

In The News 06-15-07

Air quality flags fly beginning next week

Modesto Bee, Friday, June 15, 2007

Riverbank and the American Lung Association will kick off the Air Quality Flag Program next week. The program is meant to spread the word about air quality in the city, using various colored flags. On June 22, the city and association will host a flag-raising ceremony to signify the start of the program, which is in use at several area schools. The ceremony will begin at 10 a.m. at the Crossroad shopping center on Patterson Road.

Tinkering, smart driving can cut the cost of trips

By Janis Mara, Business Writer

Tri-Valley Herald, Friday, June 15, 2007

BEFORE HITTING THE ROAD on vacation this summer, Carolyn Walker of Richmond is checking her tires and tuning up her car - and taking her 30-mile-per-gallon 1984 Toyota Tercel rather than her 17-mile-per-gallon 1955 Oldsmobile convertible in an effort to keep gas costs down.

As summer approaches, many - like Walker - feel the urge to load up the car and travel. With gas prices hovering above \$3.50 a gallon in the San Francisco-San Mateo area and above \$3.40 a gallon in the East Bay, experts say there are plenty of ways to save gas and lessen your impact on the environment while having a great trip.

First, a little preparation can help keep gas usage and carbon emissions down.

"Inflating your tires to normal pressure gives you better gas mileage," said Walker, who estimates that she has driven about 200,000 miles on vacations in the past 10 years visiting friends and relatives around the country. Getting the car tuned up, or at least doing your own checkup, is also a good idea, according to both Walker and AAA of Northern California spokesman Sean Comey.

"Check the fluid levels," Comey advised. "Is there enough oil? Is the radiator filled up, the automatic transmission fluid?"

Another ever-so-21st-century way to save: Before you leave, check Web sites such as <http://www.gasbuddy.com>.

You can also calculate the estimated fuel price of your trip at <http://www.fuelcostcalculator.com>.

If you can, plan your travel schedule around high-traffic times.

"I always travel at night or early morning," Walker said. "That way, I avoid getting caught in rush hour traffic or traffic jams. I can keep going at a steady pace."

Stop-and-go driving burns gas and increases emissions of smog-forming particles, according to the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy.

And here's a novel idea: Instead of driving your own car, rent one. "It costs you more than 50 cents a mile to drive your own car" because of the wear and tear on the vehicle, Comey said. Especially if you own a big truck or sport utility vehicle, renting a smaller car could pay for itself in gas costs.

Indeed, some car rental agencies, including Enterprise Rent-A-Car in Berkeley, have hybrid cars, though the number is limited.

Once you're on the highway, the real savings begin, experts say.

"Try to avoid high speeds. Most vehicles these days get optimal fuel economy at 55 miles an hour," said Jason Toews, a co-founder of 7-year-old cheap gas price-finding site GasBuddy.com.

The difference between 62 mph and 75 mph reduces your fuel economy by about 15 percent, based on the organization's research, Toews said. In other words, if you are driving a Honda Accord or similar sedan getting around 30 miles a gallon with an 18-gallon tank, on a 500-mile trip you will save \$16 round trip by driving 62 mph, Toews said.

Also, driving 75 mph can dramatically increase tailpipe pollution in many vehicles, according to the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy.

You can save even more by backing off on the air conditioning, Toews said. "That could be up to 20 percent," he said. "Air conditioning puts an extra load on the engine, and the engine has to use extra fuel." With that Accord on a 500-mile trip, you could save \$40 round-trip by minimizing A/C use.

"Air conditioner use increases NOX (nitrogen oxide) emissions in some vehicles and involves environmentally damaging fluids," according to the energy-efficient economy council.

Ron Sipherd of Oakland, who drives thousands of miles yearly on vacations with his wife, Joan, offered reduced A/C use as his most useful fuel economy tip.

"It saves about 10 mpg," Ron Sipherd said, "and we appreciate it more when we do use it."

Another tip: Just one tire underinflated by 2 psi reduces fuel economy about 1 percent, Toews said. "A lot of people have their tires underinflated by 10 or 20 psi," he said, "and if all your tires are underinflated, it would decrease your fuel economy by about 15 percent," or \$16 for the entire Honda Accord 500-mile trip.

These three tips would save about \$72 for that 500-mile trip. Also, slow down and enjoy the ride. Aggressive driving wastes gas.

"Don't jam on the accelerator or hit the brakes. More mellow driving can save a lot of fuel," said Emily Winston, a program manager with the Institute of Transportation Studies at the University of California, Davis.

Not only that, flooring it leads to pollution, according to the energy-efficient economy council. "One second of high-powered driving can produce nearly the same volume of carbon monoxide emissions as a half-hour of normal driving," the council cautions.

Carrying around extra weight can also ding fuel economy, so it's advisable to dump your junk. An extra 100 pounds can reduce economy around 1 percent.

"Take an extra few minutes to unload your cargo area," the council suggests. Also, you can wait until you arrive at your destination to load up the ice chest with ice and food, AAA's Comey suggested- unless you're headed to a high-priced tourist location such as Yosemite.

Of course, all these tips save gas - and there is a direct correlation between gasoline consumption and carbon output, according to Winston of the Institute of Transportation Studies. "Not only are you saving by driving more efficiently, you are reducing your (carbon dioxide) production at the same time."

Finally, some good news: Most cars these days run just fine on regular gas, so unless your owner's manual dictates otherwise, you can use the less expensive gas with impunity, the energy-efficient economy council said.

Critics unimpressed by smog-plan reform

Study targets other ideas to cut Valley air pollution.

By Mark Grossi, The Fresno Bee

The Fresno Bee, Modesto Bee, Friday, June 15, 2007

State air officials on Thursday approved a much-criticized smog cleanup plan with a 2024 completion target for the San Joaquin Valley -- but they offered a concession to those who want a quicker fix.

In the next six months, the California Air Resources Board will intensely study other pollution-cutting ideas for the Valley, such as banning older vehicles during dirty-air days. Based on the findings, the state air governing board may add more rules to speed up the cleanup.

The critics -- who staged a large protest before the meeting -- were not impressed.

"Today's decision means that a child born today in the Valley will have to wait until her high school graduation to breathe clean air," said Liza Bolaños, Fresno-based coordinator for the Central Valley Air Quality Coalition, a nonprofit group.

But the state air governing board -- convening Thursday in Fresno to approve the new plan -- agreed with its staff's finding that an earlier deadline wouldn't work. The technology does not exist yet to clean up vehicle pollution, which is the Valley's biggest problem, the staff said.

The state will send the plan to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, which also is expected to approve it. EPA approval would remove the threat of federal sanctions for the Valley, such as the delay of \$2 billion in road-building funds.

In addition, the Valley would become the first place in the nation to be classified in a category reserved for the worst smog offenders, based on how long a cleanup would take.

The 25,000-square-mile Valley, running from Stockton to Bakersfield, has had more smog violations over the last seven years than any other region in the country.

Opponents of the new smog plan said the cleanup should be finished many years sooner than 2024, primarily to save lives and limit human suffering. Ozone, the corrosive main gas in smog, triggers asthma and other lung problems. Researchers also have estimated that more than 450 Valley residents die prematurely each year from such pollution.

Carrying protest signs with messages such as "Delay is death," opponents said it is time for authorities to take more drastic action.

"We've had enough, and we're not going away," said Merced resident Lisa Kayser-Grant.

Opponents outnumbered smog-plan supporters by at least 5-1, as they did in April when the plan was hotly debated before the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District governing board.

Local air district officials repeated their position that the technology does not exist to eliminate three-quarters of one key smog ingredient, called oxides of nitrogen. The main source of such pollutants is vehicles, particularly heavy-duty diesel trucks.

"We are not just raising the white flag," said district executive director Seyed Sadredin. "By our conservative estimate, industry will pay \$20 billion for this cleanup. This is not a free pass."

The local district board approved the plan in April. But officials said the agency also would pursue other smog-reduction approaches that are not required in the plan.

For instance, officials are investigating an idea to redirect some shipments from Southern California ports to Northern California ports. The move would eliminate a lot of south-to-north diesel truck traffic that comes through the Valley.

But state governing board members on Thursday said they could sense an emotional divide in the Valley. They approved the smog plan by a 7-1 vote -- with board member Lydia Kennar of Southern California dissenting because she wanted a stricter plan.

Board member Dorene D'Adamo suggested the intense study of additional rules. She also pushed through a motion to form a state air board task force bringing the various sides together to talk about solutions.

Said D'Adamo, "We need to get a little more involved in the Valley."

Air cleanup deadline extended

BY STACEY SHEPARD, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Friday, June 15, 2007

It will take nearly 17 years before the entire San Joaquin Valley breathes air that meets the federal government's definition of safe under a plan to clean up smog approved by state officials Thursday.

Despite months of opposition from environmentalists and health advocates, the smog cleanup plan obtained the blessing of the California Air Resources Board, the agency charged with regulating air pollution throughout the state.

The plan is controversial because it pushes out the deadline to meet the federal government's standards for clean air by more than a decade, until 2024. The federal government had given the valley an initial deadline of 2013 for meeting the smog standard.

Smog is formed when emissions from vehicles and factories react in sunlight. The gas is highly corrosive and can inflame lung ailments and trigger asthma attacks.

Opponents said more could be done to clean the air sooner, like tighter regulations for industry and measures that would restrict the operation of polluting farm and construction equipment on days when air

quality is bad. They submitted about a dozen proposals of alternative methods not included in the plan that could be undertaken to bring down smog-forming emissions.

In response, state air board members pledged to amend the plan adopted Thursday if additional reductions that clean the air sooner are identified. The board also plans to form a task force to foster better communication between the agency and community members.

But Liza Bolanos, coordinator for the Central Valley Air Quality Coalition, said the board's decision to revisit the plan in six months carries no guarantees they will be added to the smog plan.

"We're disappointed at what's perceived to be a compromise, because ultimately there are no commitments," she said.

Local air district officials who drafted the plan said the valley faces a unique challenge when it comes to cleaning the air.

"Unfortunately we are the victims of geography and topography when it comes to air pollution," said Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The valley has less air pollution than other parts of the state-- the Bay Area has about six times more pollution and Los Angeles has about 10 times more. But because of little air movement combined with mountains that trap pollution, sunlight and heat that create smog, the valley has more smog violations than the Bay Area and nearly the same number as the Los Angeles area, Sadredin said.

To reach attainment, the plan will put forth new rules for industry and tighten existing ones, at a cost of about \$20 billion to valley businesses.

It also relies heavily on statewide air regulations that will require cleaner diesel fleets and passenger vehicles in the future and federal regulations that govern emissions from locomotives.

Members voted 7-1 to approve the plan.

The lone dissenting vote came from Lydia H. Kennard, the former director of Los Angeles' four airports.

"I believe in high expectations," Kennard said, as the plan's opponents applauded.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District approved the plan in April in a 9-2 vote. It will now be forwarded to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for final approval.

For many who opposed the plan, Thursday's vote by the Air Resources Board was seen as the last chance to prevent a delay in obtaining clean air, though some groups said they may sue if the EPA approves the plan.

Earlimart resident Teresa DeAnda fought back tears as she held up pictures of her toddler grandson to the state board.

The baby has asthma and will be almost 19 by the time the valley's air is clean, she said.

"I can't tell you how defensive I get when you mess with my kids," DeAnda said.

DeAnda was among dozens of the plan's opponents to give testimony before the board. Dolores Huerta also urged members not to approve the plan. She told the board she has eight grandchildren and great grandchildren with asthma.

Several agricultural industry representatives spoke in favor of the plan, even though they said it will be costly to implement.

WHAT IT MEANS

A plan to clean up the valley's notorious smog gained state approval Thursday. Under the plan, new and existing rules to control air pollution would help reduce the amount of smog in the air over time.

Here are several important details of the plan:

- 50 percent of the valley would meet the federal standard by 2015 and 90 percent would reach it by 2020. Areas in northwest Fresno and east of Arvin would not reach compliance until 2023.
- Valley businesses will have to spend about \$20 billion to implement new pollution controls over the next 17 years.

- 80 percent of the emissions that create smog in the valley come from mobile sources, including trucks, passenger cars and diesel-powered agriculture and construction equipment.

Air board asks for reprieve

By Garance Burke, Associated Press
Contra Costa Times, Friday, June 15, 2007

FRESNO -- State air regulators voted Thursday to approve a plan asking the federal government for an 11-year extension on bringing the San Joaquin Valley's smog-laden air up to current, tougher federal ozone standards.

Once it's sent on to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, California's farm belt likely will become the first region in the country to receive the reprieve, a move environmentalists fear could be repeated in other areas plagued by dirty air.

Protesters dressed in black to symbolize the premature deaths caused by air pollution chanted before the meeting Thursday, the first day this year that regulators have asked local residents to stay inside to avoid unhealthy levels of summertime smog.

"My 3-year-old was just given medication for asthma last month," said Melissa Kelly-Ortega, 36, of Merced. "I'm very angry that they want to postpone cleaning up the air for the health of all in the valley."

The San Joaquin Valley is one of the worst air basins in the nation for the emissions that create ozone, the main ingredient in smog.

Local air district officials told the California Air Resources Board they wished a clean-up were possible sooner, but said they need an extension from 2012 until 2023 to avoid federal sanctions that could cut off more than \$2 billion in transportation funds to the region.

"We are not simply raising a white flag and saying it's all the state and federal government's responsibility," said Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. "We were not happy that we really had no other option."

Under the plan, more than half the valley's population would live in areas where air meets the federal ozone standard by 2015; by 2020, that number would increase to 90 percent, local air managers said.

The state board is likely to send the plan to EPA next week as a part of California's overall ozone strategy, an air board spokeswoman said.

To get the extension, the board will ask the valley to be reclassified as being in "extreme nonattainment" of federal ozone standards, a request the EPA must grant, said Kerry Drake, an associate director in the air division in EPA's Region 9.

Industrial and agricultural groups largely supported the move, but valley activists said the board failed to follow through on Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's 2003 campaign pledge to cut pollution in half by 2010.

Cleanup timeline for ozone extended

in the Stockton Record, Friday, June 15, 2007

A plan allowing more time to clean up ozone pollution in the San Joaquin Valley was approved by state officials on Thursday after several hours of public testimony.

Critics said the decision puts the public at risk, particularly in the southern Valley, where ozone levels in the summertime are especially high.

"Today's decision means that a child born today in the San Joaquin Valley will have to wait until her high school graduation to breathe clean air," said Liza Bolanos, coordinator of the Clean Valley Air Quality Coalition.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's plan gives the Valley until 2023 to meet federal ozone standards; some conservationists say the goal could be met a decade sooner.

It's important to note, district officials said Thursday, that despite the delay, nearly two-thirds of the pollution reductions will be achieved by 2014, meaning the air will already be a lot cleaner than it is now.

To meet the standard, the Valley must reduce smog-forming nitrogen oxide emissions by about 75 percent. Part of the plan is to replace older polluting engines in cars and other equipment.

Environmentalists have called for fewer incentives funds and stricter enforcement of rules governing agriculture, industry and growth.

Not meeting the standard on time means the Valley will be declared in "extreme" nonattainment. The extension allows the region to avoid federal sanctions that could erase billions of dollars in transportation money.

Audit says engine pollution program needs repairs

By Alex Breitler

Stockton Record, Friday, June 15, 2007

An air pollution incentive program that commits more than \$140 million a year to replace dirty engines in the San Joaquin Valley and throughout the state doesn't make the best use of its money and needs a tune-up, according to a state audit released Thursday.

The report could lead to changes in the law that would mean less money available to replace hundreds of diesel-powered agricultural pumps in the Valley, officials said.

But those who called for the audit said it should make a strong program even stronger.

Audit's results

- More money should be used for "multidistrict" programs for mobile pollution sources, such as trucks.
- Some projects chosen for funding are less cost-effective than others.
- Some projects in the Bay Area exceeded the program's limit for cost per ton of emissions reductions.
- The South Coast Air Quality Management District did not spend \$24.1 million in Carl Moyer funds within the required two years. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District did not spend \$546,000 within the required two years, though district officials dispute this.
- The districts should seek projects that are likely to come up with emissions reductions at a cheaper cost.

"It's exactly what we were hoping to see - some identification of ways people can make the program work better," said Kathryn Phillips of the conservation group Environmental Defense.

The nine-year-old Carl Moyer program, named after a deceased air quality expert, gives money to companies, governments and everyday people to retrofit or rebuild engines in everything from trains to tractors and forklifts to ferries. More than 1.2 million diesel engines operate in California, spewing ozone-forming pollutants into the air.

Thursday's audit, however, says that the California Air Resources Board and the regional air districts with which it partners must do a better job doling out those dollars and deciding which projects are likely to provide emissions reductions at the lowest cost.

It also says some districts have failed to spend Carl Moyer funds in a timely manner. In 2006, the South Coast Air Quality Management District had \$24.1 million in unspent incentive money; it had held some of that money over a six-year period and, overall, had spent just 61 percent of the incentive money it received from the state.

Also in 2006, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District still had nearly \$546,000 out of its original 2003-04 allocation of \$2.8 million.

Todd DeYoung, a supervising air quality specialist with the San Joaquin district, said the numbers are misleading.

His district wasn't simply sitting on the money, DeYoung said. The money had been assigned to a project, and officials were waiting for the job to be done and the money to be transferred.

He called the Moyer program "wildly successful" in the Valley. Officials receive 50 to 60 applications per month to replace a total of 200 to 300 engines.

One of the audit's recommendations is to increase the number of projects that span multiple districts. Those types of projects, such as construction equipment that might be used in multiple regions, are more cost-effective, the audit says.

"That would be a problem," San Joaquin's DeYoung said. "Obviously, we have a great need for incentive funding here in the Valley. It doesn't make sense to divert money away."

Don Anair, an engineer with the Union of Concerned Scientists in Berkeley, said a 2004 study by his group showed that every dollar spent on the Moyer program yields \$10 in health benefits because of reduced cases of asthma.

"I think it's very good that the audit was performed," he said. "They can identify some areas that can be improved."

Phillips, of Environmental Defense, said her concern is citizens' access to the funds. Applications take months to process, and the San Joaquin district uses 20 different forms, which could turn away prospective clients.

"We want it to be easy enough to use that people are not discouraged," she said.

Fewer emissions for ships at Oakland port

Upcoming test could lead to decline in respiratory problems for nearby residents

By Sonya Hubbard, STAFF WRITER
Tri-Valley Herald, Friday, June 15, 2007

OAKLAND - If all goes well during an innovative test in the Port of Oakland on July 18, ships will spew far fewer toxic emissions - welcome news for nearby residents who suffer from high rates of asthma and other health problems related to air quality.

The test at the nation's fourth largest port will significantly reduce pollutants from ships, such as nitrous oxide, sulfur oxide and diesel particulates, announced shipping giant APL, the world's eighth largest container shipping company.

APL's test will use a process known as "cold ironing" or "alternative marine power." Cold ironing is when a ship turns off its own power and uses power from a source on the shore. Mariners coined the term to describe old steam engines that shut down, cooled off and became, literally, cold iron.

Although the Navy has used cold ironing in order to do maintenance work and save fuel, what distinguishes APL's test is that it will use liquefied natural gas to generate electricity for the ship.

Last week PG&E tested emissions from a prototype generator and measured significant reductions in pollutants. Nitrous oxide levels fell almost 95 percent, particulate matter decreased nearly 100 percent, carbon dioxide levels declined more than 40 percent, and sulfur oxide emissions were completely eliminated.

"This is an exciting project for us. It's really cutting edge," said Jack Broadbent, executive officer of the Bay Area Air Quality Management District. "If it works here, it has the promise to work in Los Angeles, Long Beach, Houston ... everywhere."

The Port of Long Beach is also testing the cold ironing process, but it will be using power off the grid and connecting it to the ship.

Pollution caused by commercial shipping vessels is not a new problem, but to date efforts to reduce emissions have produced modest results.

In March 2007, the International Council on Clean Transport issued a report that identified oceangoing ships as a greater source of air pollution and greenhouse gases than vehicles. The fuel used by ships has an average sulfur content of 27,000 parts per million, compared with 10 to 15 parts per million for the fuels used by land-based vehicles in the world's most developed nations.

Principals at Wittmar Engineering and Construction, Inc., based in Signal Hill - a city near Long Beach - developed APL's new technology in 2002. Partners Dana Markle and Eric Witten got the idea after working in the oil industry.

"Whenever you have an oil platform offshore, you're taking the natural gas that's coming out of the ground with your oil production and making electricity," Markle said. "We're never in a situation where there's electricity coming in from the grid.

"And we said, 'Why can't we do that with ships?' We kept hearing air quality districts talk about wanting to reduce the pollution from the ships. So we came up with a design and got a patent on it. We filed for the patent in 2002 and received it in August of last year."

Wittmar and APL collaborated with a number of partners to develop the technology. One of those partners developed the idea of running a single high voltage cable from the LNG generator and connecting it through the ship's bow thruster transformer to the main switchboard.

Leroy Griffin, assistant fire marshal for the Oakland Fire Department, said the project will especially benefit the residents of West Oakland, who have long suffered from higher than average asthma rates and other health problems.

But he said that the fire department must analyze all aspects of the new technology.

"We also have to look at safety," Griffin said. "We don't want to eliminate one problem and create another one at the same time."

"We're adding another element of risk by bringing in tanks. Methane is colorless and odorless, so there's always the potential for a leak or another problem. But my fire department is very experienced with working with innovative technologies. We worked with AC Transit last year to install a hydrogen tank and compressor. We've been running six buses and several cars for the last year without any problems."

Brian Constable, vice president and chief operations officer APL Maritime Ltd., said that the process of retrofitting the APL fleet could be done by the end of this year at a cost of approximately \$225,000 per ship.

"In a 35-day voyage, once we have all the equipment, we can retrofit each ship without taking it out of service."

APL, a subsidiary of Singapore-based Neptune Orient Lines, moves 120,000 containers through Oakland's port each year.

State regulators approve Valley plan to delay clean air

By Garance Burke, Associated Press Writer

In the S.F. Chronicle, Contra Costa Times, Sacramento Bee, Thursday, June 14, 2007

Fresno, Calif. (AP) -- State air regulators voted Thursday to approve a plan asking the federal government for an 11-year extension to bring the San Joaquin Valley's smog-laden air in line with current, tougher federal ozone standards.

Once the plan is sent to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, California's farm belt will likely become the first region in the country to be granted the extra time, a move environmentalists feared could be repeated by regulators in other areas plagued by dirty air.

Protesters dressed in black, symbolizing the premature deaths caused by air pollution, chanted before the meeting Thursday, the first day this year in which regulators asked local residents to stay inside to avoid unhealthy levels of summertime smog.

"My three-year-old was just given medication for asthma last month," said Melissa Kelly-Ortega, 36, of Merced. "I'm very angry that they want to postpone cleaning up the air for the health of all in the valley."

The valley, stretching 240 miles from Stockton to Bakersfield, is one of the dirtiest air basins in the nation, the main ingredient of smog.

Local air district officials told the California Air Resources Board they wished a clean-up were possible sooner, but they had to request an extension from 2012 until 2023 to avoid federal sanctions that could cut off more than \$2 billion in federal transportation funds to the region.

"We are not simply raising a white flag and saying it's all the state and federal government's responsibility," said Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. "We were not happy that we really had no other option."

Smog, which is created when pollutants from tailpipes, smokestacks and livestock waste react with summer heat, is trapped in the valley's air basin, which is bordered by mountains on three sides. It is blamed for causing asthma and makes it harder for people with respiratory conditions to breathe.

Under the plan, more than half of the valley's population would live in areas with air that meets the federal ozone standard by 2015; by 2020, that number would increase to 90 percent, local air managers said.

The state board is likely to send the plan to EPA as a part of California's overall ozone strategy next week, air board spokeswoman said.

To get the extension from 2012 to 2023, the board will make an official request for the valley to be reclassified as being in "extreme nonattainment" with federal ozone standards, a request the EPA must grant, said Kerry Drake, an associate director in the air division in EPA's Region 9.

Valley air managers also will have to update the state about their yearly progress in lowering ozone pollution, and board staff and members will have to consult with the community and report back within six months on any additional reductions to the plan, according to a resolution adopted Thursday.

Board member Sandra Berg said she felt "extremely conflicted," but hoped that the proposal would clean up the smoggy air while still leaving residents "with an economy that allows you to eat and make your home payments."

Industrial groups and agriculture largely supported the move, but valley activists said the board failed to follow through on Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's 2003 campaign pledge to cut pollution in half by 2010.

"It's really a lousy policy decision," said Brent Newell, an attorney for the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment. "The air resources board is not keeping the governor's promise."

In recent years federal standards for ozone have become more stringent. Officials now base their air-pollution readings on instruments that measure air quality for eight hours at a time, rather than the previous one-hour standard.

A March report by 23 scientists on an EPA advisory committee unanimously recommended that the agency consider making them even stricter.

"As bad as the problem might seem in San Joaquin it's actually worse. Even levels of pollution that are legal today are causing public health harm," said Frank O'Donnell, director of the Washington environmental group Clean Air Watch. "But if San Joaquin can get an extension, that doesn't mean a place like Houston wouldn't say if they can do it, why can't we?"

As utilities go green, some are seeing red

Consumer groups rap efforts to gain rewards for conservation.

By Elizabeth Douglass, Times Staff Writer

L.A. Times, Friday, June 15, 2007

In their push to go green, some of California's utilities want more green from their customers.

For decades, California has been among the best at getting its citizens to use less energy, and the state's largest utilities have been more than happy to take credit for the success of programs that do such things as pay rebates when customers buy power-sipping appliances.

But to meet ambitious targets to slash the state's output of greenhouse gases, California and its utilities must now push energy efficiency like never before.

Southern California Edison Co., Pacific Gas & Electric Co., San Diego Gas & Electric Co. and Southern California Gas Co. have said they are ready to do their part - but they want customers to hand them another \$400 million to \$1 billion in cash incentives. Extra rewards, on top of the incentives the utilities already get for administering the customer-funded power-saving programs, could add as much as \$2.50 to the average ratepayer's monthly bill.

"Audacity is a pretty good way to frame it," California Energy Commission member John Geesman said of the companies' pursuit of big energy-efficiency rewards. "It ought not to take bribes to get them to do that."

Some consumer groups share Geesman's view.

Even at \$500 million, the utility rewards would be "a huge waste of money," said Marcel Hawiger, staff attorney for the Utility Reform Network in San Francisco.

That money, he said, would be better spent in ways other than padding the profits on programs the utilities already administer. The funds would be enough, he calculated, to give every California household five energy-saving light bulbs or weatherize more than 300,000 low-income homes.

The utilities' incentive request is backed by many energy regulators, the Natural Resource Defense Council and some groups that promote conservation. They believe that allowing utilities to profit from customer-funded efficiency programs is reasonable and essential given the urgency of making Californians use less power, which would reduce the greenhouse gases that electricity generation creates.

"It's part of a package that we see as necessary to really promote and make sure that cost-effective efficiency is being pursued," said Audrey Chang, an NRDC staff scientist. The goal is to make saving power more attractive to the utilities, she said, "so they're putting their best resources, their best personnel, into energy efficiency."

The debate is playing out in a little-noticed proceeding at the California Public Utilities Commission, where regulators are hammering out strategies crucial to the state's quest to rein in the pollutants that have worsened global warming.

Under a landmark law enacted last year, California pledged to cut greenhouse gas emissions 25% by 2020. Using less energy is considered crucial to meeting the law's aggressive goal because it is the cheapest, cleanest and least-disruptive route.

California's wide-ranging energy efficiency programs target homeowners and businesses. They include adopting appliance and building standards that save power, eliminating wasteful practices, promoting efficient lighting and offering rebates to customers who install less power-hungry appliances such as refrigerators and air conditioners.

Those steps, plus the deterrent of high electricity prices, have helped California keep its per-capita power consumption relatively flat over the last 30 years, while the nationwide figure has grown by nearly 50%. Every year, the programs save more than 40,000 gigawatt-hours of electricity and 12,000 megawatts of peak power - equal to 24 large power plants.

The turning point, experts say, was the state's decision in the early 1980s to more than offset the lost revenue at utilities that sold less power to customers because of energy efficiency programs.

That crucial move, still a relative rarity in the United States, "took away the incentive, generally, for California companies to want to sell more power," said Peter Darbee, chief executive of San Francisco-based PG&E Corp., which owns Pacific Gas & Electric.

The efficiency achievements continue to save consumers and businesses money, but they aren't free. Most of the money behind the state's programs are paid for by customers, through the "public goods" charge on their energy bills. On each customer's bill, the charge amounts to about 1%, of which nearly half goes to energy efficiency.

Utilities are partway through the state's 2006-through-2008 efficiency program, which is expected to eliminate the need for three new power plants and reduce carbon dioxide emissions by more than 3 million tons per year by 2008, the equivalent of removing 650,000 cars from California roads.

The cost for ratepayers is \$2 billion over those three years. The program is expected to decrease electric and gas bills by 2% by 2009, saving ratepayers \$2.7 billion. But the cost figures don't count the utility incentives now under discussion.

PUC President Michael Peevey, energy efficiency experts and utility executives say the challenges require a wholesale shift in focus at the state's utilities. As a result, they say, energy efficiency endeavors should offer profit-making opportunities that are equivalent to the money companies earn by building power plants and selling the output.

"We're definitely pushing the envelope very hard, and that requires extraordinary measures, and one of those is earnings ... for shareholders" from energy efficiency, said Mark Gaines, director of consumer programs at San Diego Gas & Electric Co. and SoCal Gas, subsidiaries of San Diego-based Sempra Energy. "The amount is certainly what the commission needs to decide on."

Under SDG&E's plan, it and the other investor-owned utilities would be rewarded with a collective \$403 million if they meet the state's targets for 2006 through 2008, a figure that would rise to more than \$1 billion if the group achieves 150% of the goals.

PG&E's plan calls for combined payments of \$538 million for meeting the efficiency marks, and up to \$686 million for exceeding the mark - suggesting a possible profit of between 27% and 34% on the three-year \$2-billion energy-efficiency budget.

The Utility Reform Network wants utility incentives to total \$54 million for 100% success, rising to about \$100 million if the companies exceed the targets.

The utilities didn't specify how much the incentives would add to customer bills. But the Utility Reform Network estimated that \$500 million in new rewards would swell the average customer's monthly bill by \$15 a year or \$1.25 a month over three years. A \$1-billion incentive boost would double the monthly cost.

Utility commission officials are expected to rule on the issue by the end of summer. The final plan probably also will include penalties for poor results.

"We should set the incentives a little rich, so that the utilities exceed your expectations, and then you can trim back, for the next phase," said Darbee of PG&E. "If you have them so low that the utilities don't get excited about it, then you'll have a program that ... won't be a real success."

Consumer advocate Hawiger scoffs at that line of reasoning. "We're not even asking them to foot the bill. We're asking them to do the right things for a small fee rather than for a huge profit," he said.

"Joe Q. Public should be outraged that the utilities are going around bragging about how green they are ... and at the same time, they're asking for profits so that they will do what we're already paying them to do, but better."

[Sacramento Bee, Commentary, Friday, June 15, 2007](#)

Hey, governor! State needs anti-warming pitchman

By Stuart Leavenworth

On any given day in Sacramento, some of the state's top environmental economists and lawyers can be seen in intense confabulation, mulling the implementation of California's global warming laws.

Some are focused on the "early-action measures" the Air Resources Board will consider next week to seek quick reductions in greenhouse gases.

Some are grappling with a proposed cap-and-trade system for emissions that could become a template for other governments around the world.

It's important and heady stuff, but for many Californians it probably seems like an exercise in esoterica. And that's the problem.

Polls show that voters are increasingly concerned about global warming and want to do something about it. Yet to date, California leaders haven't even begun to tap into this energy and help individuals become part of the solution.

Arguably, this preoccupation with procedure is the single largest shortcoming of California's crusade against global warming.

It has helped dissipate much of the excitement that surrounded the passage of last year's Assembly Bill 32, which requires a 25 percent reduction in greenhouse gases by 2020. It also leaves the impression that only technocrats can save us from a feverish planet.

It is doubly mystifying that Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger -- dubbed "The People's Machine" in a recent book -- hasn't seized this opportunity for salesmanship. Imagine if Schwarzenegger, whose popularity has rebounded over the last year, recorded a few public service television ads to help people shrink their carbon footprint.

In these ads, the governor is seen standing in front of Lyell Glacier in Yosemite National Park -- one of several Sierra ice fields that has shrunk noticeably during his lifetime.

The finely coifed governor stares into the camera, and tells Californians that global warming is real, and that it is already affecting their lives.

"Let me give you one alarming example," the governor says, repeating one of his familiar comments. "California's snowpack -- the primary source of drinking water for two-thirds of Californians -- will be reduced by up to 40 percent over the next few decades."

The camera cuts to Schwarzenegger's home. The governor and first lady Maria Shriver are seen swapping out regular light bulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs. They go down to the basement to show how contractors have expertly sealed their air conditioning ducts, saving themselves 25 percent in summer cooling costs.

Next Arnold and Maria are seen taking transit, riding bicycles and eating food grown in their backyard.

"If all of us did this," the governor says in conclusion, "we could save billions upon billions of pounds of greenhouse gases."

Okay, perhaps I'm overreaching. But evidence suggests that Californians will respond to a strong and smart public education campaign.

Starting in the late 1980s, a state-sponsored advertising blitz helped reduce smoking rates. During the 2001 energy crisis, Californians were asked to reduce their power consumption. In just a few days, a third of all households cut their energy use by more than 20 percent.

"What we need now is a Flex Your Power program for Climate Change," said Karen Douglas, a lawyer with Environmental Defense, a group that has experience with mass-medium education efforts. "People are ready to step up now. If we had a program like that, we'd get a lot of emissions reductions."

Education alone, of course, won't get individuals to change their habits. Carrots and sticks are also needed.

The "sticks" could come when California establishes a market system for greenhouse emissions. Depending on how this system is designed, utilities, refineries and other industries would pay a price for each ton of emissions they generate. Some industries would be forced to pass those costs onto consumers, meaning higher prices for electric rates and gasoline and more incentives for individuals to conserve.

The problem with this system is the inequity. Some Californians couldn't quickly upgrade their air conditioning, or purchase a car that was more fuel-efficient. Without some form of assistance, they would howl, and future politicians would quickly suspend California's law.

To smooth over these inequities, some economists are suggesting a system of enhanced rebates.

Money raised by putting a price on greenhouse emissions could be plowed back to consumers and businesses eager to reduce their carbon footprint. Utilities could expand the rebates they currently offer to upgrade heating and cooling systems, retrofit windows or install solar panels. Motorists could get help purchasing the most fuel-efficient vehicles.

All this is two to three years away. Yet right now, there is plenty of untapped opportunity. Utilities and nonprofit foundations already offer rebates of \$300 or more to upgrade heating and cooling systems. Many consumers don't know about these. Nor do many know that the Sacramento Tree Foundation can help an entire neighborhood develop a towering tree canopy to cool houses in summer.

"The program is undersubscribed," said Rob Kerth, director for the tree foundation's Greenprint project.

Basic awareness could go a long way toward reducing emissions, and making California's program a real model for the world. But this education campaign needs a strong pitch man.

Hmmm. I wonder who that would be?

[Note: Because of inconsistencies with cell phone providers, #SMOG, will no longer be used by the SJVAPCD.]

Bakersfield Californian, Commentary, Friday, June 15, 2007:

Report belching, polluting cars

BY MAUREEN BUSCHER-DANG, Bakersfield | Thursday, Jun 14 2007

I grew up here. I can remember being able to see the surrounding mountains most days. Clean air was something we all took for granted. Over the years, my friend Elaine and I have debated just when it was we couldn't see the mountains every day. It was so gradual, no one noticed.

Sounding Board members recently received an invitation to write about what we would be willing to do to clean up Bakersfield's air.

It seemed like a simple enough task. My family and I already reduce, reuse and recycle, but I was worried about looking ill-informed. So, I did what anybody would do. I did an Internet "Google" search for consumer ideas to reduce air pollution. Little did I know I would get far more than I bargained for.

The first link took me to the California Air Resources Board's Web site. The item was titled "Fifty Things You Can Do." I was proud we were already doing many things, like grouping errands; recycling paper, glass, plastics; using fans instead of air conditioning. The last time we traveled to San Francisco, we rode Amtrak.

Things were humming along until I hit #14 "Report Smoking Vehicles." I've always hated seeing what I'm breathing from the car in front of me. I was excited when it instructed me to call the Air Pollution Control District at 1-800ENDSMOG or dial #SMOG (#7664) on my cell phone. Being a practical person, I figured it would be easiest to punch in a four-digit number on my cell. I could then relay how simple the process was in my *Californian* article.

"Exciting local people want to talk to you now! Dial 1-800-313-2300" was the message I received when I dialed #SMOG. I was confused by the woman's message. But, hey, maybe the air pollution people were just really excited about talking to me. They really want me to report smoking vehicles.

As instructed, I then dialed the 800 number. "Hey there sexy guy! Welcome to an exciting way to go live one on one with hot ***** girls.....local students, housewives and working girls from all over the country are waiting to talk to you for just 99 cents per minute....or live girls for just \$2.99 per minute...enter your credit card now..."

I know times are tough. Surely this wasn't a new way of raising money to help clean up California's polluted air! Maybe this was tied in to suggestion #42: "Avoid vigorous physical activity on days with unhealthy air." What the heck?

All joking aside, air pollution is nothing to sneeze at. I'd like to see state and local air pollution regulators come up with a better, easier way to report smoking vehicles on our roads. Maybe I can take a picture of offenders and send it to some agency.

The California Air Resources Board's "50 Ways" listing really does have some excellent ideas. Breath easier by incorporating some of their suggestions into your life: www.arb.ca.gov

Maureen Buscher-Dang is the marketing director of the Chain-Younger law firm in Bakersfield.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses California Air Resources Board's approval of the 2007 Ozone Plan. For more information, contact Maricela (559) 230-5849.

California decide postergar plan urgente de limpieza del aire

El retraso contradice planes del propio gobernador, Schwarzenegger, y a las leyes federales contra la contaminación

Noticiero Latino, California

Radio Bilingüe, Friday, June 15, 2007

La Oficina de Recursos del Aire de California decidió postergar por más de una década un plan de limpieza urgente para el Valle de San Joaquín, la segunda región más contaminada en Estados Unidos después de Los Ángeles.

En una audiencia en Fresno, la agencia estatal también aprobó que las refinerías incluyan diez por ciento de ADITIVO etanol en la producción de gasolina, lo que elogió el gobernador Arnold Schwarzenegger sin referirse a la postergación del plan prioritario para el Valle de San Joaquín.

En contraste, la Coalición para la Calidad del Aire en el Valle Central de California advirtió que la actual población infantil en la región tendrá que esperar hasta terminar *high school* (preparatoria) para respirar aire limpio.

El retraso contradice planes del propio gobernador, Schwarzenegger, y a leyes federales contra la contaminación.