

KC supervisors question air plan

By Seth Nidever

Hanford Sentinel, Friday, Feb. 2, 2007

A new plan to clean up the San Joaquin Valley's dirty air has Kings County supervisors looking to Washington, D.C. for assistance.

"The air board has to continue what they're doing... on the other hand, the (federal government) has to help us," said Supervisor Tony Oliveira.

A new ozone plan proposed this week by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District includes tighter controls on things like boilers, generators and stationary engines, but it depends heavily on massive new funding from the federal government to work.

The district says it needs \$100 million a year from Washington to purify Valley air by 2023, the target date outlined in the plan.

That's an 11-year delay from an initial 2012 deadline. The plan would place the San Joaquin Valley in the worst offender category to gain the district the additional time.

A final plan is due to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in June.

District officials say the longer time frame -- it's the longest delay allowable under federal rules -- is needed to retire older cars, trucks, diesel engines and off-road equipment.

The district says the turnover is necessary to meet a tough federal standard for ozone, a smog-forming gas that contributes to asthma and other respiratory diseases.

Officials say that meeting the mark will only be possible with new technology and \$3 billion in federal money to help people buy newer, cleaner vehicles.

The district has no power to regulate tailpipe emissions or fuel-efficiency standards.

The district currently receives \$40 million a year for incentive programs, most of it from state and local sources. Under the ozone plan, funding levels must increase to an average of \$188 million a year until 2023.

The federal government's annual contribution will have to be \$100 million, the district stated.

"The state and federal component, it definitely is a central part of it," said Rick McVaigh, deputy air pollution control officer.

If the district fails to meet the standard by 2023, the federal government could yank away \$250 million a year in highway funds, the draft plan states.

Alternatively, U.S. EPA could take over and administer its own plan.

For many Kings County supervisors, the threat of federal sanctions is frustrating.

Supervisor Jon Rachford said the big problem is diesel trucks rumbling through the Valley that tank up on dirtier diesel from surrounding states.

"I just think it's terrible that the federal government... puts all the onus on local people to take care of the problem," he said.

Oliveira, like Rachford, thinks the air district ought to have more control over diesel trucks.

But Oliveira also wants more federal tax credits for clean-burning technologies, tighter emission controls on all moving vehicles and federal funding to help people retire old equipment.

Valley lobbies for air cleanup funds

Agency wants \$250 million from Proposition 1B.

By E.J. Schultz / Bee Capitol Bureau
Fresno Bee, Monday, Feb. 5, 2007

SACRAMENTO - A newly launched effort to clean the Valley's air will face an early test in Sacramento this year when regulators begin to dole out \$1 billion in air quality bond money.

The Valley's air pollution agency is lobbying for at least \$250 million to help replace polluting cars and trucks - a key part of a 16-year, \$3 billion plan to meet federal clean air standards.

But competition is expected to be fierce, with heavily populated coastal regions also angling for a big share.

The \$1 billion in clean air money is contained in Proposition 1B, the \$19.9-billion transportation bond approved by voters in November. The ballot measure calls for the air money to be spent to reduce emissions along trade corridors.

Coastal communities are expected to vie for money to help cut pollution coming from ports. The Port of Oakland, for instance, wants to build a state-of-the-art railyard that would reduce the need for diesel-burning trucks and equipment, said Marilyn Sandifur, a port spokeswoman.

The landlocked Valley should get at least 25% of the money, officials say, because the region's air suffers from pollution-spewing trucks that rumble along Highway 99 as they deliver goods across the West.

Vehicles account for 80% of the smog-making nitrogen oxides, or NOx, emitted in the Valley, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

"We're clearly providing a goods movement service to the state of California. Therefore we're entitled to get a fair share of the air quality mitigation funding," said Pete Weber, a co-chairman of the Fresno-area Regional Jobs Initiative. He joined air district officials on a lobbying trip to Sacramento last week.

The Valley air cleanup plan was announced last week when the air district said it would not meet a 2012 clean air deadline. The agency is seeking an 11-year extension in order to avoid sanctions such as losing federal road-building money.

The plan calls for \$188 million in public money annually to help businesses, local agencies and others pay for cleaner-burning vehicles. The air district wants \$100 million in federal money with much of the rest coming from the state. Today, the district spends about \$40 million on grant programs.

It is not clear how the Prop. 1B air money will be distributed. The state Air Resources Board, which is responsible for overseeing the program, is waiting on guidance from the Legislature. Sen. Alan Lowenthal, D-Long Beach, has introduced a bill. But the legislation, Senate Bill 19, is short on specifics at this point. A hearing is scheduled for Feb. 26 in Sacramento.

Lowenthal said his bill will not include earmarks for specific regions. Those decisions, he said, would likely be left to the Air Resources Board, an 11-member body appointed by the governor.

"I don't want us to micromanage," Lowenthal said. "I'm not going to pick projects."

In making their pitch, Valley officials point to Highway 99 and Interstate 5. The highways, which cut through the region, serve as the "principal north-south corridor" for goods movement in the West, allowing for transport of much of the nation's food supply, officials say.

But "much of that truck traffic passes through the Valley without stopping, making no contribution to the Valley economy, but leaving behind pollutants that the Valley must clean up," according to a letter recently sent by the Valley's congressional delegation to Gov. Schwarzenegger.

At present, about 67,309 heavy-duty diesel trucks operate in the Valley. But as the fast-growing region attracts more traffic, that is expected to grow to 80,042 trucks by 2020, according to the air district.

Emissions standards have gotten tougher over the years, but the rules only apply to new trucks. So, the district wants to use more state money to help get older vehicles off the road. Companies could apply for grants, tax incentives or low-interest loans, with public money likely paying for up to half of fleet replacement costs.

Current vehicle replacement programs have rules that are too restrictive, said Tom Jordan, special projects administrator for the Valley air district. Under the Carl Moyer Program, for instance, companies using the money for fleet modernization can only use it to replace trucks with a model year 1990 and older, Jordan said.

"We would like to see it opened up to provide a variety of options," he said.

More carpool lanes: The right path?

By Tony Bizjak - Bee Staff Writer

Sacramento Bee, Monday, February 5, 2007

From left, Monica Otis, Karen Schneider and Cathy Bishop join Erik Hornbaker, seated in back, to carpool home from their workplace in Sacramento. When carpool lanes run out, they often take city streets. Sacramento Bee/Kevin German

Day after day, when they drive home from work, Cathy Bishop of Granite Bay and her carpooling partners hit a wall.

It happens on Interstate 80 at the Placer County line. The carpool lane just dissolves, leaving them stuck against a mass of clogged traffic.

In desperation, Bishop's group now abandons the freeway miles early, finishing the commute through city streets. "Absolutely ridiculous," said Bishop, an otherwise upbeat state employee. "There has got to be a better way."

That lament is common among Sacramento carpoolers.

Seventeen years after the first carpool lanes were rolled out in Sacramento, they remain a patchwork, offering limited time savings on increasingly congested roadways.

Highway planners say a major fix is in order.

In possibly the most ambitious transportation proposal in generations, officials plan to add 50 more miles of carpool lanes, knitting Sacramento's freeways into a "seamless" system.

Exclusive "flyover" bridges, separated from regular traffic lanes, would allow carpoolers and commuter buses to swoop from one freeway to the next -- no merging -- turning Sacramento carpooling into the road version of first-class flying.

The network is one of a series of major projects being proposed that promise to dramatically redraw the region's travel map.

Those projects, from bridges and light-rail extensions to new beltways, owe their emergence to a rare act in California: agreement by voters for billions of dollars in local tax and state bond money to buy a better commute.

It comes after what many say are years of neglect.

"This is as significant an infusion of money as I can remember," Sacramento County official Tom Zlotkowski said.

As envisioned by Department of Transportation officials, the carpool network alone is so massive that it will cost billions and could take two decades to build.

But, with population rising fast and congestion plaguing every freeway, Caltrans officials argue the Sacramento commuter network is a must.

"I'm frustrated," said Wayne Lewis, local planning chief for Caltrans. "For years, we've lived off the investments our grandparents made. We've used up our freeway capacity."

Lewis has high-level backing: Caltrans Director Will Kempton, a Folsom resident who prefers light rail to Highway 50's slowdowns, who says: "We won't achieve the full efficiencies of (carpool lanes) until we have a network in place."

It will require a keen sales pitch, however, for Caltrans to pull it off.

Carpool lanes no longer are unquestionably regarded in California as forward-thinking.

Citing a university study, some environmentally minded activists argue the network is just an excuse to expand freeways, encouraging long-distance commuting and more sprawl.

Sacramento resident Karen Jacques dismissed it as "a huge chunk of money into the same old thing."

Instead of building new lanes, Caltrans should turn existing lanes over to carpools, she said. "Now, that's a different story."

Glenda Marsh, an east Sacramento bike commuter and member of Neighbors Advocating Sustainable Transportation, says put the money into transit. "Why not try to create 'congestion' on buses and light rail."

Air quality experts are divided over the impact of carpool lanes. The state Air Resources Board's stance is that carpool lanes reduce pollution. But Sacramento air quality officials and others say they have yet to see conclusive evidence.

Some frustrated commuters would do away with carpool lanes altogether.

"All drivers are paying for the highways, and special use should not be granted to special people," said Don McDermott of Sacramento.

Lane critics miss important realities, Lewis said. He and others with Caltrans have hit the road lately, armed with computer projections, to make the case for carpool expansion.

He points out that air quality problems here have triggered federal restrictions making it nearly impossible to build regular freeway lanes. But carpool lanes-- which are regular lanes except from 6 to 10 a.m. and 3 to 7 p.m. -- do usually pass federal muster.

New rule would ban fires on Spare the Air Nights

Mandatory regulation would prohibit wood blazes in fireplaces, stoves

By Denis Cuff, MEDIANEWS STAFF

Tri-Valley Herald and Contra Costa Times, Saturday, February 3, 2007

Bay Area residents asked not to use fireplaces on bad air nights this winter could be required to snuff out their wood fires under a new mandatory ban proposed by air quality regulators.

The stronger rule would mean that the wood fires in fireplaces and stoves would be banned on Spare the Air Nights in the nine Bay Area counties. Southern California also is considering a ban, and one is already enforced in the San Joaquin Valley.

The rub is that violators are most likely to be turned in by neighbors.

Air regulators anticipate criticism from those who feel government should butt out of people's burning habits.

But failing to rein in smoke would leave the public to breathe unhealthy air, clean air regulators said.

"When your activity in the home is poisoning the air in your neighborhood for a long distance around, that's when the air district says, 'Enough is enough,'" said Mark Ross, chairman of the Bay Area Air Quality Management District Board and a Martinez city councilman.

Many nights this winter, air quality in the Bay Area and Southern California failed to meet new federal health standards for tiny particles that can lodge deep in the lungs and trigger respiratory and heart problems — even premature deaths.

The Bay Area has had 26 nights this winter when voluntary Spare the Air Tonight no-burn advisories were issued in anticipation of unhealthy air.

Some people lighted fires those nights anyway, officials say, either because they didn't hear the advisories or ignored them.

"It's not unlike smoking in restaurants and bars," Ross said.

"People who did it groused about restrictions, but then everyone noticed that the air quality was better."

Both the nine-county Bay Area air district and four-county South Coast air district have started their own rule-drafting process.

At a retreat last month, the Bay Area district board instructed its advisers to begin drawing up rule options to be whittled down and taken to public hearings in summer.

"This is not to prevent wood burning, but to prevent it when the air quality is bad," said Gayle Uilkema of Lafayette, a Contra Costa County supervisor who also serves on the air board.

The air district has yet to work out myriad rule details.

Uilkema said she wants to consider an exemption for households that don't have natural gas heaters, but rely on wood fires for heat.

"This is about protecting public health," Uilkema said. "We don't want people to freeze because they don't have a heating source."

Enforcing the rule is another a delicate matter.

In the San Joaquin Valley, where the first mandatory no-burn rule in California took effect in fall 2003, the local air district relies primarily on public complaints to identify violators.

Last winter, the valley district issued 159 no-burn tickets, which cost \$50 for first-time offenders.

"(Turning others in) was an emotional issue for some," said Janelle Schneider, a spokeswoman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. "We told people, 'Look. You have the right to turn in neighbors who make too much noise, or who drive smoking vehicles.'"

Despite some grumbling about the rule, it has made the valley air substantially cleaner, Schneider said.

Some in Contra Costa expressed mixed feelings about turning in neighbors.

Robert Pottinger of Walnut Creek said he wouldn't.

"I would talk to them," he said. "If they were a good neighbor, they wouldn't want to do something that creates a problem."

Sheila Dellebake of Concord said she might make a complaint about violators, especially if several fires in a neighborhood were fouling the air.

"The air is horrible when people burn all these fires," Dellebake said. "This is very damaging to people's health."

Use of fireplaces is banned today

Modesto Bee, Monday, February 5, 2007

Lighting fireplaces is banned today in Stanislaus and Merced counties, where the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District predicts unhealthy air for all. Wood-burning fireplaces, fireplace inserts, heating stoves and pellet stoves cannot be used unless they are a home's only means of heat. Wood burning is discouraged in San Joaquin County. On the Net: www.valleyair.org.

Burn ban today, Monday in Stanislaus

From The Modesto Bee Newsroom - BEE STAFF REPORTS

Modesto Bee, Sunday, February 4, 2007

Keep fireplaces dark and inhalers handy: Wood burning is banned today in Stanislaus County and Monday in Stanislaus and Merced County as well.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District predicts that pollution will reach levels unhealthy for everyone in the two counties. That means wood-burning fireplaces, fireplace inserts, heating stoves and pellet stoves cannot be used unless they are the only means of heating a house.

Burning will be permitted today in Merced County and today and Monday in San Joaquin, though district officials are discouraging it. San Joaquin is the only county in the eight-county district that's not under a ban Monday.

It's been a rough four days for children, older people and the chronically ill in Stanislaus County. Air quality started to nosedive Friday, and it's been unhealthy every day since for people in those "sensitive groups." That means some people -- asthmatics, for example -- likely have had to rely on emergency medications to ease shortness of breath.

Today, pollution was at high enough levels to be unhealthy for everyone. Officials expect more of the same Monday.

Power plants concern residents

Proposals for two gas fueled stations spark pollution fears

By Matt O'Brien, STAFF WRITER

Tri-Valley Herald, Sunday, February 4, 2007

HAYWARD — The thought of not just one, but two gas-burning power plants being built in west Hayward unnerves retired schoolteacher Laura Ramsey.

Hayward, like most other cities in Alameda County and the Bay Area, has never had a large-scale electricity-producing plant within its borders.

And it was only last week that Ramsey, a Hayward resident for more than 50 years, found out the city might soon transform from just another energy consumer into a crucial generator of the Bay Area power supply.

"Why Hayward?" asked Ramsey, who imagines the worst in the two new plants: rows of dirty smokestacks and noxious air.

"I think this energy thing should be spread out," she said. "I'm concerned about the water. I'm concerned about the edge of the Bay. I'm concerned with the whole area down there."

Ramsey attended a California Energy Commission-hosted tour last week of the 6-acre industrial lot where a Texas company, Tierra Energy, wants to build a 115.5-megawatt plant on Clawiter Road just north of Route 92.

She was told, along with the handful of other residents who attended, that this gas-fired plant would be far cleaner than the fossil fuel-burning power plants of the past, that hardly anyone would be able to see it, and that it would be a boon to Hayward in the event city residents or businesses ever need an emergency power jolt.

The plant has been called a back-up and would operate no more than 4,000 hours a year — which is a little less than half-time. It would have 14 smokestacks, each 70 feet tall.

"Basically, it's very similar to an engine in a car. It's 20 cylinders. There's 14 engines. It's a very simple technology," said Tierra project manager Greg Trewitt in an interview Friday. "On the exhaust side of it, we are applying for the lowest (nitrous oxide) emissions ever, certainly in the state of California, for this type of technology."

Nitrous oxide is a product of combustion.

But as a handful of active residents and city officials try to absorb complex questions of thermodynamics, the plans for both plants are rapidly developing, and some of the locals worry that Hayward is being left with a burden it shouldn't have to bear.

"We believe Hayward has done more than its share," City Manager Jesus Armas told state energy commissioners in a public hearing that followed last week's tour, listing the city's concerns about air quality, hazardous materials and traffic.

Why Hayward?

The answer to why Hayward is attractive as an energy hub depends on who is answering.

For Calpine Corp., the San Jose-based company that wants to build the larger of the two proposed Hayward plants, it has something to do with water.

Calpine's plant, called the Russell City Energy Center, would sit adjacent to Hayward's municipal wastewater treatment plant on Enterprise Avenue, and, through an agreement with the city, use the recycled wastewater as a coolant.

The plant would produce up to 600 megawatts of energy — five times the capacity of Tierra's plant.

That's because while Tierra's facility is designed as a "peaker" plant, or a back-up during periods of peak energy demand, the Russell City Energy Center would be expected to operate round the clock.

The bigger plant would use a combined-cycle gas turbine.

Instead of wasting all the excess heat that is produced by burning natural gas, a combined-cycle uses the excess heat to produce more electricity, said Mike Hatfield, Calpine's development director, making it one of the most efficient types of commercial gas plants on the market.

"With a combined-cycle plant, what we're doing is taking what would have been waste — if you think of a jet engine, that exhaust is pretty hot — and running it through a steam turbine," Hatfield said. "So we're capturing a lot more energy."

Hatfield said the other reason why Hayward was chosen is its central location in the Pacific Gas and Electric Co.'s infrastructure network.

Both the Calpine and Tierra plants are being built to produce power for the PG&E electric grid. PG&E already has signed power purchasing agreements with both companies.

"It has a location that PG&E transmission folks think is a good location," Hatfield said.

It is in what PG&E calls a "load center," he said, interconnecting with the utility company's Eastshore Substation on the south side of Route 92.

That substation is connected to a 115-kilovolt line that transports electricity up and down the East Bay, as well as another major line that crosses the Bay alongside the San Mateo Bridge.

Along with the electricity line, the two plants are near PG&E's major natural gas line, which runs alongside a railroad corridor and provides the fuel both plants need to generate power.

Both companies say they picked the Hayward site because, in effect, PG&E wants them there, but PG&E says it's the developers, not the energy provider, who decide where to build.

"PG&E does not pick power plant sites," PG&E spokesman Paul Moreno said. "However, the generators will pick plants that are closer to electric and gas transmission facilities. You want to have ready access to that."

Ultimately, whether a plant can be built on a site or not is up to the state energy commissioners, who will be reviewing both proposals for the remainder of the year before making any decisions.

Why now?

If plans are approved, the two power plants proposed for west Hayward would both begin construction in 2008.

One plant, Russell City Energy Center, has been in the planning stages since the late 1990s but fell victim, for a time, to the 2001 state electricity crisis and Calpine's own financial troubles, leading to bankruptcy proceedings in 2005. Only after Calpine got some financial backing from General Electric last year, and settled a power agreement with PG&E, were the plans considered real again.

But the smaller plant — Tierra is calling it the Eastshore Energy Center, after PG&E's nearby substation — came forward so quickly last year that even Armas, Hayward's city manager, says he didn't know what was going on.

"All of it was occurring without any knowledge of the city. Neither PG&E nor anyone else informed us that this was under way," Armas said. "The parties bought the property without doing any land-use evaluation. ... They came to us only after they had already secured the site."

David Marks, Tierra's president, said his company became involved in Hayward only after another company, Remco Energy Corp., working in collaboration with Black Hills Energy, dropped out.

Tierra's involvement can be traced back to a mandate that the California Public Utilities Commission issued about two years ago, making the state's public utilities demonstrate a long-term plan for procuring new power. After years of caution and uncertainty among plant developers not sure how the state's regulations would proceed after the energy crisis, utilities began getting inundated with proposals.

At PG&E, which provides electricity for most of Northern California, Marks said more than 100 bids came in. Under the CPUC's oversight, PG&E whittled that down to seven favored projects last year — of those, two were the plants now planned for Hayward.

And on a statewide level, California Energy Commission spokeswoman Susanne Garfield said a total of 13 projects are now under state review, amounting to a total of 4,500 megawatts of energy, with eight more proposals expected to come in the next five months.

Most of those are so-called peaker plants, such as the one that Tierra wants to build.

"Are we able to meet our peak demand now in Northern California? Yes, more so than in Southern California," Garfield said. "But as demand is growing, it's usually growing in the urban areas."

Some in Hayward who see that demand — even the plant's most immediate neighbors — say they see the importance of fulfilling that demand and, given new, cleaner technologies, don't mind having the plants.

Gerard Clum, president of Life Chiropractic College West — right across from the street from the proposed Tierra plant — said he was told it would be quieter than the stamping plant that was previously on the site.

"We think it's a good use for the area. I don't see a downside to it," he said. "If I understand it properly, in the event there were local power (problems), we'd be well-served."

Study: Nonsmoking sections won't protect casino workers, patrons

Associated Press

Contra Costa Times, Sunday, February 4, 2007

TRENTON, N.J. - A group lobbying to extend New Jersey's indoor smoking ban to Atlantic City casinos released a study Monday showing continued high levels of smoke pollution in nonsmoking areas at gambling establishments with designated smoking sections.

The study of Rhode Island video gambling facilities, where state law requires separately walled and ventilated sections - as does an initially approved Atlantic City ordinance - produced expected results: the more concentrated the smoking section, the higher the level of air pollution.

However, the study also showed that the nonsmoking sections in Rhode Island gambling establishments were far from smoke-free. In one facility, the nonsmoking area ranged from 17 percent to 37 percent as polluted as the smoking section. In the other, the nonsmoking area was 39 percent as polluted as the smoking section, according to the study.

"How dismal that the separately walled and ventilated nonsmoking sections are still one-third as polluted as the extra-polluted smoking sections," said Regina Carlson, executive director of New Jersey Group Against Smoking Pollution, or GASP.

A Casino Association of New Jersey official did not immediately return an Associated Press call for comment on Sunday.

According to New Jersey GASP, it's estimated that confining smoking in Atlantic City casinos to a quarter of the gaming area could produce pollution levels as high as four times the levels in currently undivided casinos.

For an employee who worked in that area full-time, his or her exposure would be five times the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency annual limit. Currently, casino employee exposure to cigarette smoke exceeds the EPA limit by a factor of more than one and a half, the group said.

"For employees and patrons in any of these smoking areas, quite simply, the air is not fit to breathe," Carlson said. "The only way to protect employees and patrons is to make casinos smoke-free."

Under a compromise agreement that won initial approval from the Atlantic City Council last month, the casinos would set up separate enclosures on a quarter of their floor space, with floor-to ceiling walls and high-powered ventilation systems to suck smoke out of the air.

At least some of the casinos are considering making their smoking areas lounges for patrons who wish to smoke, while keeping gambling tables in smoke-free areas. But others are toying with the idea of putting some of their highest income-generating table games in smoking areas, reasoning that many of their high-rollers are smokers.

The final vote is expected on Wednesday.

ON THE NET

<http://www.njgasp.org>

<http://www.smokefreecasinos.com>

Air pollution harms more than just lungs, study finds

Exposure makes women more likely to die from heart disease, stroke

By Warren King, Seattle Times

Contra Costa Times, Friday, February 2, 2007

SEATTLE - Air pollution has long been known to be bad for the lungs. But new University of Washington research, involving thousands of older women in dozens of cities nationwide, shows that it also raises the risk of women dying from heart disease or stroke.

The increased risk comes from tiny airborne particles typically found in engine exhaust. And the damage they cause to arteries in the heart and brain is worse than previously believed, the study found.

"It looks like it's about three times as big as previously estimated. ... That's a surprise," said Dr. Joel Kaufman, the UW professor of environmental sciences who directed the study.

The scientists found that the greater the level of the so-called "fine particulate" pollution, the greater the risk of cardiovascular disease and death. Even a relatively slight increase boosted the risk significantly.

"There is no reason to think it isn't the same for men," said Kaufman.

Kaufman said the research focused on women because there was a readily available group already enrolled in long-term health research coordinated by the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle. Data from the project, the 15-year Women's Health Initiative, have produced other important research on heart disease, breast cancer, colorectal cancer and osteoporosis.

Results from the air-pollution study are reported in this week's edition of the New England Journal of Medicine with Kristin Miller, a UW doctoral student, as the lead author. Other scientists from the UW, Hutchinson center and Harborview Medical Center co-wrote the study, which was financed by the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences.

The scientists analyzed the medical records of nearly 66,000 postmenopausal women from 36 cities and followed them for an average of six years. At the start, none had cardiovascular disease. The researchers took into account nonpollution factors in reporting their results: age, race, smoking, education, income, weight, and the presence of diabetes, hypertension and high cholesterol.

Pollution exposure was measured using monitors near their homes that looked for airborne particles smaller than 2.5 microns, or 1 millionth of a meter, in diameter. About 30 to 40 of the particles would equal the diameter of a human hair. They are invisible except when spewed in large quantities from tailpipes or chimneys, or when they form haze over a city.

During the study, 1,816 of the women had heart attacks, strokes or were diagnosed with diseased arteries of the heart or brain. Of those, 261 died.

Steel foundry agrees to slash air pollution

WEST BERKELEY: Pacific Steel will cut hazardous emissions by 2 tons each year under settlement with lawsuit plaintiff

By Kristin Bender, MEDIANEWS STAFF
Contra Costa Times, Friday, February 2, 2007

Pacific Steel Casting, the West Berkeley steel foundry sued three times in the past year for emitting a foul smell and allegedly causing health problems, will reduce its hazardous air pollutants by at least 2 tons annually under a settlement agreement with an Oakland health and justice nonprofit organization.

Last year, Communities for a Better Environment filed a federal Clean Air Act lawsuit against Pacific Steel, claiming that the foundry, which makes steel castings for trucks, buses, water valves and agricultural equipment, had for years been causing a nuisance in the community.

The two sides reached a settlement agreement this week that requires Pacific Steel to reduce emissions, create a scrap metal inspection program and establish a joint consultation committee to recommend and oversee ongoing pollution-reduction efforts.

Pacific Steel still faces two other lawsuits.

CBE senior attorney Adrienne Bloch called the settlement agreement a "great first step."

"This agreement will result in real, on-the-ground emissions reductions, will keep community members at the center of defining community needs, forge a meaningful relationship between environmental justice and labor and create the opening for a long-term process to tackle a complex set of issues with business," she said.

The settlement agreement is favorable for Pacific Steel because the lawsuit sought to fine the plant between \$27,500 and \$32,500 per day for every violation of the Clean Air Act between December 2002 and March 2004.

"There is a new spirit of cooperation that the company wholeheartedly welcomes," Pacific Steel spokeswoman Elisabeth Jewel said.

Specifically, Pacific Steel will:

- Establish a scrap metal inspection program to ensure that metals used in making product molds don't contain mercury, fluids or lead that could increase emissions. This will be accomplished through the notification of scrap suppliers and regular inspections.
- Form a joint consultation committee of Pacific Steel leaders and representatives of the company's 600-member union and the CBE to meet quarterly to look at ways to continue to reduce emissions. This will be accomplished through updating older emission control equipment and examining air flow issues.
- Deposit \$350,000 into a fund that will be used to make equipment upgrades based on what the joint consultation committee advises. The company will decide if additional funds will be spent. The consent decree will expire when the funds are depleted or after three years, whichever comes first.

The 73-year-old company, one of three remaining big steel foundries in the nation, faces two other lawsuits in connection with air pollution that residents and community members say has long caused them headaches, nausea and chest tightness.

Neighborhood Solutions, which works with residents to solve neighborhood issues, last year filed suit against Pacific Steel on behalf of 25 plaintiffs, each seeking up to \$7,500 under the suit. A hearing date is pending.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District sued the foundry in August contending that the company, under an earlier settlement agreement, failed to release a health assessment report and install a carbon absorption abatement system to reduce odor emissions.

That \$2 million pollution control system is up and running, but the lawsuit is still pending.

IF YOU GO

- WHAT: Community meeting with Pacific Steel representatives
- WHEN: 7 p.m. Wednesday
- WHERE: West Berkeley Senior Center, 1900 Sixth St.

City's prosperity only goes so far

Contra Costa Times, Sunday, February 4, 2007

At a breakfast meeting last week where the topic was Dublin's continuing economic and residential growth, East Bay Business Times publisher Mike Consol talked about the strides the city has made in the past 10 years.

As Consol talked about how property tax revenue in the city has increased 400 percent, a shout arose from a resident in the audience who didn't feel he needed to be reminded his own property tax bill was part of that meteoric rise.

"We know!" proclaimed the taxed-enough local.

ONE PHAT JAB: Contra Costa's mayors usually gather every month to chew the fat. Last week, they discussed how to cut the fat in their cities.

In a cross between a Maury Povich show and a council meeting, they passed around a mike and professed how they are leading by example to make their residents more healthy.

"My name is Don Freitas and I am a fat person," said Antioch's mayor, who told the crowd he had recently lost 36 pounds.

Concord Mayor Mark Peterson couldn't pass up an opportunity to take a jab at a predecessor.

"The best thing we did in the city of Concord was to shut down that restaurant called TR's," Peterson said. "There's a lot less beer drinking and a lot less cholesterol in our city."

The person laughing the loudest was found in the back of the room. That would be Mark DeSaulnier, who owned the restaurant for 26 years before closing it on New Year's Eve to focus on his new job in the state Assembly.

"It was not closed down by the city," he rebutted, "but due to council members who came there and drove away my business."

Toward the end of the evening, former Walnut Creek Mayor Kathy Hicks brought out Hula Hoops and suggested a competition. But these politicians are smart -- no one took her up on the offer, knowing that kind of photo op could be difficult to explain in their next election.

SPARE THE REMARKS: Gayle Uilkema stopped burning fires in her Lafayette fireplace long before a pollution board on which she serves proposed to ban wood fires on bad air nights.

Uilkema, a Contra Costa County supervisor, felt the anti-burn heat years ago when she hosted a party to announce a daughter's engagement.

Uilkema had stoked up the fire to provide a romantic setting, but guests gave her some gentle ribbing because she was a new member of the Bay Area Air Quality Management District board.

"When people walked in, they said, 'You're on the air board. You shouldn't be lighting a fire,'" Uilkema recalled.

She also stopped burning at home because the smoke irritated a granddaughter who has asthma.

Uilkema gave away some of her fire wood. "The rest turned into mulch," she said. "I still have some in the backyard."

FIREFIGHTER FUNNIES: At a recent Moraga-Orinda Fire District orientation about a new online FireWise program, a few employees mused about how the district is changing.

"I was telling my partner, 'I've been a medic for 25 years,'" said engineer paramedic Ken Consiglio. "He said, 'I'll be 25 soon.'"

Later, discussing strategies for discouraging landscaping with highly flammable plants, Consiglio wondered, "So, we can arrest people if they plant a juniper?"

And another firefighter had a creative but somewhat expensive idea for raising public awareness of the FireWise program: "Super Bowl commercial!"

Denis Cuff, Theresa Harrington, Ryan Huff and Sophia Kazmi contributed to this column.

PERSPECTIVE COVER STORY

Suburban myths

Sprawl, vehicles not a scourge on nation

By Ted Balaker and Sam Staley
Contra Costa Times, Sunday, February 4, 2007

1. Americans are addicted to driving
2. Public transportation can reduce traffic congestion
3. We can cut air pollution only if we stop driving
4. We're paving over America
5. We can't deal with global warming unless we stop driving

Travel company sells carbon credits to reduce emissions

Customers can pay to offset greenhouse gases spewed during trips

By Dana M. Nichols - Record Staff Writer
Sunday, February 04, 2007

ANGELS CAMP - An adventure travel company based here says its customers can now go on their vacations without contributing to global warming.

Outdoor Adventure River Specialists in January began encouraging customers who sign up for Grand Canyon raft trips, sea kayaking expeditions and other adventures to consider paying a few dollars extra to "offset" the carbon dioxide spewed during their car or airplane trip to the vacation site. OARS even offers to chip in half the cost of offsetting a customer's vacation travel emissions.

The money paid to offset the emissions will go to Native Energy, a firm that finances wind farms and other clean forms of electricity generation. That clean energy, in turn, replaces power that would have been generated in coal- or oil-fired plants, thus eliminating tons of carbon emissions that would have gone into the atmosphere.

Carbon-neutral travel

OARS

For information on Outdoor Adventure River Specialists and its Responsible Travel program, got to www.oars.com

CARBON OFFSET CREDITS

CLEAN AIR "" COOL PLANET, a non-profit that promotes awareness of ways to reduce global warming, recently commissioned a review of the quality of carbon offset credits available to consumers. View it online at: www.cleanair-coolplanet.org/ConsumersGuidetoCarbonOffsets.pdf

NATIVE ENERGY

Get information on the firm's carbon offset credits online at www.nativeenergy.com/

Scientists say carbon emissions from human activity trap heat in the atmosphere and are the main culprit behind rising global temperatures and sea levels.

An OARS customer from Stockton who used a small car to make the 1500-mile round trip to a Grand Canyon raft trip, for example, would cause about a third of a ton of carbon dioxide to go into the atmosphere. By paying Native Energy \$6, that customer could purchase credit for a third of a ton of emissions eliminated elsewhere, thus zeroing out the total carbon effect of the road trip.

"It seemed like the right thing to do and the right time to do it," said Steve Markle, marketing director for OARS. He said the firm for the last year has been purchasing carbon credits to offset unavoidable emissions resulting from company operations such as electricity used in offices and vans used to take rafts and customers to launching sites.

Markle said the firm seeks to prevent its activities from damaging the very oceans, rivers and canyons that are the heart of its business. And he hopes encouraging carbon-neutral travel will cause customers to consider their impact on world atmosphere and climate.

"I think it is just beginning to penetrate the common discussion," Markle said. "Even Bush in his State of the Union speech ... said we have to confront global climate change."

Europeans lead the way

Economists who study carbon offset markets say that Europe is way ahead of the United States in reducing pollution and burning fossil fuels efficiently because Europe has had a mandatory cap on emissions and a regulated market for carbon credits.

Ironically, it was the United States which in the 1980s invented the market-based cap-and-trade method for regulating pollutants with its system for sulphur dioxide. But the U.S. is not one of the 160 nations which are party of the Kyoto Protocol agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that are causing global warming, and so has not moved to limit or reduce carbon dioxide from fossil fuels.

Economists say that voluntary carbon markets, like the one OARS is encouraging its customers to use, are also a good idea, although it is harder for customers to be certain that they are really offsetting their carbon emissions that way.

"They can often be extremely innovative, pushing the boundaries of the envelope," Ricardo Bayon, director of Ecosystem Marketplace, a San Francisco-based consulting firm, said of firms that set up voluntary carbon emissions markets. "Having said that, there are a lot of different providers. Some are better than others. Some are reputable, some are not. Some offsets are permanent, some are not."

Offsets vary

Carbon offsets could come from improved technology that reduces emissions in a traditional smokestack industry like a steel plant, from creating wind energy that replaces smokestack generation, from converters that cleanly burn methane from cow manure that would otherwise go into the atmosphere, or from storing carbon under ground or in the bodies of growing plants.

An example of a carbon offset that might not be permanent would be planting a forest. Growing trees sequester carbon in their tissues. But the carbon gets back into the atmosphere if the forest burns down.

Another issue is something economists call "additionality."

"The question is, would those wind farms be built anyway?" said David Brownstone, a professor of economics at University of California, Irvine and an expert on transportation and alternative fuels. A carbon offset that funds a wind farm, for example, really only delivers that offset if the project replaces dirty electricity, he said.

Native Energy Marketing Director Billy Connelly said customers can be sure his firm's credits truly reduce carbon emissions because the firm only finances new projects that would not have been built otherwise rather than selling credits for existing clean-energy operations.

He said tens of thousands of individual consumers and several hundred businesses already have purchased carbon credits from Native Energy, although the businesses have purchased about two-thirds of the carbon credits by weight.

Native Energy in turn has financed wind farms on lands owned by American Indian tribes, methane converters for dairy farms, and other clean-energy generation projects.

Connelly said he expects his firm to thrive by selling voluntary carbon credits even if the United States eventually joins other major nations in fighting global warming by establishing a mandatory cap and carbon market.

Thomas Hand, marketing coordinator for Native Energy, said the firm to date has sold credits for eliminating about 400,000 tons of carbon emissions.

State won't drop auto industry emissions suit

Bob Egelko, Chronicle Staff Writer <<mailto:beigelko@sfchronicle.com>>
S.F. Chronicle, Friday, February 2, 2007

State Attorney General Jerry Brown followed his predecessor's lead on global warming Thursday, pushing ahead with a lawsuit seeking damages from six major auto manufacturers for their vehicles' emissions of heat-trapping greenhouse gases.

At the same time, Brown released a letter he sent this week seeking a meeting with chief executives of the car companies to "discuss resolution of our pending litigation and moving forward cooperatively."

He was referring to the state lawsuit filed in September by then-Attorney General Bill Lockyer and to the automakers' suit seeking to overturn California's first-in-the-nation law limiting vehicle emissions of greenhouse gases. The state is also part of a suit before the U.S. Supreme Court challenging the Bush administration's refusal to regulate carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.

"The problem is so huge that they (the manufacturers) have to be part of the solution," Brown said at a news conference. On the other hand, he said, "we've got a solid lawsuit" that is all the more necessary because of "the absolute failure to do anything on the part of the White House."

Brown refused to commit himself to the lawsuit against the automakers during his campaign last fall, saying he wasn't sure whether the state could prove to a court's satisfaction that the emissions were causing harm in California. He also said he was concerned about the companies' financial condition.

But he said Thursday that he had changed his view after looking more closely at the legal basis of the suit, including a 1907 Supreme Court ruling that allowed a state to sue companies in federal court for discharging harmful gases that crossed state lines. That ruling was cited in his office's filing defending California's claim that vehicles' greenhouse gas emissions are a "public nuisance," an activity that interferes with public health and safety.

Brown sought a meeting with the auto executives in a letter to Theodore Boutros, lawyer for the car makers. Boutros said the companies were reviewing the request.

"We appreciate the conciliatory tone of the attorney general's letter," Boutros said in a statement. "As we have argued in our motion to dismiss, the global warming debate implicates policy issues that need to be addressed at the national and international level and simply can't be resolved through this kind of nuisance lawsuit."

Lockyer filed the suit last year against General Motors, Ford, Chrysler and the North American outlets of Toyota, Honda and Nissan.

The suit claims that emissions from the companies' vehicles are a significant cause of climate change and are already contributing to major problems for the state's economy and natural resources, ranging from a decline in the Sierra snowpack to increased air pollution and wildlife hazards. The suit seeks unspecified damages for the harm to state lands, waters and the air, as well as the state's costs in planning and prevention.

U.S. District Judge Martin Jenkins of San Francisco has scheduled a hearing for March 6 to consider the automakers' request to dismiss the suit.

In court papers in December, the manufacturers said the state's case has no basis in California or federal law and could cause "incalculable damage (to) the nation's carefully regulated transportation industry and the national economy."

They also argued that the case raises foreign policy issues and that the state has no basis for complaining about vehicle use while maintaining its own fleet of 37,000 vehicles and an extensive highway network.

In response, state lawyers said Thursday that California "supports the purchase and use of motor vehicles; it has not thereby expressly consented to (the companies') greenhouse gas emissions that cause substantial harm to the state."

The lawsuit would not disrupt any national regulation or foreign policy on the issue, state lawyers argued, because no such rules or policies exist.

"California does not seek from this court -- and is not obligated to await -- a comprehensive solution to global warming," Brown's office said. "California alleges that defendants, the six largest domestic emitters of carbon dioxide in the transportation sector in the United States, are contributing to an interstate nuisance and causing concrete injuries to California."

Bill targets buses, public vehicles using diesel fuel

By June Woods - Tribune Writer

The Madera Tribune February 03, 2007

Senator aims to clean up air with use of biodiesel

School buses and other public vehicles will have to stop spewing so much noxious pollution if biodiesel rules being debated now go into effect.

In an effort to clean California's air, Sen. Dean Florez has introduced bills that would increase the use of biodiesel in vehicles that now use diesel.

The bills would require all vehicles owned or leased by the state, or by a city,

county, or district, and school buses that use diesel fuel to instead use B20 (20 percent biodiesel) or a higher blend. It would also require the State Air Resources Board to establish a program to implement and monitor the requirements.

Biodiesel is a renewable fuel for diesel engines that comes from natural oils like soybean oil. It is produced by a chemical process that removes the glycerin from the oil, and can be used in any concentration with petroleum-based diesel fuel in existing diesel engines with little or no modification.

"Our coalition in building this (legislation) was really focused on the fact that we needed to do something about mobile sources of air pollution," Florez said. The coalition wanted to find a fuel that could "knockout one half of the equation of our ozone problem, which would be the particulate matter."

Although biodiesel reduces particulate matter by 45 percent, Florez said scientists are still not sure if there is a difference in the output of nitrogen oxides. "But if you look at the equation, either way it comes out to better and cleaner fuel than diesel."

According to the California Air Resources Board, there are more than 1.2 million diesel engines in operation in California, each one producing tons of nitrogen oxides and toxic soot over its lifetime.

Diesel-driven vehicles amount to just 5 percent of vehicles on the road but produce 40 percent of the state's nitrogen oxides emissions.

Florez noted that the bills, which are also supported by the governor, have bipartisan support. And the governor is leading the drive toward cleaner-burning fuels and cleaner air.

Although biodiesel differs from ethanol, the drive toward cleaner-burning fuel is especially good news for facilities like Pacific Ethanol Inc., a Madera plant that opened October 2006. Pacific Ethanol produces 35 million gallons of ethanol per year. What is left over from its production of ethanol could go into making biodiesel.

"We could potentially get into (the biodiesel) market," said Tom Koehler, vice president of government affairs with Pacific Ethanol. "We have been looking at that."

Florez's bills also have the support of those currently in the biodiesel industry, on which the bills would have a big impact, and they were involved in forming the legislation. "It made a lot of sense to us to team up and produce this series of bills," Florez said.

He said he expects opposition to come from oil companies, road and highway builders, and others. "Everyone that has an interest in keeping everyone in a petroleum car is going to be opposed to this," he said. "I think they're going to argue that somehow we're trying to push an alternative and the market really should allow that opportunity to come through."

The coalition's answer to that, he said, is that they're merely going to give the biodiesel industry the same types of tax advantages that the oil companies have - no more, no less.

"We think the incentives we have in our bills are actually much less," he said.

The bills would ultimately create demand in the biodiesel industry by asking for cooperation among public agencies and others, which encourages a stable fuel supply that the industry can count on.

"On the supply side," Florez said, "biodiesel today is still termed an alternative additive. Rather than it being an additive to fuel, we want to make it a fuel and take away the additive stigma that it has."

Although the bills only ask that public vehicles run on a percentage of biodiesel, Florez would like to see some running 100 percent. " ... At the end of the day, that would be a better environment for promoting this 'dissident' fuel."

The cost to switch to biodiesel, he said, is minimal compared to products such as ethanol. "In ethanol you have to do major retrofits (for 100 percent), biodiesel can run in any engine running diesel today."

Ethanol can burn in any make or model of vehicle at low percentages without modifying the vehicle. A common blend, E10, is 10 percent ethanol and 90 percent unleaded gasoline.

Higher concentrations of ethanol, such as that found in E85, can only be used in flexible fuel vehicles (there are some 4 million on the road).

With the exception of engine and fuel system modifications, flexible fuel vehicles are identical to gasoline-only models. They have been produced since the 1980s.

The immediate problem presented by the biodiesel bills is distribution. "That is really up to the private sector," Florez said. "We're not mandating that gasoline stations or truck stops must have biodiesel fuel tanks. What we're saying is that with enough demand from a government trying to clean the air, you'll actually see those stations opening up for those folks."

The people who do choose to carry biodiesel will get a tax break of 30 cents per gallon back from 100 percent biodiesel.

"It's very similar to what the oil companies get in terms of their deductions for exploratory drilling," Florez said. "So we're trying to make it somewhat equal. I think the oil companies get 45 cents (per gallon)."

Another problem is that there are probably only four plants on line for biodiesel in California today. "We need to get that number up to about 200," he said. "If we are going to meet the demands the bills call for, it's clear to us we're going to need a lot more stations. We've got to go from a capacity of, let's say, 500 gallons in California to something like 100 million gallons."

According to Florez, if people use just 30 percent, there will be improvement. "We think that results in a huge decrease in bad air. Ultimately, if consumers are given the choice, if things are equal, the price is equal, and they know that they can put a cleaner-burning fuel in their diesel, I think they'll move over to the biodiesel. And if they do that, we're going to clean the air in a much bigger way."

The air resources board estimates that 70 percent of the airborne cancer-risk in the state can be attributed to particulate matter from diesel exhaust, which it has labeled a toxic air contaminant.

It determined also that statewide concentration of diesel particulate matter and nitrogen oxides was responsible for an average of 2,880 premature deaths per year in California, more than seven premature deaths per day. These pollutants are also linked to increased asthma hospitalizations, pneumonia, heart disease and chronic bronchitis.

Use of E10, which is not part of the bill package, reduces the cost of gas at the pump, increases the fuel's octane rating and decreases emissions that are blamed for polluting the air. Like biodiesel, however, there is no evidence that ethanol use decreases nitrogen oxides.

With the state-mandated phase-out of the gasoline additive Methyl Tertiary Butyl Ether (MTBE) in December 2003, California became the largest U.S. consumer of ethanol as a replacement gasoline oxygenate. Much of the state's gasoline supply requires an oxygenate additive to meet state and federal clean air requirements, and ethanol is the only state-approved additive.

The drive toward using renewable sources gets mixed reviews in other industries as well. Dairy, beef and poultry operations may be more costly if the growing demand for corn, which is already seeing record highs, increases their cost for feed. One bushel of corn produces about 2.7 gallons of ethanol.

And the demand is changing the farming industry. Already, some farmers have switched from growing wheat, barley, cotton and other crops to take advantage of the growing corn market. In areas with higher dairy demands, such as Kern

County, there has been an increase in corn production. New ethanol facilities and wider ethanol use may drive further increase as farmers see the low-risk corn market gaining momentum.

"Seed sales data indicate that corn acreage in California could increase as much as 30 percent this year," said Dave Kranz, spokesman for California Farm Bureau Federation. "This," he said, "is because of the demand and the resulting higher prices for corn."

Farmers have traditionally grown corn as a rotation crop for their soil. "This year it looks like more of the farmers are going to plant it as a money-making crop," Kranz said.

The main areas in California that corn is grown as grain are in the northern San Joaquin Valley and southern Sacramento Valley

A lot of the farm produce used for both ethanol and biodiesel comes from Midwestern states, but there are definitely changes on the horizon. "Some of the farmers we spoke with," Kranz said, "haven't planted corn in 10 or 15 years and they're buying seed this year."

New Pollution Effects Observed

Christopher Lee

Washington Post, February 5, 2007

Here is one more reason to dread the rat race.

Rats exposed to highway pollution for several hours in an experiment by University of Rochester researchers experienced a drop in heart rate and impairment of the nervous system. The rats, old and prone to high blood pressure, rode in a mobile laboratory for six hours on a New York interstate, inhaling vehicle emissions that motorists would be exposed to along the 320-mile route.

Tests showed that the creatures experienced up to a 10 percent decline in their heart rate and that the effect of the pollution lasted up to 14 hours.

The researchers said the findings, published in January's issue of *Inhalation Toxicology*, help explain why on smoggy days hospitals in urban areas typically see a spike in visits to the emergency room because of heart attacks.

The findings also are in line with a recent European study that showed that people who are exposed to air pollution while riding a bus or riding a bicycle to work are more likely to have a heart attack within an hour of their commute.

"The fact that exposure to air pollution can change the heart rate, independent of other factors, is a cause for concern," said Alison Elder, the lead researcher. "It's important to understand that these changes are taking place outside of the lung.

Air pollution is either having a direct effect on the heart in rats or is altering something within the circulatory system."

**Bill has funds for Mendota prison
Valley project is included in the new federal budget fix, but others are left out.**

By Michael Doyle / Bee Washington Bureau
Fresno Bee, Sat., Feb. 3, 2007

WASHINGTON - A Mendota prison wins, San Joaquin Valley ozone research loses and Congress kicks many balls down the road under a big spending bill that moved forward this week.

It's an awkward budget fix, but it keeps the government running.

Confronting a job left unfinished by Republicans in 2006, the Democratic-controlled House on Wednesday approved a \$463.5 billion bill that funds the government for the rest of the fiscal year.

Without the money, the government would shut down Feb. 15.

"We are trying to clean up their spilt milk," said Rep. David Obey, the Wisconsin Democrat who chairs the House Appropriations Committee.

Yosemite National Park gets its money from the legislation that now goes before the Senate.

So do agricultural researchers, Customs and Border Protection agents and the engineers who run California's biggest water project.

In a politically illuminating move, the package also includes \$432 million for prison construction.

The funds will be used to continue federal prisons begun in West Virginia, New York and the Fresno County town of Mendota, where lack of money has stalled work.

"The federal government is stepping up to a commitment that was made to California and Mendota by providing enough funds to complete the prison," said Rep. Jim Costa, D-Fresno.

When completed, the 960-acre Mendota prison is supposed to house 1,152 medium-security inmates and 128 minimum-security inmates.

The funding bill does not mention the word Mendota. It doesn't have to.

"We've been assured there is sufficient money," Scott Nishioki, Costa's chief of staff, said Friday, and "the Bureau of Prisons understands why the money is there."

Newly named chairman of the House energy and mineral resources subcommittee, Costa worked out a colloquy that was designed to underscore the local funding.

As often happens on Capitol Hill when floor time is scarce, he instead inserted a written statement into the Congressional Record.

All together, in its 137 pages, the legislation wraps up the nine distinct fiscal 2007 funding bills that stymied the last Congress.

In theory, these funding bills are supposed to be considered separately.

In practice, they often are combined. In practice, as well, they often come loaded with so-called "earmarks."

While definitions vary, earmarks generally are identified as line items that specify exactly where money will go.

Earlier versions of House funding bills passed last year, for instance, included \$250,000 for a substance abuse facility in Fresno, \$250,000 for a vocational training center in Mendota, funding for San Joaquin Valley ozone research and \$100,000 for a proposed Ag Science Center on the campus of Modesto Junior College.

But in order to move the big funding bill quickly this week, while abiding by new reform notions, Democratic leaders eliminated most earmarks supported earlier in the House.

Republicans complained that they weren't given a chance to try to amend the big bill, saying that such omnibus appropriations packages often are subject to dozens of amendments.

Nonetheless, 57 House Republicans - none from the Central Valley - crossed party lines to support the funding package, which passed by a 286-140 margin.

Bay Area air regulators consider ban on wood fires

The Associated Press

In the Bakersfield Californian, Saturday, Feb. 3, 2007

San Francisco Bay area air quality regulators are proposing a mandatory ban on wood fires in fireplaces and stoves when the air is bad.

Under the proposed rules, wood fires would be prohibited in the nine-county Bay Area on "Spare the Air" days -- when air quality is expected to reach unhealthy levels.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District Board has asked its staff to draft rule options so it can hold hearings on a proposed ban this summer.

Southern California is weighing a similar ban, and one already is enforced in the San Joaquin Valley, where regulators say the rules have improved air quality.

The Bay Area air district issued voluntary no-burn advisory on 26 Spare the Air nights this winter, but many people lit fires those nights anyway, officials said.

On many nights this winter, Bay Area air quality failed to meet new federal health standards for tiny particles that can lodge deep in the lungs and trigger respiratory and heart problems.

"When your activity in the home is poisoning the air in your neighborhood for a long distance around, that's when the air district says, 'Enough is enough,'" said Mark Ross, a Martinez city councilman who chairs the air district board.

Another Spare the Air advisory for Sunday evening

Bay City News <<mailto:feedback@sfgate.com>>

In the S.F. Chronicle, Sunday, February 4, 2007

Bay Area residents are being asked to refrain from driving and lighting wood-burning fires again this evening in an effort to reduce particulate pollution in the air, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District reported.

Tonight's Spare the Air advisory is the 28th this season.

The warnings are necessary because cooler weather and low wind speeds cause harmful particulate matter pollution to become trapped down low where people are breathing.

During cold winter evenings, the earth cools the air close to the ground, leaving warmer air up above, which creates an inversion layer. When this phenomenon is combined with low wind speeds, pollution can build up quickly and cause serious problems for people, especially sensitive populations such as young children, the elderly and people with respiratory or cardiovascular disease.

The recent increase in air pollution advisories is due to a tightening of federal regulations concerning air quality, which have effectively cut the recommended particulate threshold in half.

There is no free transit component to the Spare the Air Tonight campaign.

Mobile lab to scope out air hazards

A specially equipped car will measure pollution levels in several South Bay communities to help fill gaping holes in environmental data.

By Janet Wilson, Times Staff Writer

L.A. Times and Radio Bilingüe, Monday, February 5, 2007

Determined to pinpoint what kind of pollution is swirling in the air around the region's ports, a crew of scientists this week will begin cruising Southern California streets and freeways in a one-of-a-kind mobile research lab.

In a car equipped with \$450,000 worth of the world's most sophisticated air monitors and a wind sensor protruding like a giant metal claw from the roof, researchers Tuesday will begin sampling the air in several South Bay communities, examining exhaust from cars, trucks and other sources.

"We want real-life conditions, and if real-life conditions means people in traffic, then that's what we want," said Kathleen Kozawa, 28, a UCLA School of Public Health doctoral student who was at the wheel of the mobile lab on a recent weekday.

Chasing pollution in a laboratory on wheels helps fill gaping holes in data about what we breathe in sprawling Southern California, which has just 35 fixed air-monitoring stations spread across 10,743 square miles.

The scientists, from the California Air Resources Board, completed a similar study a few years ago, showing how much bad air we breathe in our cars.

The publicly funded researchers learned that commuters on the Harbor and Long Beach freeways ingested half of their daily pollution while on the road - even though most people spend just 6% of their day driving.

"We're taking the instruments to where people live and where people spend their time - in their cars and their neighborhoods," said Scott Fruin, an air resources board pollution specialist who helped design and build the mobile lab and is now a USC assistant professor.

For the latest experiment, Fruin and other air board staff borrowed a discontinued model of an electric Toyota RAV-4 (so they wouldn't be measuring their own exhaust), ripped out the back seats and sawed, nailed, clamped and bungee-corded to the innards a dozen sophisticated monitors, a police "stalker vision" video camera, five marine batteries weighing a combined 400 pounds and a tangle of extension cords. On the roof they glued the giant claw to locate wind direction and plumes and a jumbo antennae to track humidity and temperature.

For the first study, completed in 2004 in a nearly identical lab, the scientists drove and re-drove a 75-mile freeway loop between Pasadena and Long Beach.

They learned that the air in a moving vehicle can change dozens of times in an hour, even if the windows are closed.

Drivers breathe four to eight times as much of the carcinogen benzene as found in normal air levels, five to 15 times as much choking diesel soot and 50 to 100 times as much butadiene, which is used in automobile tires and has been linked to cancer, especially in women.

On a hazy afternoon last month, with the downtown skyline and San Gabriel Mountains looking like they'd been rinsed in dirty dishwater, Kozawa and Fruin took a reporter on a portion of the route used during the first study.

The research vehicle, with two large dryer hoses affixed to the back windows to catch outside air, merged onto the Harbor Freeway near USC. Inside, the needles on a laptop monitor began jiggling upward, measuring black carbon from diesel trucks, nitrogen oxide from hot rods and other toxins. The chemical levels climbed inexorably as the vehicle headed under the four-level interchange. When a dingy white panel truck lumbered by in the right lane, a black carbon meter jumped from 430 to 7,608 micrograms per cubic meter.

"That's a pretty good one," Kozawa said.

Black carbon is a strong indicator of fine particles, or soot, which lodge deep in the lungs and can lead to premature death from heart attacks, strokes and other diseases.

The scientists say their own chests grow tight and their throats sore after a typical 150-mile day in traffic, but they shrug it off as the cost of research.

The meters spiked upward as a wide Chrysler sedan with a stained tailpipe pulled in front.

"That's pretty gross," Kozawa said.

The needles danced in the medium high range as traffic flowed sluggishly under Stadium Way, then through four tunnels. Trucks lined the onramps, traffic idled at the exit for the Golden State Freeway.

It was difficult to maneuver the heavy, equipment-packed vehicle, which drew the occasional obscene gesture from fellow motorists, but also curiosity. One pickup truck driver honked loudly after Kozawa unintentionally cut him off, scowled as he pulled alongside, then gaped in amazement.

As the mobile lab reached the historic, leafy section of the highway past Via Marisol, the glut of traffic opened up. The needles drooped as the air freshened.

Near Avenue 60, a Chevy Trailblazer zipped past in the fast lane. The nitrogen oxide sensor leaped from 27 to 108 parts per cubic meter. A key component of smog, nitrogen oxide can cause asthma and other respiratory problems.

The drivers of such cars don't have to breathe their own fumes, Fruin said. It's those downwind who catch the noxious stream.

Keeping your windows closed won't help, he said. Cars are not designed to be airtight. They leak around every joint, especially at high speed. Using recirculation blocks some soot, but then carbon monoxide can build up, making drivers sleepy.

The monitors barely murmured as the test drive concluded on a quiet Pasadena side street. The PAH carcinogen needle was at 1.8 nanograms, the lowest level of the day.

That night, at a community meeting in Wilmington, Kozawa paints a different picture for poorer neighborhoods south of the city. She has already zeroed in on a side street that hugs the truck-laden Long Beach Freeway. On a preliminary prowl, she found astoundingly high levels of ultra-fine particulates. It is well-known that sooty fine particles wreak havoc in our bodies, but now ultra-fine particles one hundredth the size have been uncovered and are considered "even more potent," Fruin said.

They are a hot new research area, intriguing because they billow up quickly to staggeringly high levels, then dissipate just as fast. No one knows why.

Kozawa, for example, recorded 228,000 ultra-fine particles per cubic meter one morning, but by the next day, the levels had sunk to 20,000.

At the meeting, she shows graphs of the sharp peaks and dips to the audience, asking for help. Representatives of refineries and shipping firms sit mum. But longtime residents and community activists shout out ideas.

"What day of the weeks were they? You can find out which days the ships come in ... and the trucks will be going nonstop to move the cargo out," pipes up Jesse Marquez of Wilmington.

"I think the Santa Ana winds were blowing one of those days," offers John Cross from West Long Beach. "Did you check?"

It is exactly the sort of information that may help solve the mystery. Fruin and Kozawa urge the audience to e-mail other clues.

"It's exciting, and a little scary, too," she says of the community meetings. "We

stay in our little scientific bubble most of the time ... but you hear how passionate people are, and you realize it's not just numbers. These are people's lives."

Researchers hit Southern Calif. streets in search of pollution

The Associated Press

In the Bakersfield Californian and S.F. Chronicle, Monday, Feb. 5, 2007

Researchers in a specially equipped truck will hit area roadways this week measuring pollution levels to better determine what kind of air people breathe in sprawling Southern California.

Scientists from the California Air Resources Board will begin sampling air quality, examining exhaust from cars, trucks and other sources, on Tuesday.

They'll cruise freeways and streets in a modified electric Toyota RAV-4 equipped with \$450,000 worth of sophisticated air monitors and a wind sensor protruding from the roof.

Southern California has just 35 fixed-air monitoring stations spread across 10,743 square miles so the mobile research lab will help fill holes in environmental data.

"We're taking the instruments to where people live and where people spend their time -- in their cars and their neighborhoods," said Scott Fruin, an assistant professor at University of Southern California and an air resources board pollution specialist who helped design and build the mobile lab.

The scientists completed a similar study a few years ago that showed how much polluted air is breathed in cars. Researchers found then that commuters on the Harbor and Long Beach freeways ingested half of their daily pollution while on the road -- even though most people spend just 6 percent of their day driving.

During that study, researchers also learned that the air in a moving vehicle can change dozens of times in an hour, even if the car's windows are closed.

This latest study will go beyond freeways and into neighborhoods often missed by fixed air monitoring stations.

Stickerless drivers stuck

LA Times, February 5, 2007

Rushing to beat an impending state cap on permits that allow the drivers of hybrid cars to drive solo in carpool lanes, William Ha sent in his paperwork soon after purchasing his Toyota Prius last month.

But he was too late.

So many people had applied for the permits that officials ran out before they received Ha's.

"It was heartbreaking," said the 24-year-old financial analyst, who commutes from Fountain Valley to downtown Los Angeles each weekday. "I heard they

were running out, and I wanted to purchase it as soon as possible so I could get the stickers."

In an effort to prevent carpool lanes from becoming clogged with solo hybrid drivers, state lawmakers set an initial cap of 75,000 cars that would be allowed to cruise the carpool lanes. Faced with high demand, the Legislature voted to allow 10,000 more hybrids in the lanes starting Jan. 1. Demand was so high that the state ran out of permits in four weeks.

"Every consumer who was looking to get a hybrid wanted to make sure they could get the stickers," said Michael Jafari, general sales manager at the Kolbe Honda dealership in Reseda. "I don't think people are going to be happy."

Only the most fuel-efficient hybrids — those that average 45 miles to the gallon or more — are allowed in carpool lanes under the state program. Just three models meet those qualifications: the Toyota Prius, the Honda Civic hybrid and the now-discontinued Honda Insight.

Buyers who have known about the looming cap have played a frantic game in the last month, obsessively calling the DMV to check on their applications and mailing forms in by express mail, sometimes twice, applicants said in interviews.

Attorney Kathy O'Brien, 40, who regularly commutes from Orange County to San Bernardino County, received her stickers Jan. 29.

"It was like Christmas!" O'Brien said. "This is why I spent over 25 grand on the car — just to get that sticker. Time was everything to me."

Linda Ashmore, 38, was still in limbo Sunday. Ashmore and her husband, Bob, frantically sent off their paperwork via certified mail a day after they bought a Prius on Jan. 19.

They have since been checking several times a day to see if the DMV has cashed their check — a sign that would all but guarantee the coveted golden sticker.

We're "waiting on pins and needles, literally, waiting, and not knowing," said Ashmore, who lives about 25 miles south of San Francisco.

"A progressive state like California should reward those of us who are doing something about global warming rather than discourage it," Ashmore said, particularly in light of Friday's United Nations report blaming humans for climate change.

Since the program began in August 2005, the number of hybrids in California has increased dramatically, from 34,861 at the end of 2004 to 91,665 in March 2006, the most recent figures available. The numbers include less fuel-efficient models that didn't qualify for the carpool-sticker program.

Assemblywoman Sally Lieber (D-Mountain View), who cosponsored a bill last year permitting the 10,000 additional stickers, said she would consider increasing the cap again.

"Eighty-five thousand hybrid stickers throughout California is not a lot," Lieber said. There are 32.8 million vehicles registered in California. "Hybrids are better for air quality in California, and hybrid owners are going to be rewarded."

Adam Mendelsohn, a spokesman for Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, said another expansion in the program would require review. "The governor strongly supports programs that encourage use of alternative energy and reduction of the state's dependence on fossil fuel," he said.

A California Department of Transportation study published in June showed that about 4% of the state's monitored carpool lanes became more congested from April 2005 to April 2006, including stretches on the San Bernardino and San Diego freeways. But because another 4% became less congested, the study concluded that there was "no clear indication" that carpool lanes were uniformly becoming congested after the stickers were introduced.

Still, some critics worry that allowing more hybrids in carpool lanes would clog them further, lessening the incentive for drivers to double up instead of going solo.

Stuart Cohen, executive director of the Oakland-based Transportation and Land Use Coalition, said high gas prices — not unfettered use of carpool lanes — were already a primary selling point for hybrids. "You don't need an incentive on this," he said.

Helping to slake thirst for Ethanol

Sacramento Bee, February 5, 2007

The nation's burgeoning thirst for ethanol is having an impact on the Central Coast, where Santa Maria-based American Ethanol hopes to break ground this summer on a production plant twice the size of anything yet in operation in California.

When fully operational, the \$200 million plant west of Santa Maria will produce 110 million gallons of ethanol a year, using Midwestern corn that will arrive twice a week in trains of between 100 and 150 cars, American Ethanol President David Baskett said.

When in operation, the plant would employ 40 to 45 people and use technologies including an experimental solar-powered system to help produce steam from gray water discharged from the county's sewage treatment system.

"Old plants use between 5 and 6 gallons of water per gallon of ethanol," Baskett said. "We think we will be in a 2- to 3-gallon range."

He said he expects to file an application with Santa Barbara County within the next few weeks.

"Our expectation is to have the permits this summer and to start building this summer," Baskett said.

Santa Barbara County's planning department energy specialist, Kevin Drude, who has been assigned the plant, said the company's schedule might be a bit ambitious but is not impossible.

"We are enthused about how well organized they are," Drude said of American Ethanol. "Everything they are doing with this seems consistent with federal, state and county goals of looking at alternative energy."

Another company using the same name operates ethanol plants in the Midwest. The Santa Maria company is not related, Baskett said, and its only ethanol venture is the local plant.

Ethanol plants, which cook vegetative materials to ferment them and then extract the alcohol, are going to have to spring up by the dozens to meet growing demand for the gasoline substitute. Current production is only about 6 billion gallons a year. President Bush, in his State of the Union address to Congress, set a goal of 35 billion gallons annually by 2017.

In California, the use of ethanol climbed with the phase-out of MTBE, an oxygenation additive linked to health concerns. Although California's congressional delegation tried to exempt the state from having to use ethanol because of studies showing it wasn't an effective air cleaner, oil companies began mixing it with gasoline under a congressional mandate in a 2004 energy bill.

Now the argument for its expanded use focuses more on reducing oil imports, particularly from the volatile Middle East, and that was the reason Bush cited for his proposed sixfold expansion in use over the next decade.

So far, California has not been a big producer. There are only a handful of ethanol plants in operation in the state now, and all produce less than 50 million gallons a year. At least five other plants are also in the concept stage in California.

According to a California Energy Commission report on its Web site, in-state production was expected to be to less than 40 percent of its billion-plus gallons of consumption this year.

"California uses about 900 million gallons of ethanol, basically 6 percent of the total gasoline demand," said Susanne Garfield-Jones, spokeswoman for the commission. "With the exception of a thimbleful produced in California, almost all is imported."

Baskett has operated an international construction and consulting business, TTE International, from Santa Maria for two decades. He said this was his first venture into the ethanol business, although his company has worked worldwide on other energy projects.

"California is starting to gin up from being a laggard in renewable energy to being a real leader in the development of alternative energy fuels," he said. "Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has made that very plain and public."

Game over on global warming?

Action would have to be radical -- but climate change can be slowed.

By Alan Zarembo, Times Staff Writer
L.A. Times, Monday, February 5, 2007

Everybody in the United States could switch from cars to bicycles.

The Chinese could close all their factories.

Europe could give up electricity and return to the age of the lantern.

But all those steps together would not come close to stopping global warming.

A landmark report from the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, released Friday, warns that there is so much carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere that even if concentrations held at current levels, the effects of global warming would continue for centuries.

There is still hope. The report notes that a concerted world effort could stave off the direst consequences of global warming, such as widespread flooding, drought and extreme weather.

Ultimately eliminating the global warming threat, however, would require radical action.

To stabilize atmospheric levels of carbon dioxide - the primary contributor to global warming - CO₂ emissions would have to drop 70% to 80%, said Richard Somerville, a theoretical meteorologist at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in La Jolla.

Such a reduction would bring emissions into equilibrium with the planet's ability to absorb carbon dioxide. The last time the planet was in balance was more than 150 years ago, before the widespread use of coal and steam engines.

What would it take to bring that kind of reduction?

"All truck, all trains, all airplanes, cars, motorcycles and boats in the United States - that's 7.3% of global emissions," said Gregg Marland, a fossil fuel pollution expert at Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Tennessee.

Closing all fossil-fuel-powered electricity plants worldwide and replacing them with windmills, solar panels and nuclear power plants would make a serious dent - a 39% reduction globally, Marland said.

His calculation doesn't include all the fossil fuels that would have to be burned to build the greener facilities, though.

Trees could be planted to absorb more carbon dioxide. But even if every available space in the United States were turned into woodland, Marland said, it would not come close to offsetting U.S. emissions.

"There is not enough land area," he said.

The United States accounts for nearly a quarter of the carbon dioxide released each year, according to government statistics. China, in second at about 15%, is gaining fast.

If the rest of the world returned to the Stone Age, carbon concentrations would still rise.

Carbon does not dissipate rapidly. Some is eventually absorbed by oceans and plants, but about half stays in the atmosphere. And there is no easy way to get it out.

Maintaining current levels would require reducing worldwide carbon dioxide emissions by more than 20 billion tons a year, federal statistics suggest.

For some perspective on that number, consider an icon of the green movement: a 2007 Toyota Prius. Driving it 12,000 miles releases 4,200 pounds of carbon dioxide.

If hybrid cars replaced all 245 million cars in the United States - more than a third of the cars in the world - the carbon savings would be less than 3% of the needed reduction.

Rapid industrial development in some of the most populous nations has compounded the problem. Their burgeoning emissions could swamp environmental gains in other countries.

In India, carbon dioxide emissions increased 39% between 1993 and 2004 - nearly double the global rate. The figure was 36% in Indonesia. China, which saw a 45% rise, now opens a coal-fired power plant every week to 10 days.

Given the scale of the problem, experts see no realistic way to lower the concentration of atmospheric carbon.

In fact, Robert Socolow, a carbon mitigation expert at Princeton University, said that even if the entire world stopped burning fossil fuels, carbon wouldn't approach pre-Industrial Revolution levels for several hundred years.

The only possibility now is to slow the buildup of carbon. If emissions can be reduced enough, the gradual process of warming can be stretched into centuries.

From this perspective, there is some hope. Though the savings from any one measure may look small, in combination, they could add up to something significant, experts said.

There is no shortage of ideas.

The Environmental Protection Agency's administrator, Stephen L. Johnson, said high-efficiency appliances and other products in the Energy Star program last year eliminated greenhouse gas emissions equal to the pollution from 23 million cars.

"As a citizen, each of us has an opportunity to make a difference," he said Friday after the release of the U.N. report.

He urged people to use compact fluorescent light bulbs, which provide the same light as a standard bulb on two-thirds of the energy.

Replacing one standard light bulb in every U.S. home would prevent greenhouse gases equivalent to the emissions of nearly 800,000 cars.

Tips from TerraPass Inc. of Menlo Park, Calif., include going back to clotheslines.

The company, which promotes alternative energy, says eliminating a family's dryer could save electricity equivalent to 1,016 pounds of carbon dioxide a year.

Socolow said the ultimate solution might rely on technology.

He said his research suggested that by improving energy efficiency now and phasing out fossil fuels over the next 100 years, carbon concentrations could remain within safe levels.

The biggest polluter, he said, should lead the way: "The U.S. is going to have to decarbonize."

Times staff writer Karen Kaplan contributed to this report

Global emissions

Carbon dioxide is the largest source of global greenhouse gas emissions, and is expected to rise steadily in the coming decades.

Greenhouse gases, 2001

Carbon dioxide*: 82%

Other carbon dioxide: 2%

Other gases: 2%

Nitrous oxide: 5%

Methane: 9%

*From fossil fuel combustion

Global CO2 emissions by fuel type, 2006

Oil: 40%

Coal: 40%

Natural gas: 20%

Source: Department of Energy

Global Warming Man-Made, Will Continue

By SETH BORENSTEIN, AP Science Writer

In the S.F. Chronicle, Friday, February 2, 2007

PARIS, France (AP) -- A panel of international scientists predicted Friday that global warming will continue for centuries no matter how much people control pollution, in a bleak report that blamed humans for killer heat waves, devastating droughts and stronger storms.

The report said people were "very likely" the cause of global warming - the strongest conclusion to date - and placed the burden on governments to take action.

"It's later than we think," said Susan Solomon, co-chair of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Man-made emissions of greenhouse gases are to blame for fewer cold days, hotter nights, heat waves, floods and heavy rains, droughts and stronger storms, particularly in the Atlantic Ocean, the 21-page report said.

It highlighted "increases in global average air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice, and rising global mean sea level."

Authors of the report called it conservative: It used only peer-reviewed published science and was edited by representatives of 113 governments who had to agree to every word. It was a snapshot of where the world is with global warming and where it is heading, but does not tell governments what to do.

Yet if nothing is done, the world is looking at billions of dollars in costs adapting to a warmer world over the next century, co-author Kevin Trenberth said in an interview. He also warned of at least 1 million deaths in droughts, floods and hurricanes.

The study said no matter how much civilization slows or reduces its greenhouse gas emissions, global warming and sea-level rise will continue for centuries.

"This is just not something you can stop. We're just going to have to live with it," said Trenberth, the director of climate analysis at the U.S National Center for

Atmospheric Research. "We're creating a different planet. If you were to come back in 100 years' time, we'll have a different climate."

Scientists fear world leaders will take that message in the wrong way and throw up their hands, Trenberth said. Instead, the scientists urged leaders to reduce emissions and adapt to a warmer world with wilder weather.

"The point here is to highlight what will happen if we don't do something and what will happen if we do something," said another author, Jonathan Overpeck of the University of Arizona. "I can tell you if you decide not to do something the impacts will be much larger than if we do something."

The next step is up to public officials, scientists said.

"It is critical that we look at this report ... as a moment where the focus of attention will shift from whether climate change is linked to human activity, whether the science is sufficient, to what on earth are we going to do about it," U.N. Environment Program Executive Director Achim Steiner said.

The strongly worded report put pressure on the Bush administration to reduce the United States' growing share of gases that trap heat in the atmosphere.

The White House issued a statement less than four hours after the report's release defending President Bush's six-year record on climate change.

It said Bush and his budget proposals have devoted \$29 billion to climate-related science, technology, international assistance and incentive programs - "more money than any other country."

Bush has called for slowing the growth rate of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, which averages 1 percent a year, but has rejected government-ordered reductions.

Since 1990, U.S. greenhouse gas emissions have gone up 16 percent. The Bush administration has rejected the Kyoto Protocol, which calls for cuts in emissions of greenhouse gases.

Sharon Hays, White House associate science adviser, called the study "a significant report. It will be valuable to policy makers."

Another report by the panel later this year will address the most effective measures for slowing global warming.

If it looks bad now, the harmful effects during the 21st century "would very likely be larger than those observed during the 20th century," the report said.

The panel predicted temperature rises of 2-11.5 degrees Fahrenheit by the year 2100. It said its best estimate was for temperature rises of 3.2-7.1 degrees.

On sea levels, the report projects rises of 7-23 inches by the end of the century. An additional 3.9-7.8 inches are possible if recent, surprising melting of polar ice sheets continues.

The panel, created by the United Nations in 1988, releases its assessments every five or six years, though scientists have been observing aspects of climate change since as far back as the 1960s. The reports are released in phases- this is the first of four this year.

The projected effects of global warming would vary in different parts of the globe. The closer to the poles, the higher the temperature spikes, the study said.

Dramatic temperature spikes are likely to be seen within 22 years in most of the Northern Hemisphere, the report showed. Northern Africa and other places will see dramatically less rainfall.

The United States could see a 10-degree temperature rise by the end of the century and a more arid south and west, Overpeck said.

And that's just average temperature increases and rainfall amounts, something that doesn't affect people much. The harshest consequences of global warming are the heat waves, droughts, floods, and hurricanes, said study co-author Philip Jones of Britain's University of East Anglia. And those have increased dramatically in the past decade and will get worse in the future, he said.

Global warming could eventually lead to an "ice-free Arctic," warned Gerry Meehl, an official with the U.S National Center for Atmospheric Research.

And when that happened 125,000 years ago, seas rose between 13 and 20 feet. That is looking like a real possibility for the 22nd Century, the report said, though some scientists fear much of it could happen before the end of the century.

Trenberth said the world is paying more attention to scientists now than to previous warnings in 1990, 1995 and 2001. "The tension is more now," he said.

As the IPCC report was being released, environmental activists rappelled off a Paris bridge and draped a banner over a statue used often as a popular gauge of whether the Seine River is running high.

"Alarm bells are ringing. The world must wake up to the threat," said Catherine Pearce of Friends of the Earth.

Associated Press writer Angela Charlton contributed to this report

A WARMING WORLD

Climate Change Report

Grim global warming prognosis for Western U.S.

International group says quick action can mitigate some effects

Jane Kay, Chronicle Environment Writer

S.F. Chronicle, Saturday, February 3, 2007

Global warming has already led to rising sea levels and dramatic increases in temperature in the Arctic, and scientists warned Friday that its effects will hit closer to home, creating heat waves, droughts and hurricanes.

How bad it gets, say international scientists in the latest release of findings on climate change, depends on what actions people and nations take to reduce the burning of fossil fuels, the destruction of forests and everyday activities that emit carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases into the air.

In the United States, the West will be hardest hit, scientists say. Heat waves, droughts and intense hurricanes are likely to increase in the coming decades. Air temperatures in the Southwest, particularly from California to Texas, are projected to rise in the summer about 10 degrees by the end of the century, assuming there is a moderate increase in greenhouse gas emissions. A reduction in emissions might keep the temperature rise to 5 degrees.

The findings were released in Paris as part of the fourth assessment by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, or the IPCC, formed by the United Nations. It is the result of six years of work and is built on a previous dozen years of study by hundreds of researchers from more than 100 nations.

In a warming world, the Southwest will receive less rain, and the Pacific Northwest may get more, although that is less certain, scientists say. And even less clear is what will happen in Northern California, where the unpredictability of El Niños, ocean winds and currents make forecasting difficult.

Over the next several decades, the snow season is expected to shorten across North America, and the snow cover is expected to contract. Permafrost will thaw to greater depths, the scientists project. And the East Coast will be wetter and cloudier.

On a global scale, increases in the amount of precipitation are likely to occur at high latitudes, while decreases are expected in most subtropical land regions. Scientists believe it's very likely that hot extremes, heat waves and heavy rain will continue to become more frequent.

Tropical cyclones, both typhoons and hurricanes, will become more intense, reaching larger peak wind speeds and bringing more heavy rains associated with rise in surface ocean temperatures.

Sea ice is projected to shrink in both the Arctic and Antarctic even if industrial and vehicle emissions are immediately reduced. In some projections, the late-summer Arctic sea ice will almost completely disappear by the latter part of the century.

The summary report said the warming of the climate "is unequivocal," now evident from rising temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice and rising sea levels. These conditions support the scientists' conclusion that climate change is "very likely" not due to known natural causes alone, the report said.

Even if nations start to immediately reduce emissions of carbon dioxide, methane and other greenhouse gases, the past and future gases will continue to contribute to global warming and the rise of oceans for more than 1,000 years, the report said. But it added that cutting emissions could vastly reduce the catastrophic effects.

This new assessment will attract more attention than the previous three released over the past decades because fresh evidence has enabled the scientists to make stronger statements and projections than ever before, said Linda Mearns, senior scientist at the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder and lead author of a section on future regional climate.

Now the scientists can make regional projections about "where people actually live," Mearns said.

The extreme weather events of the past few years-- killer heat waves and Katrina and other hurricanes -- have heightened people's sense of a climate in flux, she said in an interview.

"There seems to be a real shift toward a focus on climate change. The evidence is mounting, and has an effect on people's perceptions," she said.

The groundswell of interest in global warming, Mearns believes, has been fueled by the vacuum of "clear leadership at the top" in the United States.

"In the U.S., we're choosing a business-as-usual scenario. But we could make some choices: No, we don't want to live in a world with a 10-degree Fahrenheit increase," said Mearns.

Members of religious denominations and the business world have shown new interest, some encouraged by former Vice President Al Gore's film, "An Inconvenient Truth," said Richard Somerville, a professor of meteorology at Scripps Institution of Oceanography, speaking at a news conference from Paris. Coverage by the mainstream media also has contributed to the new interest, Somerville said.

The 21-page summary of the assessment, which is thousands of pages long, concludes that global warming over the last 50 years is "very likely" due to the increase in emissions from the burning of fossil fuels. "Very likely" indicates a confidence of more than 90 percent.

"Warming of the climate system is unequivocal, as is now evident from observations of increases in global average air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice, and rising global mean sea level," it said.

Jonathan Overpeck, director of the Institute for the Study of Planet Earth at the University of Arizona, said in an interview that science teams worked until after midnight Thursday to reach "unanimous agreement" from the climate experts from 113 countries. He is a member of the U.S. delegation.

Scientists call carbon dioxide a "greenhouse gas" because it keeps Earth warm by trapping some of the heat it radiates. But too much of the gas can capture too much heat, and that's what scientists say is happening now.

Since the large-scale burning of fossil fuels began during the Industrial Revolution, the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has increased 35 percent to a level not seen in 650,000 years, according to the European Project for Ice Coring in Antarctica.

That period, for which the project has analyzed ice cores drawn from deep in Antarctica, covers six natural fluctuations of ice ages and warming periods. The recent spike in carbon dioxide goes beyond that natural variability.
Chronicle science editor David Perlman contributed to this report.

Yellowstone Proposal Sets Greater Snowmobile Access As many as 720 snowmobiles would be allowed to enter Yellowstone National Park each day under a new plan, which has fans and critics alike.

By Jim Robbins

N.Y Times, Monday, February 5, 2007

YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK, Wyo. - The latest installment in the long-running debate over the use of snowmobiles in Yellowstone National Park is a proposal to allow as many as 720 to enter each day, nearly three times as many as permitted in the last several years.

The plan, which could be adopted by the end of the year, has drawn fire from environmentalists and praise from snowmobile advocates and some businesses in the communities around the park.

The plan is described in a preliminary draft environmental impact statement that was released to agencies and governments near the park for comment in December. The Park Service could change the plan before releasing a final

version to the public next month for comment, but so far it is favoring greatly expanded winter use. About 250 snowmobiles a day use the park now. The historical average in the 1990s was 795 a day, before access was banned by the Clinton administration.

Critics say that snowmobiles will be detrimental to the park's pristine air, wildlife and quiet. Michael Finley, who was superintendent of Yellowstone for more than six years, and who oversaw the plan that banned snowmobiles, said the Park Service was skirting its responsibilities under the new plan.

"The facts and science gave them a direction to take, then they softened, twisted and contorted the science," Mr. Finley said. "The plan deserves to be challenged. It deserves burial in deep snow."

In late 2006, Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne reaffirmed the parks' commitment to policies emphasizing the conservation of natural and cultural resources over recreation.

But Tim Stevens, Yellowstone program director for the National Parks and Conservation Association, said the proposed standards were misguided.

"Instead of meeting the bars they set for themselves, they lowered the bars," Mr. Stevens said.

John Sacklin, a management assistant at Yellowstone who has worked on the issue since the 1990s, said that the park had not abdicated its responsibilities and that the new plan still protected the park's natural assets.

"We can achieve those goals," Mr. Sacklin said, "with a managed program that allows limited snowmobile and snow-coach use."

Mr. Sacklin said snowmobile technology had gotten much cleaner and quieter. And all snowmobiles must travel with a guide, who enforces strict rules. The new plan also requires noise reduction technology on snow-coaches.

As far as increasing the limit from current use, he said, "It's hard to know what the real demand or desire might be."

"We were comfortable with a middle ground of 720," he added.

Before 2000, snowmobile use was unregulated. Hundreds of vehicles with roaring two-stroke motors entered the park daily, and noise, pollution, harassment of wildlife and moving violations became serious problems. A lawsuit by a wildlife group, the Fund for Animals, forced the park to take a hard look at the issue.

The first study, in the late 1990s, found that banning snowmobiles and allowing only snow-coaches - buses or vans on large skis or treads - would protect the park the best. In 2000, near the end of the Clinton administration, the Park Service adopted that recommendation.

That decision was reversed after the Bush administration took over. Two subsequent studies, in 2002 and 2003, found that snowmobiles were compatible with park values. A lawsuit has followed each study and forced another.

Critics say the latest preliminary draft is faulty in three major areas, including its effects on air quality and on wildlife. Perhaps the most evident is the noise levels it would allow.

In the winter of 2003-4, a study by the Park Service looked at whether snowmobiles were audible more than 50 percent of the time at Old Faithful. Even the new, quieter snowmobiles, numbering about 250 a day, exceeded that threshold, creating "major adverse effects."

The last two environmental studies raised the threshold. Major adverse effects were considered to exist if visitors to Old Faithful heard snowmobiles more than 75 percent of the time. This relaxed standard was still exceeded with 250 snowmobiles a day entering the park.

"People go to Yellowstone one time in their lives with a few hours at Old Faithful," said Jon Catton, an independent environmentalist who has worked on the issue for eight years. "You can hear the hiss and splash of Old Faithful, the howl of a wolf, or the persistent buzz, whine and roar of snowmobiles."

Chavez Takes Up Energy Conservation

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

In the N.Y. Times, Sunday, February 4, 2007

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) -- His ambitious social programs are built on Venezuela's petroleum wealth, but President Hugo Chavez is increasingly talking up environmental causes and urging the world to cut back on oil use to fight global warming.

He wants to use some oil revenues in a venture to manufacture solar panels and has begun doling out millions of energy-saving fluorescent light bulbs to homes nationwide.

Some critics say Chavez's campaign is mostly rhetoric, noting this is a country where government subsidies have gasoline prices at 12 cents a gallon, car sales are booming and vehicle exhaust chokes litter-strewn streets.

But Chavez says Venezuela can be an example, and he has begun exhorting his followers to drive less and take public transport. His government plans a windmill farm to generate electricity on the Caribbean coast and is exploring more uses for cleaner-burning natural gas.

"Venezuela is one of the countries that least contaminates the environment, but nevertheless we want to give an example and be at the vanguard," Chavez said at a news conference Thursday.

He called U.S. oil consumption -- which handsomely funds his government -- a leading cause of the world's environmental troubles.

"They're destroying the world," Chavez said, citing melting glaciers in the Andes and predictions of rising sea levels. "The human race will be finished if we don't change the world capitalist system."

Leftist ideology colors Chavez's views, and he has spent time discussing the dilemma of climate change with Cuban leader Fidel Castro, his friend and mentor.

Castro's obsession with energy saving has been caused in part by Cuba's dependence on oil imports. Before he underwent intestinal surgery last summer, Castro was in the midst of an energy-saving crusade in which he distributed pressure cookers and offered household tips on TV.

In contrast, Venezuela is the fourth-largest oil supplier to the United States and has traditionally had little reason to worry about saving energy.

Internationally, some environmentalists warn that Chavez's plan to build a South American natural gas pipeline across Brazil to Argentina could be an ecological disaster.

Others, such as Venezuelan activist Deborah Bigio, say Chavez has interesting ideas but add that the government needs to put even more emphasis on environmental issues.

"I don't see clear environmental policies in Venezuela," said Bigio, who heads the Foundation for the Defense of Nature. She said Venezuelans need to be given more concrete incentives to encourage them to save energy and protect their natural surroundings.

Venezuela, a country of 26 million people and about twice the size of California, has huge tracts of grassland and jungle in a sparsely populated interior. Most of the population is in the north, where Caracas and other cities generate the bulk of air and water pollution and use much of the energy.

Taking Cuba's lead, Venezuela has distributed millions of fluorescent bulbs in recent months, giving a blue-gray glow at nighttime to slums that used to be swathed in common yellow incandescent light.

"We see the savings," said Francis Izquierdo, a single mother in Caracas who said her power bill is about half what it was before the bulbs were replaced in her barrio.

Chavez also said recently that he will raise gasoline prices to encourage Venezuelans to drive less, although he hasn't said by how much.

The country's heavily subsidized gasoline price hasn't been changed for years and is among the cheapest in the world, encouraging strong sales of fuel-burning sport utility vehicles. Filling up an SUV's tank takes roughly \$3 -- less than the cost of two jugs of drinking water.

Chavez said he also plans to open a solar energy research center to eventually produce solar panels "in massive quantities" to supplement hydroelectric dams and reduce the need for oil-fired power plants. It remains unclear when that project may begin.

Global Warming Poses Health Threats

By Steven Reinberg

Washington Post, February 2, 2007

(HealthDay News) -- Global warming not only poses significant threats to the Earth's ecology, it may also unleash unprecedented health risks, experts say.

On Friday, an international panel of scientists released a report predicting that global warming due to greenhouse-gas emissions will continue for centuries, no matter what's done to check pollution. The result will be killer heat waves, devastating droughts, rising sea levels and fiercer storms.

Saying it was acting with 90 percent confidence, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change of the United Nations said carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases produced by human activity are the main cause of the global warming that has taken place since 1950.

Michael A. McGeehin, director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Division of Environmental Hazards and Health Effects, said, "There are some health effects from climate change that we are comfortable in predicting. We will see an increase in the intensity, duration and frequency of heat waves around the world. We will see more severe precipitation events, both heavy rainfall and severe droughts."

That flooding and drought will bring attendant health problems, McGeehin said. "There are health effects secondary to flooding, such as contaminated water supplies, that could result in the spread of infectious diseases," he said.

Droughts, which are becoming more common and longer lasting, can lead to starvation and the destruction of entire ways of life, particularly in regions-- such as sub-Saharan Africa -- that are least equipped to deal with such catastrophes.

McGeehin also foresees the possible spread of mosquito-borne illnesses such as malaria, dengue fever, yellow fever and encephalitis. "As the climate warms, we may see a change in the range of vector-borne diseases," he said.

Dr. Paul Epstein, associate director of Harvard Medical School's Center for Health and the Global Environment, said the effects of climate change are already apparent, as some of these mosquito-borne diseases are spreading to new areas as the world warms and precipitation increases.

"There is a whole range of infectious diseases like malaria, dengue fever and water-borne diseases whose range is restricted by temperature," Epstein said. "We are seeing malaria changing in its altitude. It is moving into higher altitudes in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

"In the very places where glaciers are retreating, we are also seeing a lengthening of the season of transmission of the disease in parts of Africa," Epstein added. In Africa, there has been an increase in Rift Valley Fever, which affects animals and people, as well as cholera, he said.

Epstein noted that even in the United States, ticks, mosquitoes and other insects that carry disease -- such as West Nile Virus, Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, Eastern Equine Encephalitis and Lyme disease -- are already spreading to areas once considered too cold for them to survive.

In addition, increasing air pollution from the continued burning of fossil fuels will cause higher rates of respiratory and cardiovascular disease, McGeehin said.

"With warming, there are also increases in pollen and mold spores," Epstein added.

The best way to deal with the new health threats posed by a changing climate is to improve on the methods currently in place to combat disease, McGeehin said.

"Everything we are seeing as likely coming out of climate change from a public health standpoint, particularly in the developed nations, can be dealt with by improving what we already do," McGeehin said. "What we are seeing is things we have seen before. So, if we improve the public health infrastructure in the United States and other developed countries and improve surveillance and people's access to health care, we can blunt a lot of the effects of this," he said.

In response to the threat of climate change, the CDC is creating an "action plan" to address the health risks posed by global warming, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution reported last month.

Of particular concern, McGeehin said, are developing nations, where health-care systems are under-equipped to deal with the changes that global warming might bring.

"Climate change will affect, at a much greater level, the populations that are least able to deal with it," he said. "In the developed world, it will affect the poor more than the rich. In the developing world, it will affect the nations least able to respond to these stresses and these threats."

Public health efforts can only do so much, Epstein said, adding that "the real driver of climate" is the burning of fossil fuels.

"Ultimately, public health officials and physicians all have to be bringing attention to the politicians and call for clean energy -- it's fundamental for public health. Our energy is fundamental to air pollution, acid rain to its impact on our health and the health of our environment," he said.

"Without changing that, we are going to have a very polluted, sick future," Epstein said.

More information

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency can tell you more about health and global warming.

SOURCES: Michael A. McGeehin, Ph.D., director, Division of Environmental Hazards and Health Effects, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta; Paul Epstein, M.D., M.P.H., associate director, Center for Health and the Global Environment, Harvard Medical School, Boston

[N.Y. Times commentary, Sunday, Feb. 4, 2007:](#)

Op-Ed Columnist

Smoke Signals

By PETER M. IWANOWICZ

NOW that Gov. Eliot Spitzer is in office, the makers of outdoor wood-fired boilers better listen up. Their days of selling their product without a care about the emissions they belch out may be numbered.

In 2005, Mr. Spitzer, who was attorney general, issued a report that detailed the pollution that these boilers emit and their attendant health effects. In addition, New York and other states petitioned the United States Environmental Protection Agency to set air emission standards for these particularly noxious devices.

Last week, the agency announced, some say with a wink and a nod, that under a voluntary program, makers of wood-fired boilers would begin offering for sale boilers that emit fewer pollutants. The agency's response was woefully inadequate. Everyone knows that a voluntary program has no teeth.

The good news is that a number of towns and counties in New York have already banned these devices. And last year, a bill to create state emission standards began winding its way through the legislative process. While the makers of these boilers were able to kill the bill in the State Senate, their victory is sure to be short-lived.

As any power plant owner can attest, when Eliot Spitzer says he will use the tools at his disposal to reduce air pollution that causes asthma attacks, he means it. And the governor does not need a permission slip from the State Legislature to act on outdoor stove emissions. He can and should tell his environmental nominee, Alexander "Pete" Grannis, to propose the regulations this year.

By doing this, Governor Spitzer can build on New York's history of setting the tone for regulations that cover the entire Northeast. Already Connecticut and Vermont have enacted strict regulations on where boilers can be used. The Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection even warns potential buyers that these devices are very likely to violate state smoke and odor standards; even when operated properly. But like New York, other states in the region are dealing with hundreds of complaints and have yet to establish boiler emission limits.

Outdoor wood-burning boilers are more common in rural areas, but they are frequently popping up in suburbs, with an estimated 150,000 in use nationwide. They look like large outhouses or tool sheds with 12-foot smokestacks and burn wood to create hot water to heat houses and even pools and hot tubs. In the winter, these boilers run constantly, engulfing communities in smoke and prompting emergency calls to fire departments.

The smoke that these boilers produce is as bad as it looks and smells. Besides causing breathing difficulties and eye, nose and throat irritations, the smoke contains fine particles that, in turn, have been linked to premature death in older people, lung cancer, second heart attacks in those with cardiovascular disease, worsening of asthma and complications for diabetes patients. Fine particle pollution is responsible for the death of 50,000 Americans every year. The toxicity increases if homeowners use their boilers to dispose of garbage or other household waste.

Outdoor wood-fired boilers have grown in popularity over the past several years. Many owners see them as sustainable sources of fuel and an answer to the ever-increasing cost of oil. But the environmental costs of boilers, which pump out 12 times the fine particle pollution of a certified wood stove, don't justify their owners' economic savings. If this smoke causes an asthma attack and the person suffering is hospitalized, everyone will pay for the cost of treatment.

The arrival of these outdoor boilers is causing a headache for local officials as residents worry about the impact they will have on their health, quality of life and property values. Last month, Steve Levy, Suffolk County executive, vetoed a bill that would have banned outdoor boilers within 1,000 feet of any structure. He said that he didn't think the legislation was protective enough.

But why pick on the little guy when there are so many other threats to air pollution? Because like indoor wood stoves, everything from the largest smokestacks to consumer products like paint have been regulated. Taken in the aggregate the so-called little guy can end up being a big source of emissions- consider that a lawn mower can produce the same emissions in one hour as 50 cars driving 20 miles.

In New York State, more than 90 percent of the population lives in counties that fail to meet federal health standards for air quality. Whether it is warm weather ozone or year-round fine particle pollution, the threat to public health that already exists cannot afford the added injury caused by an influx of outdoor wood-burning boilers.

New York must take a lead in developing emissions measuring for these boilers and establish pollution limits for them. Rules should also govern where these boilers can be situated and should allow local governments to enact tougher standards, including an outright ban.

The problem is national in scope and begs for a federal solution. The only way we are going to get Environmental Protection Agency officials to act with force is for Governor Spitzer to show them how to do it.

Peter M. Iwanowicz is the vice president of the American Lung Association of New York State.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Monday, Feb. 5, 2007:](#)

Air pollution woes mount

Studies find it's bad for children's lungs and older women's hearts.

Two recent studies add to the argument that controlling air pollution is a public health necessity. Both strongly suggest that clean air standards are not stringent enough to protect the most vulnerable populations.

In one study, researchers measured lung capacity - the ability of airways to absorb oxygen and deliver it to the bloodstream - for thousands of children living in smoggy and not-so-smoggy areas of Southern California.

Researchers tested the lungs of 3,677 children annually for 8 years as the children grew from 10 to 18, the years when lung development is most rapid. The youngsters tested lived in 12 different cities, from relatively clean Santa Maria and Lompoc to smoggier Long Beach and Riverside.

Scientists found significant differences in lung function - the ability of youngsters to take in a breath and expel it - between those who grew up near a freeway and those who didn't. By the time they reached age 18, when their lungs are fully developed, children who grew up within approximately a third of a mile of a freeway had 3% to 7% less lung capacity than those who were raised a mile or

more away. Less lung function at 18 puts them at greater risk for heart attack, emphysema and other respiratory ailments when they reach 50. It means a less robust and shorter life.

In the second study, scientists followed 58,600 post-menopausal women from some 200 metropolitan areas across the country for seven years. They found that older women living in communities with high levels of fine particulate matter - tiny bits of soot from cars, coal-fired power plants and diesel trucks, among other sources - had a 150% greater risk of dying from heart disease and stroke than women who lived in areas with low levels of soot pollution.

Older women breathing air with the highest concentrations of soot, in places such as Riverside, faced the risk of dying from heart attack or stroke similar to that of an active cigarette smoker.

The findings in both studies should ring a special alarm bell in the Valley. Many elderly women and young children live within the danger zone of urban freeways in Fresno and other Valley cities.

Federal and state regulators need to tighten clean air standards. The nation needs more restrictions on coal and dirty diesel and greater investment in cleaner fuels and better transit.

Local officials have an obligation to make changes as well. In particular, local land-use planners should be careful not to site schools, playgrounds, day care centers, housing and facilities for the elderly close to high-traffic roadways.

Such efforts will improve everyone's health. As these new studies show, though, older women and children may have the most to gain.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Saturday, Feb. 3, 2007:](#)

Battle lines drawn

State senator looks to avoid future outbreaks of E. coli due to greens.

State Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter has set himself - again - on a collision course with California's agriculture industry. It's too early to take sides, but it's a confrontation that could lead to safer produce on the tables of Californians and consumers across the country.

Florez has introduced three bills that would, for the first time, set up a regulatory framework for the state's leafy green produce industry. The package is a response to recent outbreaks of E. coli that have been linked to growers in the state, including spinach farms near Salinas and dairies near lettuce fields in the Valley.

The bills would call for frequent testing of irrigation water, creating buffer zones between dairies and farms and a host of other new regulations: a paper trail to track leafy green produce from farm to retailer, and bans on using creek water for irrigation, raw manure for fertilizer and placing portable toilets in the middle of fields.

Inspectors would have the power to recall, quarantine and destroy infected produce. Growers would pay a fee - perhaps a charge of \$10 to \$18 an acre, Florez said - to the state to fund the various inspection and oversight programs.

The industry, for its part, is working to assemble a voluntary program of inspections that it says could be in place much faster than any legislation, and offer equal protection to consumers. Growers would pay a small fee - perhaps a nickel per carton of produce - to finance the industry program.

Florez and the ag industry tangled mightily over air quality legislation the senator pushed in recent years. And the battle lines are being drawn again.

The problem is serious, and it's good news that no one's arguing with that conclusion. "There's no real dispute about the need to bolster food safety," said Tim Chelling, spokesman for the Western Growers Association.

Four people died and nearly 300 were sickened in the recent outbreaks linked to California spinach and lettuce. The current system - inspectors periodically visit packing plants, but not the fields - is clearly inadequate.

The impact on the Valley is potentially great - western Fresno County growers provide 95% of the nation's supply of lettuce during certain periods in the spring and fall. The lines are drawn and the debate is on.

[Letters to the L.A. Times, Monday, Feb. 5, 2007:](#)
Hot topic gets hotter

Re "No stopping climate shift, U.N. study says," Feb. 2

It is now almost universally acknowledged that human activity has caused climate change, but what never seems to be acknowledged is the role that the explosion of human population growth plays. In 1900, there were fewer than 2 billion people on the planet; now there are more than 6 billion. Even if all people consumed at the same levels that they did in 1900 (a joke right there), we would be using three times the resources now that we did then, with all the environmental consequences that carries.

Most solutions to this situation are so unacceptable that we cannot consider them, but can we not honor and emulate the Chinese "one child" policy, which has helped slow our rush to disaster?

Erica Hahn, Huntington Beach

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So the United Nations says there is no stopping climate change. For once, the U.N. is correct. This Earth is a living, vibrant, sometimes violent, ever-changing planet. Much of North America was once covered with water, with tropical forests and huge glaciers, which have been receding since the end of the Ice Age. Nothing we puny humans do can significantly alter the natural evolution of this Earth.

Don Wagner, Santa Monica

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Global warming is now officially "real." If we are lucky, it will give everyone on the planet a common enemy.

Rodger Garrett, Loma Linda

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Re "How carbon emissions turn green," Opinion, Jan. 31

Garrett Gruener and Daniel M. Kammen open a conversation that is long overdue. The most efficient way to curb our use of petroleum would be with a carbon tax, although I would argue that a gas tax at the pump should be larger than that suggested by Gruener and Kammen. This would encourage people to shift to more fuel-efficient vehicles, make them more aware of their carbon footprint, lower our dependence on imported oil, decrease air pollution and improve our national security.

To their creative ways to redistribute the tax money I would add the following: Use some of it to pay the first 20% or so of Social Security taxes for people with incomes below \$25,000, which would reduce the regressive effect of the gas tax.

Gary Peters, Chico

The writer is a professor in the department of geography and Planning at Cal State Chico.

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Does it not seem pointless when a wealthy company is provided the option of buying pollution credits, when the costs incurred can simply be levied on the consumer? This would not financially impact such a polluter, nor would it provide any real incentive to bring about ecological benefits.

Michael E. White, Burbank

[Letters to the Fresno Bee, Monday, Feb. 5, 2007:](#)

Polluted air afflicts the Valley all year round

Even with the recent rain, today our air is unhealthy for sensitive groups and has been for days. Before that for three days, the weather page posted the red zone: unhealthy to hazardous with the burning of wood, pellets and manufactured logs prohibited.

On one of the red days, I saw my doctor, who said she planned to jog that afternoon. She was surprised when I urged her not to because of the polluted air. She was amazed; she thought our air was only bad in the summer.

Unfortunately for all of us, bad air can be present in all seasons. Spring brings out gardeners, many of whom use pesticides. Do people realize that pesticides can be more dangerous than second-hand smoke?

One can smell smoke, but pesticides that contaminate our air, water and food don't usually give our sense of smell a warning of danger.

We desperately need scientists and environmentalists on our air district board. We need to realize that pesticide run-off contaminates our water, that pesticide drift is dangerous to our health. We all need to work together to improve and protect our environment.

Joan Poss, Fresno

Coalition Against the Misuse of Pesticides

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'Guarantee of dirty air'

If the air can be clean by 2023, it can be clean by 2013. The Valley air district has no intention of cleaning our air because developers, factory farms and the oil industry pull its strings. This delay [story Jan. 30] is not a promise of clean air in the future. It is instead a guarantee of dirty air for many more years and business as usual for the pollution mongers.

The general public will do whatever it takes because they are paying the \$7 billion per year in pollution related health costs. I think we need the federal government to step into this mess, put a cap on new sources of pollution, and throw out the miscreants running this farce of a public agency called the air district.

Tom Frantz, Shafter

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'Accept a consensus'

Global warming issues have fallen to extreme partisanship. One side believes the modern world has generated environmental conditions that are hastening the process, thereby putting the world at greater risk. The other side believes these views belong to Henny Penny - "the sky is falling."

Why not accept a consensus that there is a problem, whether escalating natural processes or a devastating enhancement of cause and effect that might be ameliorated by reducing greenhouse gases?

It's increasingly obvious the world's climate is changing in dramatic ways over shorter periods of time. The Bee has reported oceans warming, marine plants vanishing, Atlantic climate changes generating conditions attributable to western fires, centuries old historic sites at risk from shifting climate zones, acidic oceans threatening the food chain, NASA studies showing that in the last two years sea ice is shrinking, the northern hemisphere ice cap has shrunk from 6.3 to less than 5.7 million square miles in 16 years, and the Northwest Passage, once iced over prohibiting winter passage is "weakened and failing, sapped by climate change," per Doug Struck of the Washington Post.

What more do we need to know to say, "Houston, we have a problem"?

Georgia A. Vercoe, Fresno

[Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Sunday, Feb. 4, 2007:](#)

Throw out bums

If the air can be clean by 2023, it can be clean by 2013. The air district has no intention of cleaning our air because developers, factory farms and the oil industry pull their strings. This delay is not a promise of clean air in the future. It is, instead, a guarantee of dirty air for many more years and business as usual for the pollution mongers.

The general public will do whatever it takes because they are paying the \$7 billion per year in pollution-related health costs. We need the federal government to step into this mess, put a cap on new sources of pollution and throw out the miscreants running this farce of a public health agency called the air district.
-- TOM FRANTZ, Shafter

[Sacramento Bee, Editorial, Sunday, February 4, 2007](#)

Editorial: Take a deep breath, and feel your lungs weaken

Two recent studies make clear that controlling air pollution is more than just a good idea. It's a public health necessity. Both strongly suggest that clean air standards are not stringent enough to protect the most vulnerable populations.

In one study, researchers measured lung capacity -- the ability of airways to absorb oxygen and deliver it to the bloodstream -- for thousands of children living in smoggy and not so smoggy areas of Southern California.

Researchers tested the lungs of 3,677 children annually for 8 years as the children grew from 10 to 18, the years when lung development is most rapid. The youngsters tested lived in 12 different cities, from relatively clean Santa Maria and Lompoc to smoggier Long Beach and Riverside.

Scientists found significant differences in lung function, the ability of youngsters to take in a breath and expel it, between those who grew up near a freeway and those who didn't. By the time they reached 18, when lungs are fully developed, children who grew up within approximately a third of a mile of a freeway had 3 percent to 7 percent less lung capacity than those who were raised a mile or more away. Less lung function at 18 puts them at greater risk for heart attack, emphysema and other respiratory ailments when they reach 50. It means a less robust and shorter life.

In the second study, scientists followed 58,600 post-menopausal women from some 200 metropolitan areas across the country for seven years. They found that older women living in communities with high levels of fine particulate matter - tiny bits of soot from cars, coal-fired power plants and diesel trucks, among other sources -- had a 150 percent greater risk of dying from heart disease and stroke than women who lived in areas with low levels of soot pollution.

Older women breathing air with the highest concentrations of soot, in places such as Riverside, faced the risk of dying from heart attack or stroke similar to that of an active cigarette smoker.

The current federal standard for soot pollution is 15 micrograms. This new study should help persuade federal regulators to tighten that standard as a number of environmentalists and public health experts have long urged. The World Health Organization has recommended a long-term standard of 10 micrograms.

Riverside, one of the dirtiest air basins tested, had an average annual level of 21 micrograms of particulate matter per cubic meter of air compared with Honolulu, the cleanest city surveyed, which had 5 micrograms per cubic meter. The Sacramento metropolitan area had 11.5.

The findings in both studies should prompt renewed urgency in our nation's effort to clean the air. Federal and state regulators need to tighten clean air standards. The nation needs more restrictions on coal and dirty diesel and greater investment in cleaner fuels and better transit.

Local officials have an obligation to make changes as well. In particular, local land-use planners should be careful not to site schools, playgrounds, day-care centers, housing and facilities for the elderly close to high-traffic roadways.

Such efforts will improve everyone's health. As these new studies show, though, older women and children may have the most to gain.

[Modesto Bee, Guest Commentary, Sunday, February 4, 2007](#)

Jack Smith: Wanting something that's a gas to drive

By JACK Z. SMITH - FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM

Ideally, I'd like for my next new car to be made in America by an American carmaker.

I'd prefer a good-quality, well-built small car that is moderately priced, gets excellent gas mileage, has sufficient pep for freeway on-ramps and will last 150,000-plus miles if well-maintained.

I'd like side air bags as a foil to loony drivers who willfully run red lights and cause deadly right-angle crashes. I'd like a CD player and a cup holder -- two features missing in my 15-year-old Toyota Tercel. But I could manage without a global positioning system or built-in DVD player.

Although I'd ideally prefer an American car, I've been buying vehicles built by foreign manufacturers for 25-plus years. They generally seemed better-built, had less maintenance problems, lasted longer and drew better ratings from Consumer Reports. It was a little 1975 Chevrolet Vega station wagon that drove me away from American cars. As a young, financially struggling Star-Telegram reporter with a wife staying at home with our two preschool daughters, I bought the Vega used, for \$1,000 cash, but soon paid more than that in repairs.

One of the car's most maddening features was a standard transmission plagued by sticking gears. I sometimes had to crawl under the car and unstick the gears with my hands.

I began thinking about that vexatious Vega this week while doing research on federal fuel economy standards. For many years now, Congress has refused to raise corporate average fuel economy (CAFE) standards because it wants to protect U.S. automakers who make much more money selling big SUVs and pickups than little, fuel-efficient cars.

But with gasoline prices having escalated as high as \$3 a gallon in recent years, one has to wonder: Was Congress really doing domestic automakers a favor by neglecting to set significantly higher CAFE standards that would have forced them to focus on building more high-quality, fuel-efficient small cars? U.S. automakers have been taking a financial bath in recent times, in part because their gigantic, gas-gulping SUVs and pickups have become notably less de rigueur in the wake of spiraling fuel prices and the specter of global warming. Had Congress mandated substantially higher CAFE standards a decade ago, U.S. carmakers almost certainly would be better positioned today to compete with the Toyotas, Hondas and Kias of the automotive world in the small-vehicle market.

We need to raise CAFE standards significantly -- by perhaps 5 to 10 miles a gallon over a decade -- to help slake our thirst for foreign oil and curb air pollution. Higher standards also could reduce fuel consumption and lower pump prices. The passage of new standards in 1975 paved the way for a near-doubling of fuel economy over the next decade.

But since then, we've made little progress on fuel economy, despite major improvements in engine efficiency. As gas again became cheap in the late 1980s and 1990s, Americans bought bigger cars with greater horsepower. The average weight for new U.S. cars and light trucks for the 2006 model year was a record 4,142 pounds, an 11 percent jump over 1997 models, according to a Bloomberg news service report.

My criteria for a new car might dictate that I buy something like a Toyota Corolla. (My wife, Nina, and I have owned three Corollas and liked them very much.) But

I'd prefer to buy a car built in America by a U.S.-based automaker, if I can find one closely comparable in price, quality, fuel economy and reliability to a Corolla.

The badly built American small cars of the 1970s helped pave the way for a successful U.S. invasion by foreign automakers, who now have a sizable number of manufacturing plants in America. It's my understanding that small cars made by U.S. automakers have improved substantially in more recent times.

If so, I might could distance myself from the memory of that dreadful little Vega and buy American for the first time in more than a quarter-century. How about it, Detroit?

Jack Z. Smith is a Fort Worth Star-Telegram editorial writer. Write him at jzsmith@star-telegram.com.

[Lodi News Sentinel, Commentary, Saturday, Feb 3, 2007](#)

Our field trip to Sacramento

Why we should all get to know this fellow Dave Cogdill

We just got back from Sacramento, where we listened to state political honchos talk at length about such weighty issues as prison overcrowding, redistricting and health care.

Oh, and how Maria has turned Arnold into a liberal.

Here are notes from our field trip to the Capitol, which was courtesy of the California Newspaper Publishers Association, a trade group for newsies.

* * *

Question: Who is Dave Cogdill and what are his plans to help clean up pollution and give a break to community college students?

Answer: Dave Cogdill is the son of a meat cutter. He is 57. He is a real estate appraiser from Modesto.

He is also our state senator.

If you haven't heard of him, don't feel too bad. He is a relatively new senator, and he represents lots of places besides Lodi, from Fresno to Firebaugh.

Cogdill serves the sprawling 14th District. He replaces Chuck Poochigian, our former state senator who ran for attorney general against Jerry Brown, and lost. We caught up with Cogdill at his Capitol office. Despite fighting a cold, he was amiable and articulate and shared some innovative ideas with us about pollution and the costs of higher education.

* * *

Cogdill has a neat idea to fight smog in the San Joaquin Valley. You could donate an older but low-polluting car to the state for substantial tax or other incentives.

In turn, your old car would be provided to someone who turns in a high-polluting old car but can't afford to spend big bucks on repairs or a new vehicle.

* * *

Educating young people at community colleges is much cheaper than schooling them in the UC or even CSU system.

So one of Cogdill's ideas is to reward students who complete their lower division work at a community college and then transfer to a state college or university.

The student might receive a credit toward future tuition or some other incentive.
Seems a win-win.

His idea would save money for students trying to stretch their educational pennies, and save money for taxpayers.

Cogdill is hopeful, but realistic.

There are unions lobbying on behalf of UC and CSU constituencies, he said, that may not be swayed.

* * *

Will there be meaningful redistricting any time soon? Right now, legislative districts are drawn (by lawmakers themselves) to make sure incumbents always win.

Of course, the current lines favor the Democratic majority.

Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez, a liberal Democrat, said he is "open to the idea" of recrafting these boundaries.

But, almost in the same breath, he added, "It is about power. Once you get it, you don't want to give it away."

So, it seems, redistricting is on the far back burner.

* * *

We aren't sure why this is, but it is:

Republicans don't like spending money, but they are eager to build more prisons.

Democrats like spending money, but they don't want to build more prisons.

Nunez talked about how much has been said through the years about the "military-industrial complex," first described by Ike.

"Now in California," the speaker said, "we have the 'prison-industrial complex.'"

Democratic State Sen. Gloria Romero said the majority of people locked up in California's prisons are non-violent offenders with some kind of drug violation.

Romero said getting "tough on crime" is not the issue.

"We need to get smart on crime," she said.

Her rhetoric, we think, is telling.

With a strong Democratic majority in California, and federal judges getting involved in the operation of the prison system, we'd put money on this:

More early releases, no more new prisons.

* * *

Romero and other liberals said the governor has been "terrific" to work with.

Republicans, though, are less effusive.

As you wander the halls, you here grumblings that Arnold caved to the Dems so he could get re-elected.

Here is some Arnold-related speculation: Maria privately objected to Arnold's attempt at passing reforms in 2005 that would have reined in state spending and recast legislative districts.

He ended up with political egg on his face, most of it hurled by unions for nurses, teachers and correctional officers.

Seeing the error of his ways, and coached by Maria, Arnold then joined hands with Democrats.

With his liberal buddies, Arnold pushed a variety of labor-friendly measures — aimed at big construction projects — on the November ballot, and won re-

election.

That's the scuttlebutt. May or may not be true.

In any case, you get the feeling Arnold needs to hand out a few more cigars to aggrieved members of his own party.

* * *

Apparently, the November election and cheery news of bipartisan hand-holding has burnished the image of legislators.

According to moderator Greg Lucas of the S.F. Chron, fresh polls from the Public Policy Institute of California show politicians have risen in the esteem of citizens. For the first time, he said, the lawmakers now rank in popularity, "somewhere above lung cancer."

Cogdill, for one, is skeptical about the so-called "post-partisan" era.

The election is over. Tax revenues are off.

He thinks the fray will begin anew this year.

[Modesto Bee Editorial, Friday, February 2, 2007](#)

Finally, valley's farmers get seat at USDA's table

Picture U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns as a maitred' — who has just shown California farmers to their seats at the table. The 2007 Farm Bill Proposal that Johanns unveiled Wednesday is unlike any before it, largely because it includes \$5 billion to help develop, protect and sell many of the crops grown around here.

Unlike previous incarnations, this farm bill proposal is actually important to farmers in the Northern San Joaquin Valley. That's part of the reason Johanns came to Modesto to speak to about 150 farmers and ag industry representatives Thursday. He's barnstorming for support — and for much of what he's proposing, he has ours.

Since the Great Depression, farm bills have concentrated on crops grown by Midwestern and Southern farmers. Wheat, corn, rice, soybeans and cotton were granted subsidies — often through direct payments.

Most farmers who live around here either raise animals or grow "specialty crops" — almonds, walnuts, wine grapes, apricots, peaches and vegetables. Specialty crops get no subsidies, and thus were only afterthoughts in previous farm bills.

Now, that could change.

Growers of specialty crops don't want subsidies; but they do want help creating markets, improving their products and finding ways to battle pests. This proposal calls for \$5 billion over 10 years for such projects.

The change in emphasis reflects a dramatic change in how this proposal was created. U.S. Department of Agriculture staff visited 48 states and took 4,000 comments from farmers and others. By listening, the USDA learned. The proposal shifts money from traditional subsidies to fund a range of programs and to streamline others. Some key elements:

An additional \$250 million for the Market Access Program that has helped wine and fresh-fruit companies open foreign markets;

Increased amounts and limits on loans to beginning and "socially disadvantaged" farmers, including money to buy land and to operate a farm;

Increased funding for rural critical access hospitals.

Increases in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program that specifically mentions the San Joaquin Valley's air quality.

Anne Cannon, who spearheads Rep. Dennis Cardoza's team on ag issues, was particularly pleased with that: "For the USDA to specifically recognize us in such a fashion is hugely important."

Cardoza is particularly well-placed to have an impact. He is chairman of the subcommittee on fruits and vegetables and sits on subcommittees that deal with livestock and conservation. He also sits on the important Rules Committee, which sets the agenda for all of Congress. That makes him important to every other representative.

Despite all the positives, this proposal could be in for a rough ride. Congress, not the USDA, writes legislation and already considerable resistance is developing. Ag issues split on regional lines rather than partisan, so it wasn't surprising when one Midwestern Republican senator greeted the proposal with a press release that said, essentially, "we'll see" about subsidy reductions.

Any change in the status quo will be fought — especially in the Senate, where Midwestern states have the most clout. Still, the farm bill must be renewed this year.

Ag Secretary Johanns, himself a Midwesterner, went directly to the people to craft this proposal. In doing so, his team came up with something that benefits all areas of the nation — not just one or two regions. He has provided an excellent starting point for deliberations.