

## **State funding will help build facility at port**

By Reed Fuji, Record Staff Writer

Stockton Record, Wednesday, August 29, 2007

STOCKTON - California officials approved \$8 million of tax-exempt bonds Tuesday to help underwrite construction of a biodiesel production plant at the Port of Stockton.

That plant, already under construction, is expected to be a small step toward reducing greenhouse gas emissions and dependence on foreign crude oil by making motor fuel out of domestic resources such as vegetable oils or animal fats.

The top executive of Community Fuels, the Encinitas company building the Stockton facility, said the state tax-free bonds will help ease the interest and financial burden. It was going to fund the project with internal equity and a bank construction loan.

### **To learn more**

Community Fuels is advertising for positions at its biodiesel production plant in Stockton, expected to open early next year. For information about openings, visit the company's Web site at [www.communityfuels.com](http://www.communityfuels.com).

"It's very exciting, and we're thrilled to see the state is supporting that," Lisa Mortenson said Tuesday while visiting the construction site.

The bond issue, which will underwrite the bulk of the development costs, was approved Tuesday by the California Industrial Development Financing Advisory Commission.

"Any step we can take now to fight climate change and reduce our dependence on foreign petroleum is a step in the right direction," said state Treasurer Bill Lockyer, who chairs the commission. "With this project, Community Fuels will benefit our environment, create jobs and boost the local economy, and offer a product increasingly in demand."

Mortenson said she expects to have about 21 permanent employees at the plant early next year as production begins. With future expansions, the company could employ as many as 35 people in Stockton.

Community Fuels expects initially to produce about 7.5 million gallons of biodiesel per year. That could expand to 10 million gallons per year, or roughly the amount of diesel fuel consumed each day in California.

It has leased a 2-acre site and 40,000 square feet of warehouse space from the port and is installing storage tanks, a cooling tower, a distillation column and an energy generator on the site.

The project has drawn a good deal of attention, port Director Richard Aschieris noted.

U.S. Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez visited the site last August, about a month after the port lease was approved. Mortenson spoke at an economic summit last week in Stockton hosted by Rep. Jerry McNerney, D-Pleasanton.

"I've been real happy with their progress," Aschieris said. "They've been doing a really great job on getting this together."

He noted that Pacific Ethanol also is constructing an ethanol plant on port property. Port officials are negotiating with two other biodiesel firms about possible leases.

"We're making important inroads in the area of providing alternative fuels," Aschieris said.

When Community Fuels unveiled its plans last summer, officials hoped the plant would be up and running early this year.

Mortenson said it simply took longer than expected to apply for and obtain the necessary land-use and building permits. It is the first time most agencies involved had to review a biodiesel production plant.

Given that, she said, a one-year delay isn't bad.

Community fuels will sell the biodiesel to regional distributors, including Van De Pol Enterprises in Stockton, as well as Royal Petroleum, San Francisco Petroleum, Biodiesel Oasis and Peoples Fuels. End users will include farmers, construction firms, and commercial and public-sector fleet operators.

Community Fuels also will produce glycerin, a byproduct of the biodiesel process, which will be sold for industrial uses.

## **Today year's first Spare the Air day**

**Trains, ferry free until 1 p.m., buses free all day**

FROM STAFF REPORTS

Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald, Wednesday, August 29, 2007

The threat of hot weather and still air has led Bay Area air officials to declare today the year's first Spare the Air Day, affording commuters free morning rides on 29 area transit agencies in hopes of reducing emissions that combine to cause smog.

BART, Caltrain, and Altamont Commuter Express rail systems, as well as all area ferry services, will offer free rides until 1 p.m., while area bus systems will offer free rides all day.

This will be the first of four non-holiday days of free federally-funded transit anti-smog days offered by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, Metropolitan Transportation Commission and area bus, rail and ferry operators.

The \$7.5 million program seeks to entice motorists to take transit to work, particularly in the morning hours. Less driving reduces the effects of cars starting and driving, which in turn release emissions that react with predicted heat and sunlight to create ground-level ozone and other smog components.

Environment and transportation officials also hope that people trying transit might decide to make a habit of riding, rather than driving to work.

Last year, the program spent nearly twice as much money to pay for six days of free transit during two protracted bouts of hot, smog-inducing weather.

Critics charged that the all-day free transit program attracted unruly joy riders and day-trippers who might have stayed home were it not for the free rides. Officials decided that this year, they'd curtail much of the free rides to the morning commute to discourage impulse trips and stretch three days worth of free rides to four.

For more information about Spare the Air, visit [www.sparetheair.org](http://www.sparetheair.org).

## **Free transit rides Wednesday for Spare the Air day**

By Julie Sevrens Lyons

Tri-Valley Herald, Wednesday, August 29, 2007

With ozone levels expected to reach unhealthy levels Wednesday, Bay Area air quality officials are asking local residents to "spare the air," driving less and carpooling more. The Wednesday morning commute will be free on BART, CalTrain, ACE Train and all Bay Area ferries - until 1 p.m. Buses and light rail rides will be free all day.

During the summer months, ground-level ozone can pose a major health problem. Ozone is formed when pollutants combine on hot days, and it accumulates when there is little wind. Wednesday's predicted weather conditions will make the area ripe for smog.

People who are sensitive to air pollution are being encouraged to limit their time outdoors, particularly in the afternoon hours.

The public is also being asked to refrain from using gasoline-powered lawn and garden equipment, as well as polluting household products such as hairspray, paint and aerosol cleaners.

For additional information, go to [www.sparetheair.org](http://www.sparetheair.org).

## **Free ACE rides today**

Staff report

Tracy Press, Tuesday, 28 August 2007

A "Spare the Air" day means free morning rides on Bay Area-bound transportation.

All rides from the start of service until 1 p.m. today on the Altamont Commuter Express will be free.

Bay Area Rapid Transit will offer the same service, according to BART's Web site.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District declared today a "Spare the Air" day in an effort to limit pollution on a day in which it expects hot conditions with little wind - prime factors for unhealthy air.

## **1st Spare the Air Day means free rides on most transit**

Steve Rubenstein, staff writer

S.F. Chronicle, Wednesday, August 29, 2007

The weather will be hot today and the air will be bad, but most public transit rides will be free.

It's Spare the Air Day, the first one of the season.

Most transit systems will offer free rides all day to get commuters out of cars and reduce ozone pollution. But BART, ferry, Caltrain and ACE train passengers will have to pay after 1 p.m.

"We are asking Bay Area residents to take action to protect air quality," said Jack Broadbent, executive officer of the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, which is sponsoring the free rides by reimbursing transit systems.

The district predicted unhealthy air quality in East Bay valleys today and authorized the free rides, after weather forecasters declared that inland temperatures could hit triple digits. Morgan Hill, Livermore and Concord are among the local hot spots where the thermometer could reach 105.

Livermore beat the rest of the Bay Area to the punch Tuesday, hitting 100 degrees.

"It looks like a warming trend is taking shape," said Chris Brenchley of the National Weather Service. "The next three days will see the warmest weather in the Bay Area in the past several weeks."

Coastal areas will be cooler, with a few wisps of morning fog hampering the sun's plans to get into the swing of August. San Francisco's temperatures are expected to top out in the 70s.

The free rides, offered on 28 transit systems, are expected to cost the air quality district about \$2.2 million. Money is available to provide free rides on three more Spare the Air days, district spokeswoman Karen Schkolnick said.

The freebies end at 1 p.m. on some systems to cut down on afternoon joyriders who clog ferries and trains, preventing regular homeward-bound commuters from getting seats, Schkolnick said.

On past Spare the Air days, some regular ferry patrons complained that they had been turned away at the dock because boats were already full of passengers attracted by the free rides. Train commuters moped that all the seats were taken by freeloaders. On past free days, ridership increased by about 25,000 on BART alone. Motorists are being asked to curtail driving throughout the Bay Area, not just in the East Bay, as the wind does not respect county lines.

"Pollution goes everywhere," Schkolnick said. "We're asking everyone to make good air choices."

State electricity monitors also urged Californians to conserve energy and reduce air conditioner use during the late afternoon peak hours.

The California Independent System Operator declared "Flex Alert" days for today and Thursday. A spokesman said no shortages were expected but asked Californians to shift energy use to off-peak hours anyway.

## **Berkeley's Pacific Steel foundry emitting toxic metals, group says**

Carolyn Jones, staff writer

S.F. Chronicle, Wednesday, August 29, 2007

A Berkeley steel plant continues to spew toxic levels of manganese, nickel and other metals over residential areas of West Berkeley despite the company's recent steps to reduce emissions, a community group said Tuesday.

The Berkeley Community Monitoring Team, using a \$25,000 grant from the regional air district, based its conclusions on 22 air samples taken from 12 sites within one-third of a mile of the steel foundry.

Pacific Steel Casting, the nation's third-largest steel foundry and a fixture in West Berkeley for 75 years, agreed earlier this year to install filters on its smokestacks, remove plastic from its scrap supply and take other steps to reduce emissions as part of a settlement of lawsuits filed by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District and an Oakland environmental group.

Pacific Steel has reported what chemicals and metals are released in its manufacturing process, but the community's test is the first look at what residents are inhaling, the group said.

According to the group's data, which span a period of three months, Pacific Steel emitted levels of manganese and nickel more than 10 times higher than what is deemed safe by the World Health Organization. Local and state regulatory agencies do not regulate emission of the metals.

Pacific Steel released almost 700 pounds of manganese and 56 pounds of nickel in 2005, according to figures the foundry gave the air district.

Manganese, a metal found in trace amounts in drinking water and many foods, is safe in small amounts. But high levels of manganese can cause slow and clumsy body movements, poor balance, respiratory problems and sexual dysfunction. High levels of nickel can cause chronic bronchitis and lung problems.

A Pacific Steel spokeswoman said the community group's data is inconclusive and misleading because it's impossible to isolate the steel plant's emissions from other pollution sources in the neighborhood, such as

Interstate 80, an asphalt factory and other nearby industries. Pacific Steel is at 1421 Second St., near Gilman Street.

"It's very difficult to point the finger solely at Pacific Steel," company spokeswoman Elisabeth Jewel said.

Pacific Steel is working hard to comply with air district pollution standards, she said. The company recently installed a new filter on the smokestack at Plant No. 1, started using a less toxic binder for mixing the steel, and added a new hood on the furnace at Plant No. 3.

## **Pollution becoming Olympic-sized concern**

By STEPHEN WADE , AP Sports Writer

Modesto Bee, Tuesday, August 28, 2007

OSAKA, Japan - Athletes will have a tricky choice next year if Beijing's polluted air doesn't improve in time for the Olympics: stay away as long as possible, or come in early and get used to it.

"We know how to train for heat and humidity, but not a lot of research has been done on running in the polluted atmosphere we think we'll find in Beijing," Kyle O'Brien, an American marathoner who ran at the track and field world championship in Osaka, said Tuesday.

Therein, lies the problem.

Air pollution levels in China's capital are nearly five times higher than the World Health Organization's recommended safety level. A mix of major pollutants such as ozone, nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter are common. Sulfate and carbon also float regularly in the air.

It's not that officials haven't noticed.

China is spending billions to close dirty factories and build new subways, and in an experiment for the Olympics, the city earlier this month pulled 1 million private vehicles a day off the streets. The congestion eased, but a gray haze remained.

Sounding an alarm recently, International Olympic Committee president Jacques Rogge warned that choking smog might force some endurance events to be postponed.

During this week's world championships in Japan, the stifling heat regularly has hit the mid-90s with humidity in the 60 to 70 percent range.

Add the mix of pollutants Beijing might offer, and athletes, particularly those in the endurance events, foresee problems.

Like O'Brien, teammate Mike Morgan ran Saturday in Osaka, and he, too, was about 10 minutes off his personal best.

"The heat and humidity knock you out, and you have to adjust for it," he said. "I assume pollution will have more of the same effect, and Beijing is going to be a different story with the city surrounded by pollution."

Some research suggests training at altitude might offer an edge, building endurance which might help counteract the effects of pollution.

Perhaps, but others are concerned the dirty air might cost them a legitimate shot at a medal.

"It is difficult for a distance runner to compete there," said Tirunesh Dibaba, who won her second straight 10,000-meter world title in Osaka. "It could possibly affect me. I might even consider running just one event because of the pollution."

How to train for Beijing certainly will get more discussion in the coming months. For now, it's mostly speculation or guesswork.

Some teams have promised to stay away until the last moment. The most prominent so far is Australia, which is planning to send a medical staff of 80 to deal with heat, humidity and pollution, about one for every six athletes.

"It will be hot and humid and the pollution is high," said Dr. Juan Manuel Alonso, chairman of the IAAF medical and anti-doping commission. "It wouldn't be good to compete in that, but I'm confident the air quality will be fine."

Obviously, endurance athletes take in more air and feel the most threatened, but even sprinters are worried.

David Gillick, the Irish 400-meter record holder, said he'd stay away as long as possible at a camp Ireland plans to set up in Japan.

"There's no scientific proof if you go in and spend two weeks there it will be beneficial," he said. "Or maybe it will work against us. Will we get sick? Will we just keel over with it? I think a lot of people are going to be stuck between a rock and a hard place. It's not going to be ideal, but what do you do?"

"I'd like to stay away," Gillick added. "Just come in two days beforehand and go for it. We're in sprint events. I think it's a different story for endurance athletes."

Masaaki Sugita, an exercise physiologist with Japan's athletics governing body, was in Beijing earlier this month. He said on some days the air was better than expected, but smog and haze still blanketed the city. At one test event he said he saw archers wearing masks.

If there is a solution, Sugita suggests it rests with China.

"The best thing would be for Beijing to make a big, big effort to clean up the air for next year," he said. "We certainly hope for this."

[Tri-Valley Herald, Commentary, Tuesday, August 28, 2007](#)

## **Remade in Germany**

AMERICA needs an Axel Friedrich.

Friedrich, a top German environmental regulator, got tired of hearing automakers promise to cut vehicle emissions as soon as the technology to build hydrogen-powered cars comes along in, oh, 20 or 30 years. So, as recounted recently in the Wall Street Journal, he hired a bunch of engineers to take a Volkswagen Golf and make it more environmentally friendly using existing technology, without compromising safety or horsepower. They managed to cut emissions by 25 percent - much to the chagrin of Volkswagen, which now faces uncomfortable questions about why it hasn't bothered to make the same simple fixes.

If Friedrich's engineers could do that with a Golf, which is already much greener and more fuel-efficient than most American cars, think what they could do with our domestic behemoths.

Detroit likes to claim that making cars more efficient is too costly, requires changes that consumers won't accept or would compromise safety, or that the technology isn't here yet. Bull-dungen, as Friedrich might say. His re-engineered Golf got dramatically better mileage with simple changes in parts.

In Germany, automotive fleets are required to achieve an emissions level that's the U.S. equivalent of a 40-mpg fuel economy standard. Now that's Fahrvergnugen.

Los Angeles Times, Editorial

[Bakersfield Californian, Commentary, Wednesday, August 29, 2007:](#)

## **Henry column: Not in our front yard! Kern regulators wake up**

BY LOIS HENRY, Californian columnist

The ground beneath the Rosedale refinery is shifting. And I'm not just talking about the toxic soup pooling dangerously close to drinking supplies.

There's a new sheriff in town, so to speak, and pollution is Public Enemy No. 1.

That's too bad for refinery owner Big West of California, now seeking to expand.

While state regulators, in a kind of Rip Van Winkle haze, have (until recently) all but ignored millions of gallons of MTBE, benzene, gasoline and diesel spilled or leaked at the refinery, Kern County regulators are now wide awake.

Kern County planners are reviewing Big West's environmental study on its expansion and have become keenly interested in *The Californian's* recent revelations of past spills and lackadaisical cleanup and enforcement efforts, said Planning Department head Ted James. That includes the unfinished efforts of previous owner Shell Oil.

Meanwhile, the most recently discovered toxic leak continues to flow and no one knows where it's coming from or when it will stop, according to Matt Constantine, director of Kern's Environmental Health Department.

Thirty-five feet of crude oil (Big West says it was oil dating from the 1980s) was floating on top of the groundwater when it was caught by monitoring wells in June, Constantine said, a tinge of outrage in his voice.

"And they continue to pull significant amounts" from the same area, he said.

The leak is under the state Regional Water Quality Control board's jurisdiction. But when Constantine learned of it, he got the California Environmental Protection Agency, Big West and the water board on the phone and demanded answers. He says he's going to stay in the loop.

Add to that airborne chemical releases, including 3,700 pounds of potentially lethal hydrogen sulfide last October, and Constantine has real concerns. He did say Big West has been responsive to the county.

But the refinery has had "significant environmental failures," and the question of whether it can ensure safe operations for future expansions is up in the air.

"I am unsure we're able to say 'yes' based on their practices previously," he said.

That does not bode well for Big West's expansion hopes.

It does bode well for Kern County.

In years past, local regulators, chiefly Environmental Health, shuffled their feet and looked the other way as companies illegally turned Kern into their own private dumping ground.

Since Constantine has taken over, Environmental Health has jumped on a number of high-profile polluters.

- At the beginning of this year, the department ordered EnviroCycle Inc. to stop taking piles of contaminated soil and oily liquids and clean up its property near McKittrick.
- Hondo Chemical, stockpiling fly ash and petroleum contaminated soils and oily liquids over or near the Kern Water Bank, was ordered to clean up its property in May or face fines. To date, it owes the county \$12,000 in fines and has complied to a degree, Constantine said.
- Composting facility Community Recycling near Lamont earlier this month was told to clean up farmland layered with trash-filled compost.

In each of these cases, Constantine noted, the trash, tainted dirt and toxic liquids, almost exclusively came from outside Kern County.

"Talk about NIMBY," he scoffed. "This is my *front yard*. And I'm not going to stand for this."

Refreshing words to a community beleaguered by a reputation as the state's outhouse. But what happens when the offender is one of our own, the oil industry, a major part of Kern's economy?

"So what?" he said.

The rules are the same and large corporations have an even greater responsibility to lead by example, he said.

"And they haven't been."

No kidding.

Here's hoping the county keeps up the pressure. It's only our health we're talking about here.

[Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Wednesday, August 29, 2007:](#)

### **Take child's asthma seriously**

Arvin reportedly has the most polluted air in the nation. Arvin's pollution is produced elsewhere and the prevailing winds blow it onto Arvin, where it gets trapped by the mountains. The American Lung Association refers to this as "secondhand smog."

The EPA reports that Arvin's level of ozone, the primary component in smog, exceeded the EPA's acceptable level an average of 73 days per year between 2004 and 2006, which is the worst level in the nation.

In Kern County, 17.5 percent of children under 18 suffer from asthma, according to the California Department of Health Services, a rate that far exceeds national and state averages. Many studies have found that children who breathe polluted air are more likely to develop asthma.

School is now open and the results of the 2007 American Lung Association's Back to School with Asthma Campaign poll of parents of children with asthma revealed that they are not taking the basic steps to manage their child's asthma at school.

Less than one-third of those parents surveyed make sure their children are under medical supervision or talk to school administrators about their child's asthma. Asthma is the leading cause of school absenteeism due to chronic conditions and the leading cause of hospitalizations in children under 15.

Parents need to make sure their child's asthma is under control so it doesn't worsen once they get back to school. Every child with asthma should have a written Asthma Action Plan. The American Lung Association provides Asthma Action Plan forms and details at 800.LUNG.USA or at [www.lungusa.org](http://www.lungusa.org) <<http://www.lungusa.org>>.

-- RICHARD FALLON, American Lung Association, Bakersfield