete.

"The downtown in Atlanta is 10 to 12 degrees hotter" than the surrounding countryside, Gangloff said. "You've created an urban heat island, and that's a human health issue. All the concrete and pavement literally hold the heat into the night."

The thinning of America's trees has occurred despite a significant body of research showing their benefits to body and mind.

"Local decision-makers often think of trees as, 'Yes, they're nice, but we have crime and other issues to take care of,'" said Kathleen Wolf, a research scientist at the University of Washington. "But research shows trees are important to urban residents."

One landmark study concluded that trees help surgery patients recover. Conducted in Pennsylvania, it found patients with views of nature were released sooner and needed fewer painkillers compared to patients with views of brick walls.

"I believe it," said Dr. James Baldwin, associate professor of internal medicine at the University of Michigan medical school. "There's a lot of stuff that doesn't involve machines and medicines that can help people get better quicker."

Kaplan cites a study in San Francisco showing that people who provide daily care to AIDS patients were less likely to "burn out" if they spent time around trees and in nature — walking, running, biking, canoeing. Watching or participating in sports was not as helpful. The worst strategy was watching TV.

Other research showed spending time in nature helped women recovering from breast cancer. Such patients are prone to irritability, impatience and marital problems. But those who relied on "restorative" time in the natural world did better. Even just 20 minutes, three times a week, helped them score better on attention-deficit tests and return to work faster. They were also more likely to take on new challenges, such as losing weight or learning a language.

In Chicago, meanwhile, a series of studies in a huge and dreary public housing project showed residents who lived close to trees were more likely to interact with one another, felt safer and more hopeful about life, and were less likely to procrastinate or use aggression when dealing with major life issues.

Other research showed parents' belief that "natural settings" were most helpful for children with attention deficit disorder. A study of nursing home residents showed that just an hour outdoors improved mental functioning.

Current research, Wolf said, is aimed at how trees might help a growing problem: obesity.

Experts already know that today's Americans live more sedentary lives, a significant contributor to being overweight. But what would happen if urban areas planted more trees? Recent studies suggest adequate greenery may help overcome psychological obstacles to outside activity.

One project, Wolf said, revealed that people perceive walking distances to be shorter if greenery is plentiful along the route. The opposite is true if the trip is characterized by "hardscape."

Another preliminary finding suggests that parents are more likely to let their kids walk to school if their path is full of greenery.

"It might be the trees," Wolf said.

For more information about American Forests' studies on depleted urban tree canopies, visit <http://www.americanforests.org/resources/urbanforests/analysis.php>.

