

## **Valley residents ready to rally for cleaner air**

Merced Sun-Star, Tuesday, August 28, 2007

A caravan of about 20 Merced residents is on its way to Sacramento today to rally outside the California state Capitol building for cleaner air.

They join about 180 San Joaquin Valley residents being bused from their home cities by the Central Valley Air Quality Coalition (CVAQ), a group representing more than 85 valley environmental, community, health and justice organizations.

The point of this journey is to encourage Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and other legislators to pass bills that could help air quality in the Valley, said Liza Bolanos, coordinator for the CVAQ. "This is their opportunity to make a difference," she said. "We hope one in many."

The bus leaves from Merced at 7 a.m. from Smart & Final on Martin Luther King Jr. Way. On that bus will be representatives from the Merced/Mariposa County Asthma Coalition, a health organization to control asthma in this area.

There are 36,000 diagnosed asthmatics in Merced County, said Melissa Kelly-Ortega, program associate of the coalition. And that number is connected to the pollution here. Merced's high level of ozone pollution put it at sixth in the country. "We're duking out with Los Angeles and other Valley cities to be become the worst-polluted city in the nation," she said. "Our citizens are breathing really bad air."

They plan to bring this message to the Capitol building at 10 a.m. today before a short rally on the west facing steps at 12:20 p.m. The CVAQ has invited the governor and other legislators to attend this rally to discuss with the group strategies for cleaning up the air, Bolanos said.

## **Engineering Rail's Rebirth**

### **Freight cars may join big rigs in transporting valley's bounty**

By Michael G. Mooney

Modesto Bee, Sunday, August 26, 2007

Make no mistake, when it comes to moving goods in and around the San Joaquin Valley, the big rig is still king of the road.

But the day of the dominating tractor-trailer -- efficiently hauling everything from automobile parts to almonds -- could be waning.

Why?

Experts say there are three primary reasons:

- Growing congestion on valley highways.
- Rising fuel costs.
- [Seriously polluted air.](#)

Those factors have some believing the time is right for a return to short-haul rail -- freight trains of usually 50 cars or fewer to move goods short distances.

That's the same rail-based, freight-hauling system displaced decades ago by the cheaper and more efficient shipping-by-truck system still used throughout the valley today.

So, what goes around comes around?

Not exactly.

Even the most ardent short-haul rail advocates don't envision a freight-hauling future without big rigs.

The idea is to trim costs, enhance efficiencies and cut traffic and air pollution by dramatically reducing heavy-duty truck trips between the valley and the Port of Oakland.

But development of an "inland port" at Crows Landing is just one piece of a larger and more complicated puzzle -- the aging and overburdened Northern California railroad network.

D.J. Smith of California Strategies, and coordinator of the Crows Landing project for PCCP West Park LLC, said railroading in Northern California is much the same today as it was a hundred years ago.

As a result, Smith said, there's a lot to be done to improve other aspects of Northern California's rail network for an inland port at Crows Landing or anywhere else in the valley to succeed.

"No one project solves all the problems," Smith said. "There's a lot of work we need to do to become competitive. Southern California is about 25 years ahead of us."

Officials at the Port of Oakland, a key player in the Crows Landing project, are pushing improvements for their long-haul Class I rail partners, the Union Pacific and Burlington Northern Santa Fe railroads.

The Class I trains operated by UP and BNSF move up and down the valley. At up to a mile long, those trains are much longer than short-haulers, and they don't make frequent stops.

"As exporters, we're always looking for more efficient and better ways of doing things," said Brian McGuire, a Fresno-based representative of the Western Cotton Shippers Association. "People see freight trains moving through the valley, but the containers aren't loaded here. We're paying (truckers) to drive our product to the Port of Oakland."

While port officials support short-haul rail in concept, they aren't ready to commit money to Crows Landing or any other potential inland port.

"If improvements to the overall rail system are not made," said Omar Benjamin, Port of Oakland executive director, "then local initiatives such as short-haul rail become infeasible due to congestion on the state's rail system as a whole."

"The port's highest priority must be focused on expanding and improving the main rail line service to the port's facilities."

### **Donner Summit work**

At the top of Oakland's priority list is a series of road and overpass improvements to alleviate traffic moving in and out of the port.

Port officials also want the train tunnels over Donner Summit in the Sierra enlarged. That would enable UP trains to double-stack cargo containers bound for Midwest and East Coast markets.

Today, UP trains with double-stacked containers, a shipping standard, must travel on a route that takes a day longer than the route over Donner Summit.

West Park, led by developer Gerry Kamilos, is keenly aware of the port's position and has been lobbying hard to win a commitment to Crows Landing.

"That's why our group is working with both Central Valley and Bay Area interests," Kamilos said, "to solve these problems. Collectively, this will evolve into a Northern California (rail improvement) solution."

Those interests include the Port of Oakland, San Francisco Bay Area Metropolitan Transportation Commission, San Joaquin Council of Governments, Stanislaus Council of Governments and Sacramento Area Council of Governments.

West Park and Kamilos also are talking to economic development agencies, including those representing the Bay Area, and San Joaquin and Stanislaus counties.

Talks also are ongoing between the Kamilos group and Altamont Commuter Express, known as ACE, as well as the Union Pacific and BNSF railroads.

A key part of the Kamilos plan would secure the UP's Altamont Pass track for his short-haul rail client and the ACE commuter trains. UP's long-haul would enter and exit Oakland via Martinez.

At this point, said Libby Schaaf, the port's director of public affairs, Oakland wants to study the feasibility of short-haul rail but not only at Crows Landing.

The study, Schaaf said, also would examine the viability of establishing inland ports at Stockton, Fresno, Sacramento and Shafter, in Kern County. Firebaugh and Mendota in Fresno County also have been mentioned as possible sites.

West Park, meanwhile, continues to work on developing a joint application to the California Transportation Commission by early 2008. Smith said it would seek nearly \$1 billion of the \$3 billion worth of transportation improvement bond measure money that California voters approved last year.

"This is probably the most complicated thing I've ever attempted to coordinate in my career," Smith said. "We've got a pretty broad battlefield here. We're trying to change the whole logistical (shipping) system in Northern California."

While short-haul rail service has piqued interest throughout the valley, Smith said it will be expensive. He estimates it could take as long as 14 years and nearly \$200 million to fully develop Crows Landing.

"Trucks are still a cheaper alternative than short-haul rail," said Andrew Chesley, executive director of the San Joaquin Council of Governments. "But the gap is closing between them. When we look to the future, short-haul rail has a role to play."

That's because the region's highways are expected to become further choked with traffic, slowing trucks into the port even more.

For example, Hughson Nut Co., a Stanislaus County-based almond processor and exporter, today pays a trucking company about \$400 per container for the drive into and out of the port.

West Park's Smith said that shipping a container by short-haul rail would cost about the same but would enable exporters to move more containers more efficiently, possibly saving the company money in the long run.

### **But why Crows Landing?**

Smith said the site's location near freeways and rail lines as well as its proximity to Oakland make it ideal.

Kamilos envisions the former Crows Landing Naval Air Station as not only a rail hub, but a 4,800-acre "magnet" for manufacturing and other businesses.

Some West Side residents and political leaders have criticized the plan. They fear it will disrupt the area's agricultural character and bring noise and traffic from the trains moving through Patterson and other towns.

Kamilos has tried to reassure residents that his project would improve the quality of life by bringing in new and higher-paying jobs, among other things.

Smith said short-haul trains will be no more than 50 cars, causing at most a two-minute delay at crossings.

Eventually, Smith and Kamilos said, the Crows Landing's line would become the primary carrier of agricultural products into the Port of Oakland.

Even without having seen a detailed presentation, officials at the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District are embracing the concept.

"We know 80 percent of the valley's pollution is attributable to mobile sources; cars, buses, trucks and trains," said Seyed Sadredin, air district executive director. "Of that 80 percent, 50 percent comes from heavy-duty trucks."

Sadredin continued: "A project like this could go a long way to helping solve the valley's air pollution problems."

Smith said preliminary research by West Park shows it would take about 526 truck trips to carry as many containers to and from the port as a single train based at Crows Landing.

That's based on a complicated formula that takes into account the difficulty truckers face trying to secure empty containers, which ocean shipping lines and railroads largely control.

One short-haul train, according to West Park, can carry as many as 115 containers each way. By comparison, trucks carry a single container into and out of the port in a day.

### **More than one inland port?**

While Sadredin conceded there's "no silver bullet" to solve the valley's air pollution, "if we had only one bullet it would be (aimed at) getting rid of the trucks."

Sadredin said the valley likely will need to develop more than one inland port. He also suggested opening a sea lane to ship goods between Northern and Southern California via the Pacific Ocean rather than by truck through the valley.

Shirley Batchman of California Citrus Mutual, an Exeter-based trade association, also believes the time has come for an inland port.

"The devil is always in the details, no doubt," said Batchman, the mutual's director of industry relations. "I see nothing but positives in this. Reducing drive times, easing (traffic) congestion; conceptually it has a lot of merit."

## **EPA may adopt California air standard**

By: Dave Downey - Staff Writer

North County Times, Tuesday, August 28, 2007

California's smog benchmark is tougher than the nation's. But it is often ignored because the state can't take away billions of dollars in highway money like the federal government can, if regions fail to clean up the air, experts say.

That may be about to change.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has proposed to ratchet down its limit for ozone, Southern California's most prevalent air pollutant, to either match the state's threshold or come close to it.

"They're playing catch-up with California," said Debra Kelley, Southern California advocacy director for the San Diego office of the American Lung Association, which backs the move to tighten the screws on the nation's smog.

The EPA has planned five public hearings around the country the next couple weeks, including one in Los Angeles on Thursday. The agency proposes to make a decision by March 12, 2008.

Dale Kemery, an EPA spokesman in Washington, said by e-mail the agency expects to determine in 2010 which metropolitan areas meet the new federal standard and which don't. Kemery said offending urban regions would be given deadlines ranging between 2013 and 2030 to reach the new target.

"We can't specify attainment dates for specific areas," Kemery said. "But areas with the most severe problems get the longest time to meet standards."

The South Coast air basin, which takes in Riverside, Orange, Los Angeles and San Bernardino counties, is notorious for having one of the nation's most severe smog problems. It already is having a rough time meeting the existing limit, with compliance not anticipated until 2024. Now it could take even longer to reach the elusive dream of clean air.

San Diego County is doing a little better in the smog department.

"We're within striking distance," said Rob Reider, planning manager for the San Diego County Air Pollution Control District, which regulates stationary pollution sources such as power plants and factories. "We're a year or two away from hopefully reaching that (existing federal) standard."

However, if the EPA adopts California's standard as its own, it could take the San Diego region a decade or more.

### **The toxic brew**

Ozone, the primary component of smog, is an invisible but pungent and poisonous gas. Ozone tends to form when hydrocarbons and nitrogen-oxides belched by the huge concentration of cars and factories along the coast blow inland and cook in the hot valley sun to form a toxic brew.

Bryan Brendle, energy resources policy director for the National Association of Manufacturers, a Washington-based group that represents the nation's 11,000 manufacturing firms, said by telephone last week it would be unfair to change the rules now, just as regions are beginning to approach the goal.

"This is like moving the goal posts during the ball game," Brendle said. "The current standard is working. Ozone concentrations are dropping."

The national business group, which warns that the rule would eliminate millions of manufacturing jobs, is urging EPA to leave the current limit intact. Already, Brendle said, the nation has lost 3 million such jobs -- going from 17 million to 14 million -- since the turn of the century.

"A stricter ozone standard will exacerbate that trend. There is just no doubt," he said.

However, with likely generous deadlines for meeting a new target, James Lents of Diamond Bar, former head of the South Coast Air Quality Management District, disputed the notion that the economy would be harmed.

And with the health stakes so high, Lents said the federal government has no business basing a standard on difficulty.

"Citizens deserve to know if their air is healthy or not," Lents said. "It's like lying to the public to maintain a non-health-protective standard just because it is hard to get to."

## **Giving lip service**

State and regional air quality officials said they generally back the federal proposal, although they have yet to deliver official comments.

"We would support that effort, so that it protects more people and so that we have fewer deaths throughout the United States," said California Air Resources Board spokesman Dimitri Stanich in Sacramento.

Numerous scientific studies have linked high smog levels to aggravated health problems for children and the elderly, and people suffering from lung and heart ailments. Studies also suggest pollution causes premature death.

Lents said the EPA proposal would have the practical effect of spurring serious efforts to meet the targets California has had for years.

"The state standards, in my opinion, aren't adequately enforced," he said. "They are only giving lip service to them. You rarely hear people seriously consider the state's standards."

California's smog rules call for ozone concentrations to reach no higher than 70 parts per billion, as averaged over an eight-hour period. The federal threshold is 84 parts per billion.

On June 22, the EPA proposed ratcheting down the federal limit to either 70 parts per billion or 75 parts per billion.

In a recent report, the EPA stated: "We now conclude that the overall body of evidence clearly calls into question the adequacy of the current standard in protecting sensitive groups, notably asthmatic children and other people with lung disease, as well as children and older adults."

The report said studies have demonstrated smog can damage lungs at concentrations as low as 60 parts per billion.

Brendle, of the manufacturing group, suggested it was inappropriate for the EPA to propose lowering the standard in advance of hearings scheduled as part of an annual five-review of its smog rules.

"We believe that such a blatant policy preference is unnecessary, and that it is not founded on the existing scientific data on the various alleged health impacts of current ozone exposure," he said.

## **Something to chew on**

David Gemmill of Temecula, who retired earlier this month from his job as an air quality scientist at UC Riverside, disagreed.

"I'd rather have the EPA put something on the table so that people can chew on it a little bit," Gemmill said.

If the 70-parts-per-billion proposal on the table is adopted, Riverside and San Diego counties would find their skies in violation of federal smog laws much more often than now.

For instance, the South Coast basin that takes in western Riverside County has logged 70 bad air days so far this year -- as of Thursday -- under the existing EPA standard, said Tina Cherry, South Coast district spokeswoman. If the proposed limit were in place today, violations would total 105 -- and counting.

San Diego County, by comparison, has logged just five violations so far, said Carl Selnick, the county's air quality specialist. But the number of bad air days would already have reached 34 under the proposed rule, he said.

The totals don't, however, reflect how many days the air is bad in, say, Temecula or Oceanside. That's because a violation is recorded whenever any one air monitor in an entire air basin exceeds the limit. That tends to happen most often at Alpine in San Diego County, and in the urban area lying directly east of Los Angeles in the South Coast basin. Still, limits would be exceeded more often in Escondido, for example, under the change.

Besides the impact on overall numbers, Reider, of the San Diego district, said the change could also affect the time of the year air quality is considered poor.

"In the early 1990s, it used to be that we could get an ozone (violation) at almost any time of the year," Reider said. "But today, ozone is only a summer problem. If EPA tightens the standard, we might get back to having violations outside of the summer season."

On Aug. 2, the EPA estimated the new rule would curb premature deaths caused by smog by 1,100 to 1,400 per year nationwide.

The report also said the tougher standard could prevent, in the year 2020, 9,400 to 16,000 cases of aggravated asthma, 1,400 to 2,300 nonfatal heart attacks, and 675,000 to 890,000 occasions when people miss work or school.

The regional hearing is scheduled for 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Thursday at the Garden West Room, Wilshire Grand Los Angeles, 930 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90017.

## **Rail plan could benefit Caltrain**

### **Regional network blueprint ties in with aim of high-speed L.A.-to-Bay Area line**

By Will Oremus, Medianews Staff

Tri-Valley Herald, Tuesday, August 28, 2007

A \$45 million plan to improve and integrate the Bay Area's myriad rail lines would affect the Peninsula mainly by expanding and upgrading Caltrain, transportation officials said Monday.

About 100 people crammed into an auditorium in San Carlos for a public workshop on the Bay Area Regional Rail Plan, which was released earlier this month and could be approved by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission next month.

While the plan envisions BART as the "backbone" of the region's transit system, it calls for Caltrain to remain the key spur connecting San Jose to San Francisco.

Accordingly, it calls for Caltrain to go electric, build tunnels at major crossings, expand across the Dumbarton Bridge, and possibly add tracks to accommodate high-speed trains running from Los Angeles to San Francisco. Regionally, it calls for BART to link up with Caltrain in San Jose and to add a second transbay tube from San Francisco to Oakland.

The result, proponents say, would be a seamless ring of trains around the Bay, relieving clogged highways and reducing air pollution.

While none of the ideas are brand-new, their inclusion in the rail plan gives them a regional backing that could help them become a reality.

The obstacle, of course, is money.

The local officials and residents who spoke at Monday's workshop gave mixed reviews of the plan. Many praised the basic concept but criticized certain aspects, such as the short amount of time available for public input and the lack of detail in the ridership and cost projections. Several focused on the plan's connection to a separate, statewide high-speed rail program aimed at zipping passengers between Southern California and the Bay Area in under three hours. That proposal adds uncertainty to the MTC's regional plan, because its advocates are still deciding between at least two route plans.

One would send trains through the Pacheco Pass and up through San Jose to San Francisco. The other has them going through the Altamont Pass and through the East Bay before splitting.

The MTC's plan includes both options, and the commission has yet to decide whether to endorse one or the other.

Caltrain Chief Development Official Ian McAvoy on Monday gave an enthusiastic thumbs-up to the regional rail plan, saying that although the costs are high, the rewards would be higher. He also backed the high-speed rail program, saying Caltrain would welcome the express trains on its tracks.

Doug Kimsey, planning director for the MTC, noted that the high-speed rail plan may bring a windfall of state money for Caltrain. That's because it would require the trains to be electrified and the tracks widened and separated from road crossings by over- and underpasses, which Caltrain wants to do anyway.

But some local residents fear that trains running up to 200 miles per hour through their towns would be disruptive.

"I'm worried about how much more they're going to divide our towns," said Bobbi Benson of Burlingame. Her sentiment was echoed by Atherton Vice Mayor James Janz, who wondered how much Peninsula residents would benefit from the high-speed line.

Burlingame Councilwoman Rosalie O'Mahoney wondered about the expense of the proposed grade separations at crossings, noting that they can cost \$100 million each.

Dan Cruey, president of the San Mateo County Economic Development Association, argued the improvements and the high-speed rail are essential for the region's economic growth. He praised the

MTC's plan for regional transit integration, saying, "We've got a number of transit systems in the Bay Area that don't currently work together."

The San Carlos workshop was the last of five around the Bay Area. The MTC will take comments under consideration and aims to approve a final regional rail plan by the end of September.

## **Two state commissioners OK Hayward power plant**

By Matt O'Brien, Staff Writer

Tri-Valley Herald, Monday, August 27, 2007

HAYWARD - With overriding concerns presented by their own staff, two presiding board members of the California Energy Commission said a proposed gas-burning Hayward power plant ought to go forward after all.

The Friday decision by state commissioners John Geesman and Jeffrey Byron is just the latest chapter in a monthslong approval process for the

600-megawatt Russell City Energy Center. It is also a sign that San Jose-based Calpine Corp.'s project is neither a dead deal nor a done deal.

In a 229-page report, the commissioners differed in opinion with state commission staff who warned earlier this year that columns of warm exhaust from the west Hayward plant could interfere with aircraft approaching the nearby Hayward Executive Airport.

The commissioners also dismissed concerns raised by some Hayward residents about pollution impacts on health, saying "the evidence shows that there will not be significant health impacts and that the project will comply with all health-related requirements."

The decision overrides a July report from staff scientists of the California Energy Commission that recommended against construction of the Russell City plant, mostly because of aviation concerns.

But it is not the final decision. Geesman and Byron have served as the commission's licensing committee presiding over the Hayward project, but a final vote of approval or denial must be made by all five state energy commissioners at a hearing scheduled for Sept. 12 in Sacramento.

Before that, the commissioners will host a conference at 6 p.m. Sept. 5 at Hayward City Hall to discuss their findings.

The Friday report states that the plant, whose stacks would rise about 12 stories, would be built 1.5 miles southwest of the airport, and that aircraft would not need to fly over the plant.

Federal aviation officials can issue warnings to pilots and revise instrument approaches, while Calpine can install air traffic hazard lighting on the plant, the commissioners said.

Geesman and Byron are also presiding over the approval process for another proposed Hayward power plant, Eastshore Energy Center. Proposed by Tierra Energy, a small company now based in Colorado, the 115-megawatt plant would be about a half mile from the other plant.

Commission staff members last week issued a report on Eastshore that drew similar conclusions as the report they issued on Russell City. The staffers said they could not recommend Eastshore because of its proximity to the airport.

Geesman and Byron must now decide whether they will support that Eastshore recommendation. The Eastshore center's location is closer to the runway approach line.

## **'Green' investments key to climate fight**

By William J. Kole, Associated Press Writer

in the Modesto Bee, Tuesday, August 28, 2007

VIENNA, Austria - They could be powerful new weapons in the battle against global warming: turbines powered by waves or wind, or technology that scrubs the skies to recapture and recycle carbon.

The struggle to contain and reverse climate change may hinge on whether governments and corporations choose those kinds of environmentally friendly options in the next two decades, U.N. experts said Tuesday.

"Climate change may turn out to be an environmental question with an economic answer," said Yvo de Boer, the U.N.'s top climate official.

Worldwide, a projected \$20 trillion will be spent on energy infrastructure between now and 2030. More than 1,000 experts meeting in Vienna this week are trying to come up with ways to ensure that as much of that cash as possible goes toward projects that will efficiently generate clean energy.

Governments can help by enacting legislation that gives companies tax breaks, subsidies and other incentives to invest in clean technology, de Boer said.

Another option, he said, could be an international tax on air travel - a levy that would raise an extra \$10 billion-\$15 billion a year.

But industry will have to take the lead. The private sector accounts for 86 percent of all energy investment, the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change says in a new report.

It says additional investments of about \$210 billion a year will be needed - mostly in the developing world - to maintain greenhouse gas emissions at their current levels in 2030.

"The investment decisions that are taken today will affect the world's emissions profile ... for many more years to come," the report warns.

Negotiators in Vienna are laying the groundwork for a major climate summit to be held in December in Bali, Indonesia.

Officials say a new treaty is needed to eventually replace the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which requires 35 industrial nations to cut their global-warming emissions 5 percent below 1990 levels by 2012, when Kyoto expires. They also say private industry needs to see a long-term international agreement in place before it sinks money into "green" energy projects.

Underscoring the lucrative business opportunities that climate change has spawned, the World Bank says the global carbon market - where government and industry limits on carbon dioxide emissions are traded like credits - tripled from \$7.9 billion in 2005 to \$24.4 billion last year.

Companies need to do some fast thinking, U.N. experts say, because 40 percent of the world's power generation infrastructure will be replaced in the next five years.

"What they do today, they could be stuck with for the next 25 or 30 years," de Boer said.

The U.N. is promoting clean alternatives that use new technology to capture and recycle pollutants that damage the Earth's atmosphere.

One such project, a joint U.S.-Chinese initiative at China's largest coal methane-fired power plant, captures methane - a volatile gas that, like carbon dioxide, contributes to global warming - and converts it into electricity.

But environmental organizations chided de Boer's office for shifting the focus from coral reefs to carbon markets.

The Climate Action Network, an umbrella group, issued a statement suggesting the fight against global warming should be motivated by altruism, not avarice.

"The shift away from the business-as-usual path to a clean, efficient and safe energy future is not about additional costs, but about saving money, species and human lives," it said.

## **Two sites considered for county compost facility**

By Chris Metinko, Staff Writer

Tri-Valley Herald, Monday, August 27, 2007

If at first you don't succeed, move farther east - at least, that's what Alameda County waste officials are thinking as they hunt for a new site within the county for a composting facility.

After failing to place a facility at a site near Sunol, the county Waste Management Authority is looking at two sites in the Livermore area.

One is property off North Flynn Road already owned by the authority, and the other is the Jess Ranch site off Interstate 580.

"Right now we're investigating both sites," said Tom Padia, recycling director for the authority. "We're still early on in this process. No final decisions have been made, but there's interest in these two sites."

Last month, the authority's board authorized talks with the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, Fish and Wildlife Services and other regulatory agencies to identify key issues that would need to be addressed to develop the sites.

Padia said while there is no firm timetable, they hope staff will report back to the board later this fall with its findings.

The search for a new compost facility site began when the board killed a plan last year for a 600-ton-a-day facility on Andrade Road in Sunol.

The authority had spent nine years and \$2.1 million on research and planning for the site.

But Sunol residents feared the 40-acre facility would produce odors and worried about potential health problems from gases and airborne particles.

The authority wants to build a large-scale composting facility, or several smaller ones, to help reach the voter-mandated goal of diverting 75 percent of waste sent to county landfills by 2010.

Material Recovery Industries Inc. and Norcal Waste Systems Inc. have expressed interest in the authority's North Flynn Road site. Biosolids Recycling has expressed a desire to develop the Jess Ranch property.

Earlier in the summer, the authority board held a meeting in Livermore to discuss the possibility of developing both sites. While some residents brought up concerns about effects on endangered species and water quality, most seemed concerned with the possible development of sites at the Altamont Landfill and just across the border in San Joaquin County. The board has decided to postpone considering those two sites until the Jess Ranch and North Flynn Road sites are examined.

Along with the Jess Ranch and North Flynn sites, a possible expansion of East Bay Municipal Utility District's organic digestion facility in Oakland is still being pursued by the authority for disposal of organic waste. Also being discussed is a possible marine transfer system that would send organics north to the Delta.

## **Bill Clinton defends health care effort**

By BETH FOUHY , Associated Press Writer  
in the Modesto Bee, Monday, August 27, 2007

NEW YORK - Former President Clinton defends his administration's attempt to reshape the nation's health care system in a new book, saying the effort "was killed by politics, not the plan's particulars."

Clinton also disputes the Bush administration's skepticism about the effect of carbon emissions in producing climate change, calling the scientific evidence "overwhelming."

"Giving," set for publication Sept. 4, is largely an apolitical treatise on the ways in which philanthropy, innovative business practices and human generosity can tackle global problems. The former president runs a large charitable foundation that bears his name, focusing on issues of climate change, poverty and public health in the developing world.

But Clinton also uses the book to tout his successes in the White House and gets in several glowing mentions of his wife, Hillary Rodham Clinton, the 2008 Democratic presidential front-runner. He also takes some subtle digs at Republicans, including President Bush.

Government's role is essential in promoting public welfare, Clinton writes, ticking through his own accomplishments as president. During his eight years in office, Clinton said air quality standards improved, 90 percent of children were vaccinated against serious diseases, and 40 million more people had access to safer drinking water.

The former president never criticizes his successor by name but takes aim at several Bush administration policies.

On health care, Clinton notes that millions more Americans are uninsured since he left office and that insurance premiums have risen 90 percent.

"Since 2000, all the cost and coverage problems have worsened," he writes, arguing that the country may soon be ready for a major health care overhaul.

The former president also praises Ira Magaziner, who with Hillary Clinton helped spearhead the administration's failed health care reform effort, as a "brilliant social entrepreneur" unfairly blamed for the political debacle. Magaziner now runs the Clinton Foundation's HIV/AIDS effort.

On climate change, "The country has refused to take serious action," Clinton writes, complaining that "too many politicians have been resistant to implementing proven strategies to reduce emissions."

The Bush administration and many Republicans have acknowledged the need to address climate change, but have resisted global agreements to make emission reductions mandatory.

## **Plants' cleanup may create side-effect**

in the Modesto Bee, Sunday, August 26, 2007

OMAHA, Neb. - As the nation's coal-fired power plants work to create cleaner skies, they'll likely fill up landfills with millions more tons of potentially harmful ash.

More than one-third of the ash generated at the country's hundreds of coal-fired plants is now recycled - mixed with cement to build highways or used to stabilize embankments, among other things.

But in a process being used increasingly across the nation, chemicals are injected into plants' emissions to capture airborne pollutants.

That, in turn, changes the composition of the ash and cuts its usefulness. It can't be used in cement, for example, because the interaction of the chemicals may keep the concrete from hardening.

That ash has to go somewhere - so it usually ends up in landfills, along with the rest of the unusable waste.

"You're replacing an air problem with a land problem - a disposal problem," said Bruce Dockter, a research engineer with the Energy and Environmental Research Center at the University of North Dakota.

Coal ash naturally contains arsenic and mercury, and if the elements leach into groundwater they can contaminate drinking supplies. The EPA says ash disposed of in landfills could pose significant risks when mismanaged, and there are gaps in state regulation.

And the chemicals added to clean up emissions - such as ammonia, lime and calcium hydroxide - make the ash worse, environmental groups say, because they take toxins such as mercury out of the air but leave higher levels of it in the ash.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency doesn't classify coal ash - with or without the added chemicals - as a hazardous waste, although many environmental groups say it should.

"As a general rule, anything you do to make the air emissions cleaner makes the ash more toxic," said Lisa Evans, an attorney with Earthjustice, a nonprofit environmental law firm.

More than 120 million tons of ash and other leftovers come from coal combustion each year in the United States, and more than 46 million tons are reused, according to the American Coal Ash Association.

Environmental groups encourage reuse of the ash because it keeps most of the waste out of landfills. And substituting ash for cement means less mining for the materials typically used to make cement - consequently causing a drop in the amount of carbon dioxide that would be emitted by mining machinery.

But the EPA is pushing power companies to cut emissions of the sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides, which add to smog and acid rain and contribute to thousands of premature deaths, asthma and other respiratory ailments. A large portion of those emissions come from coal plants, the EPA says.

"If you live near a power plant, you want the cleanest air possible," said Dave Goss, executive director of the American Coal Ash Association. "If in exchange for clean air they have to dispose of material - that's the challenge. The only option may be putting it in a landfill."

It's not clear how many plants already using or will use the new technology or how much ash may be affected, but the technique is becoming widespread as companies work to comply with federal guidelines, Goss said.

The issue was raised as the EPA developed air emissions rules, but the power sector has found ways to minimize the impact, said EPA spokesman John Millett, who said the agency doesn't believe the increased injection of the chemicals into ash will cause a significant drop-off in ash recycling.

But the effects are evident in Nebraska, for example, where the Omaha Public Power District sells about 135,000 tons of ash from its current plant near Nebraska City every year. Ash from a new plant being built nearby will be injected with chemicals to clean emissions, and it will be dumped in a 16-acre landfill to be built onsite at a cost of \$2.7 million, said Mike Jones, a spokesman for the utility.

"You've got to do something with it," Jones said. "This was the best option."

The landfill will fill up in about five years and likely have to be expanded.

Xcel Energy Inc. will use the injection equipment on a new plant near Pueblo, Colo., and also will install the equipment on two existing units there. The ash will be dumped in a 250-acre onsite landfill.

But even if there is a drop in recycling, the trade-off might be worth it.

"The benefits of the additional (emission) reductions from these controls is immense," Millett said.

In Nebraska, the dump sites are closely regulated, said Bill Gidley, a section supervisor with the state's Department of Environmental Quality. Landfills must have liners to collect seepage, and they are inspected every year.

This month, the Maryland Department of the Environment ordered the operator of an 80-acre Anne Arundel County coal ash dump to clean contaminated water detected near the site. Cancer-causing metals were discovered last fall in almost two dozen wells in the area. BBSS Inc. also was fined an undisclosed amount.

In a 2000 report, the EPA promised to re-evaluate the potential risks of coal ash and is developing regulations for disposal of coal byproducts in landfills, spokeswoman Roxanne Smith said.

There are ways to remove the pollutants from emissions without making the ash unusable. But that equipment can be up to four times more expensive, adding millions of dollars to the cost of meeting EPA guidelines, Goss said.

"The utility's primary goal is to provide cheap, dependable electricity for you, the consumer, connected to the grid," he said. "In order to do that and maintain compliance, sometimes the only thing they can do is make the ash unusable."

### **Did you know?**

Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, August 28, 2007

The San Joaquin Valley's smog problem is so bad, the air wouldn't meet federal standards by 2013, even if all personal vehicles were removed from the road.

Source: San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District

[Modesto Bee, Letter to the Editor, Tuesday, August 28, 2007](#)

### **Let state take lead in air quality plans**

Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, wrote in his article ("Valley residents think air is worse than it really is," Aug. 13, Page B-5) that valley air quality ratings are better now than in the 1980s. That might be true, but there is a bigger reduction of pollution using state planning. California needs the foresight to recognize that putting a bedroom community in a bowl-shaped area creates health and land-use problems.

The Bay Area cities didn't create an infrastructure for their communities as they looked at the open land over the Altamont. If the Central Valley was part of the ocean, how many high-rise condos would be part of the Bay cities' landscapes?

*James Kunisch, Modesto*