

## **Air district finalizes plan to meet federal standard**

BY STACEY SHEPARD, Californian staff writer  
Bakersfield Californian, Friday, March 9, 2007

With a few minor adjustments, a formal plan to reach federal clean air standards for smog was finalized by valley air regulators Thursday.

The plan still calls for extending the deadline for attainment from 2013 to 2023, which has drawn strong criticism from air quality advocates.

However, air regulators have insisted it's impossible to clean the air by 2013. To meet the federal standard, the valley must reduce smog-causing emissions by 75 percent.

"This is the most expeditious way to attainment that anyone has been able to identify," said Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, which came up with the plan.

Sadredin said the San Joaquin Valley is not alone in requesting more time to meet the standard. Of the 15 air districts in California that are required to develop a plan for reducing smog, 11 will request an extension to the deadline, he said. The deadline is set by the federal government.

Implementing the valley's plan is expected to cost as much as \$23 billion over the next 15 years, Sadredin said. Businesses and industry will bear the brunt of those costs, spending about \$20 billion in pollution control upgrades and further efforts to reduce emissions. Regulators plan to tackle the biggest source of polluting emissions -- trucks and cars -- with the other \$3 billion, which the district hopes to obtain from state and federal sources.

The money would be used primarily to encourage trucking companies and consumers to buy newer, cleaner vehicles.

The only major change in the final plan released Thursday calls for an increase in the number of older, polluting cars regulators hope to take off the road by offering owners a monetary incentive of \$5,000. The number has bumped from 6,000 to 30,000.

Other minor changes would require 10 percent of new homes to have solar-powered water heaters and would require a glass plant to implement better pollution controls sooner. But even those additional controls won't create enough reductions to meet the deadline any sooner, Sadredin said.

The new measures were taken from an alternative plan proposed by a research group in the Los Angeles area, which last month released a report saying the valley could reach clean air standards by 2013. The district has disputed the idea of reaching attainment sooner than 2023, but said Thursday some of the suggestions in the group's plan were "viable."

The state Air Resources Board must approve the plan by June 15. It will then be forwarded on for approval by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

## **Where there's smoke, there's up to \$5,000**

from the Associated Press

Modesto Bee, Bakersfield Californian, Contra Costa Times and San Francisco Chronicle, Friday, March 9, 2007

FRESNO — Regional air officials who want to get 30,000 smog-belching clunkers off the road said Thursday that they want to offer owners up to \$5,000 each to buy a newer, cleaner car.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District said the effort would help clean the region's air, which ranks among the nation's dirtiest, but still won't meet a 2013 federal deadline.

Still, it's an ambitious proposal, contingent on passage by the district's board and funding, that would retire older cars bought by the district, said Seyed Sadredin, the group's executive director.

The district proposes to identify the worst polluters through state smog-testing records. Owners would be approached and offered \$5,000 apiece to sell their cars.

The district will destroy the vehicles it purchases. If all 30,000 are taken off the road, two tons of pollution would be eliminated each day.

"But it is contingent on getting funding for the program," Sadredin said.

The regional air district is under federal pressure to reduce 75 percent of nitrogen oxides, a smog-causing gas that comes mostly from cars. The panel has said it is impossible to reach the 2013 deadline set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and is expected to request an 11-year extension.

Community activists said valley residents have breathed corrosive air long enough.

Ozone, the main ingredient in smog, triggers lung diseases, such as asthma. Ozone pollution also has been associated with early death.

"People are going to be breathing dirty air and suffering for years longer," said Liza Bolanos, coordinator of the Fresno-based Central Valley Air Quality Coalition. "I don't think they have made their case for this delay."

A public hearing on the smog cleanup plan was scheduled for April 30 at the district headquarters in Fresno.

## **Officials revoke nuke test permit**

### **Air District didn't know simulated blasts would use depleted uranium**

from the Associated Press

in the Modesto Bee, Friday, March 9, 2007

TRACY — San Joaquin Valley air officials rescinded their decision to allow the federal government to test its nuclear weapons arsenal in the Altamont Hills after they learned the bombs would have radioactive material.

The San Joaquin Air Pollution Control District initially granted a permit to the Lawrence Livermore Laboratory to test the 350-pound bombs on Site 300, a 7,000-acre property owned by the lab off Interstate 580 near Tracy. But air officials changed course when they learned the tests would involve depleted uranium.

"They did not tell us they had radioactive emissions (in the explosives)," agency Executive Director Seyed Sadredin told the San Francisco Chronicle. "I'm not saying they tried to hide it. They did not think it (the radioactivity) was significant."

Sadredin said the agency found out about the radioactivity after residents brought it to his attention.

Lawrence Livermore lab spokesman David Schwoegler defended lab officials' decision not to mention the use of depleted uranium in the original permit application.

"Generally, depleted uranium is not considered radioactive because its radioactivity level is so low as to be equal to or below background level," he said. "It is in the ballast of every sailboat and jetliner in commercial use."

Schwoegler said lab officials have not decided how to respond to the agency's decision, which was made public Wednesday.

The planned tests, which were to be conducted over the next 18 months, would have simulated full-scale nuclear weapons blasts.

Because the United States halted testing of real nuclear bombs in 1992, officials have used depleted uranium to determine how well the nuclear weapons are holding up with age.

"If these huge explosions had been allowed to go forward, the hills, nearby waterways, the workers and the surrounding community would have all been put at risk," Loulena Miles, staff attorney for Tri-Valley Communities Against a Radioactive Environment, said in a statement praising the agency's decision.

## **National home builders lag when it comes to going green**

### **Higher costs for buyers, materials shortages notes**

By Vinne Tong - The Associated Press  
in the Modesto Bee, Friday, March 9, 2007

NEW YORK — Green building as a cause has united disparate parties from environmental groups to big business to policy-makers, but one key industry has struggled to react to the change in public sentiment.

The major home builders, who account for 80 percent of all home building activity in the nation, face a unique challenge in implementing green building on a widespread scale. Many have added energy-saving features and experimented with environmentally friendly materials but have not yet been able to sign on a critical mass of buyers willing to pay more for them.

The National Association of Home Builders and McGraw-Hill Construction predict a rise in green building to 10 percent of homes by 2010 from 2 percent today, but experts say the large-scale residential builders have been slower to respond because of the extra costs and availability of materials.

"The residential market as I see it is the last one to take off," said Mary Ann Lazarus, sustainable design director of architectural firm HOK.

Home builders are crucial to reducing greenhouse gas emissions believed to cause global warming, according to Ed Mazria, founder of environmental activist group Architecture 2030. He estimates that buildings — their construction and operation — contribute 48 percent of overall emissions while transportation adds 27 percent and industrial activity 25 percent.

Certainly, there has been frustration among some of the largest home builders about finding the right cost formula. Estimates vary widely for how much green building can add to the final price, with the lower estimates at 3 percent to 5 percent versus higher predictions of 10 percent to 15 percent.

Ara Hovnanian, head of one of the nation's biggest home builders, said that all other things being equal, consumers would choose green. But, he said, all is not equal.

"Consumers have not been willing to make the investment," said the chief executive officer and president of Hovnanian Enterprises Inc.

### **All-green venture frustrating**

Hovnanian was one of 10 home builders that developed an all-green community called Terramor in Orange County, south of Los Angeles.

He said the results of that venture were frustrating; consumers were unwilling to pay extra for green features such as solar panels to generate electricity.

"The disappointing thing is we were all hoping consumers would embrace it and at least be willing to pay a substantial part of the premium," he said. "I can't say we were overwhelmed by the results financially."

Recouping that premium is more of a problem for developers who build properties for sale, as opposed to those who can benefit later from lower electricity bills or being able to charge higher rents. Investing in green features ultimately benefits the home buyer, so if the consumer is unwilling to pay more, the cost-benefit formula makes no sense, in Hovnanian's view.

Bill Valentine, chairman of architecture firm HOK, said the main goal for architects who support green building is to get sustainability into the common man's budget.

"The real action is in suburbia, in reconstructing suburbia," he said.

Mazria of Architecture 2030 and others say that's about to happen.

"I think we're just seeing the beginning of a total transformation of the building sector," Mazria said.

Mazria said a number of different parties are working on proposals to extend the tax benefits in the Energy Policy Act of 2005 that could encourage growth in green building. He said two New Mexico Democrats, Rep. Tom Udall and Sen. Jeff Bingaman, are working on one version that could extend the act to 2013, and in some cases double the level of tax credits allowed for energy-saving measures such as using solar or photovoltaic panels.

"It is a very small price to pay for mitigating the potential impact of climate change," Mazria said.

### **Shift started in hybrid cars**

To date, 11 federal agencies, 17 states and 53 municipalities require buildings to meet either local green standards or those set by the U.S. Green Building Council, a nonprofit group.

Among the early adopters are two smaller home builders, Los Angeles-based Pardee Homes and Florida-based WCI Communities Inc.

While they are much smaller than home builders such as Hovnanian, KB Home and others, they also build mainly where consumers have been more receptive to green building practices.

Pardee's marketing vice president, Joyce Mason, said one-third of about 10,000 homes it has built since 2001 are in its Living Smart line of homes, which come with carpet made from recycled soda bottles and wood from managed forests. She said consumers always had appreciated the green features, but buyers have started specifically asking for them in recent months.

"We saw it first happen in hybrid cars," Mason said. "I think it's probably going to shift over to houses."

Karen Childress, environmental stewardship manager for WCI, said it first built a green home prototype in 2001 to explore energy efficiency and has experimented with a growing list of features since then. Its latest project is working with the Florida Solar Energy Center to design a home that generates enough of its own energy to be self-sustaining — the holy grail of green building.

Researchers are developing energy-saving methods to move toward that ideal.

James Sweeney, director of the Precourt Institute on Energy Efficiency at Stanford University, is organizing a research effort to develop strategies that could be used in the home, such as ways to encourage consumers to use less energy at peak times and building-design changes. The research ultimately will include ways of encouraging changes in behavior that will save energy, said Sweeney.

"There may be no silver bullet, but there may be some silver buckshot," he said.

## **U.S. accused of silencing experts on polar bears, climate change**

### **Scientists told not to speak officially at conferences**

Jane Kay, Chronicle Environment Writer

S.F. Chronicle, Friday, March 9, 2007

The federal agency responsible for protecting Arctic polar bears has barred two Alaska scientists from speaking about polar bears, climate change or sea ice at international meetings in the next few weeks, a move that environmentalists say is censorship.

The rule was issued last month by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service but was made public this week. The federal government has proposed listing the polar bear as a threatened species, and the wildlife agency is receiving public comment on the proposal.

"It's a gag order," said Deborah Williams, a former high-level Interior Department official in Anchorage, Alaska, who received documents on Wednesday from Alaska scientists who chose to remain unnamed. The documents make the subjects of polar bears, climate change and sea ice off limits to all scientists who haven't been cleared to speak on the topics.

Two of the memos are copies of those prepared for Craig Perham and Janet E. Hohn, who are traveling to Russia and Norway this month and in April. The scientists "will not be speaking on or responding to these issues" of climate change, polar bears and sea ice, the memos say. Before any trip, such a memo must be sent to the administrator of the Fish and Wildlife Service in Washington.

According to the memos, agency scientists must obtain a memorandum designating which official, if any, is allowed to respond to questions, particularly about polar bears, and include "a statement of assurance that these individuals understand the Administration's position on these issues."

Tina Kreisher, communications director of the Interior Department, which oversees the wildlife agency, said in an interview Thursday that the government isn't trying to prevent scientists from talking about their findings -- but doesn't want them to make policy statements.

At a news conference, Fish and Wildlife Director H. Dale Hall denied that the memos were a form of censorship. He described the content of the documents as part of a policy to establish an agenda and the appropriate spokesperson for international meetings.

Considering the high-profile nature of climate change and the issues that might come up, it was prudent to know ahead of time what everyone was going to discuss, he said.

"We are not gagging scientists," said Hall. They can speak with other scientists at international gatherings in conversations or at dinner but may not speak for the United States government in a formal setting, he said. The agency would frown on their going to news conferences in a host country, he added.

When asked for the administration's position with which the Alaska scientists would have to be familiar, Hall said, "The Earth is warming, and we have to understand how to deal with that and to slow down greenhouse gases and manage the changes that will occur."

The agency has taken steps to evaluate whether the polar bear should be listed and has significant questions about scientific studies, including those dealing with when sea ice will melt and the effects on the bear, he said.

Environmentalists who petitioned for the new protections for polar bears hope that a listing would force mandatory limits to greenhouse gases. At present, the administration prefers voluntary programs to cut emissions and has taken the position that carbon dioxide, the predominant greenhouse gas, can't be regulated as a pollutant under the Clean Air Act.

Kieran Suckling, policy director of the Center for Biological Diversity, one of the groups that submitted the petition to list the polar bear, said muzzling of scientists at international meetings isn't appropriate.

"That type of memo might be appropriate for the State Department and purely political issues," he said. "What we're dealing with here is science. How many polar bears are there? Why are they going extinct? What is the cause of the ice melting? It's completely inappropriate to ban scientists from talking about science."

Williams, an attorney who received the documents about rules for scientists' speech, was special assistant to the secretary of the Interior under the Clinton administration for six years. She now heads an environmental consulting firm, Alaska Conservation Solutions.

"I worked very closely with Fish and Wildlife and other Interior agencies, and a memo like this is truly inconceivable," she said. "This is an issue of international significance, and you want your professional public servants to be able to discuss these issues. It is unconscionable to gag them."

The Bush administration has been under fire for several years for allegedly trying to curb the speech of government scientists who produce studies that contradict the administration's positions, particularly on global warming.

Scientists in the Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Geological Survey and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration have been chastised for speaking to reporters, and some have been asked to submit papers and lectures to high-level managers for review. Political appointees at NASA have turned down journalists' requests for interviews with scientists, and the Minerals Management Service has allowed journalists to interview scientists, including on polar bear observations, only if the agency could record them.

The agencies challenged scientists over studies revealing negative effects of oil development on the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and the drownings of polar bears possibly associated with shrinking sea ice.

The beloved furry Arctic animal has become a symbol for the dire effects of a warming world. Four dead polar bears floating in Arctic Ocean waters, which may be attributed to the long swim from the diminishing sea ice to land, were shown by former Vice President Al Gore in his documentary, "An Inconvenient Truth."

### **City eyes ban on blowers**

Island's Climate Protection Task Force to also consider prohibiting polystyrene products

By Alan Lopez, Staff Writer

Contra Costa Times, Friday, March 9, 2007

Ask Alamedan Pat Colburn about what she thinks of leaf blowers and prepare to get an earful.

"There's absolutely no reason to have these abominations," she said. "None whatsoever."

Others may disagree, but the city is on its way to seeing whether gas-powered leaf blowers can be banned.

City Councilman Frank Matarrese recently referred the issue to the city's Climate Protection Task Force for a study and possible recommendation.

The action came soon after Mayor Beverly Johnson referred a possible city ban on polystyrene foam to the same group.

(Though commonly known as Styrofoam, that's technically a different product used mainly in craft and building products.)

The potential foam study comes less than a year after neighbor Oakland voted to ban restaurants and other food vendors from using the product.

The ban, which went into effect on Jan. 1, was opposed by the California Restaurant Association.

Johnson said she discussed the ordinance with Oakland Councilwoman Jean Quan and was heartened to hear that most Oakland fast food restaurants are apparently in compliance.

"That's a significant amount of garbage; just those types of restaurants," Johnson said.

The ordinance is in effect in about 100 U.S. cities.

Matarrese said he supported the ban as well because the foam breaks up into resilient little pieces.

He called it a step in the right direction.

Leaf blowers using two-stroke engines that combine fuel and oil are also an environmental concern, he said.

"It pollutes more heavily than if you're using a broom or rake," he said.

About 20 California cities have ordinances banning leaf blowers, according to the Web site [www.nonoise.org](http://www.nonoise.org).

Colburn said she first made a presentation to the council about leaf blowers in August.

Besides the pollution emitted by the engines, she was also fed up with the noise and dust and various particulates she said are blown into the air.

"For people with asthma and allergies, it's of great concern," she said.

It's unknown how far either of the ordinances would go toward banning polystyrene or leaf blowers.

The Climate Protection task force is charged with making recommendations to the City Council about how Alameda can lower the amount of fossil fuels it generates. Matarrese said the bans could go toward helping to fulfill that goal.

The next meeting of the task force is scheduled for March 21.

## **Madison's cheeseheads no couch potatoes**

**Capital of the beer and brat state ranks No. 1 on magazine's list of the most walkable cities in the U.S.**

By Scott Bauer, Associated Press

Contra Costa Times, Friday, March 9, 2007

MADISON, Wis. - With the thermometer hovering at 22, and the wind ripping off a frozen Lake Mendota, Rink DaVee and his brother Jim decided to take a stroll.

And why not? After all, according to a recent top 10 list, there's no better place in the country for walking than the capital city of a state known more for cheese and beer than exercising.

"It makes you feel better," DaVee said during a break in his walk Wednesday, standing on the icy, snow-covered trail that extends out over the lake. "It gets you through a cold month of March."

Prevention magazine named Madison -- 1,300 miles north of sunny Miami -- as the most walkable of the country's 100 most populated cities. The list was commissioned by the American Podiatric Medical Association based on certain criteria and ran in editions of the magazine released this week.

Madison beat out the likes of Austin, Texas (No. 2), San Francisco (No. 3) and Miami, which barely cracked the list at No. 98.

Factors contributing to the ranking were [air quality](#), the percentage of people who walk to work, access to parks, number of athletic shoes sold and (believe it or not) weather.

Number of beaches versus frozen lakes apparently was not a factor. Crime rate, unfortunately for Miami, was.

Adopting a walker-friendly plan 10 years ago was a major plus for Madison, said Prevention deputy editor Karyn Repinski. That plan focused on maintaining and improving the city's walkability and requires that when roads are redeveloped they should accommodate not just cars but bikes and pedestrians, too.

But don't be fooled by all the signs of fitness around town. Madisonians also love their beer, bratwurst and Wisconsin cheese. The city of 250,000 plays host to a four-day extravaganza dubbed "the World's Largest Brat Fest," where nearly 200,000 brats are consumed during four days.

Madison was the only city in the walking top 10 that's not in the South or the West, a point of pride for residents such as Kathy Andrusz, coordinator of the Fit City initiative. Started in 2003 by Mayor Dave Cieslewicz, the program is a collaboration between city officials and more than 30 other groups to combat obesity and get people moving.

"We're definitely touting it," Andrusz said of the walking rating. "We're definitely proud of it and will be able to use it as a sense of pride, if nothing else."

Madison is no stranger to No. 1 rankings. People still talk about Money magazine naming it the best U.S. place to live in 1998, although that ranking dropped to 53rd last year. Outside magazine named it the best road biking city in August, and other high rankings have commended it for being vegetarian-friendly, gay-friendly, environmentally friendly, and, well, according to Midwest Living in 2003, the overall friendliest city in the Midwest.

Even with all that love going around, who wants to break out the walking shoes in the middle of winter? Especially this winter, with snow on the ground every day since Jan. 14, and an average high temperature in February of just 21.7 degrees and an average low of 7.2 degrees. It also snowed 22 inches last month.

"Winter weather is only a barrier if you let it be," Andrusz said. "It's a matter of attitude."

Repinski, the magazine editor who spoke from New York City, which ranked 39th, said only a cynic would let a little winter weather get in the way of walking.

"I walked a mile this morning and I was walking in an inch of snow," she said. "The conditions don't have to be perfect for walking, that's what's nice about it."

## **Magazine: Burlington, Vermont, is nation's most eco-friendly city**

Associated Press

Contra Costa Times, Thursday, March 8, 2007

BURLINGTON, Vt. - Burlington, Vermont, is listed as America's most eco-friendly place.

That comes from Country Home magazine, which ranked Burlington tops among 379 metropolitan areas in a survey of "Best Green Places". It rates cities based on [air](#) and watershed quality, mass transit use, power use and number of organic producers and farmers' markets. It puts Madison (Wisconsin) eighth.

The survey used data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the U.S. Department of Transportation, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Green Building Council.

Ithaca, New York, is listed second; followed by Corvallis, Oregon; Springfield, Massachusetts; and Wenatchee, Washington; Charlottesville, Virginia; and Boulder, Colorado.

After Madison, Binghamton, New York, and Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, round out the top ten.

[Letter to the L.A. Times, Friday, March 9, 2007:](#)

### **China protest**

Re "Asian air pollution affects our weather," March 6

There is one sure-fire answer to the increasing pollution that comes from China. The pollution from Chinese factories comes, in large part, from manufacturing the items that people buy in stores around the world every day. People can take a stand against this by refusing to buy products that are made in China.

*NIGEL WRIGHT, Santa Monica*

[Sacramento Bee, Editorial, Friday, March 9, 2007](#)

### **Editorial: Under darker clouds**

#### **Asia's smog strengthens California's storms**

Carbon dioxide, an invisible emission from cars and power plants, is getting the most attention when it comes to climate change, but pollutants the eye can see may be playing a bigger role than previously thought. A new and worrisome study by the National Academy of Sciences has found that the air pollution from Asia is altering storm patterns in the Pacific Ocean that head east toward California and the Pacific Northwest, making storms bigger and more dangerous.

Even worse, these warm storms, if they track toward Canada, could accelerate the melting of polar ice packs. Scary stuff.

The burning of Asian forests and the belching of Asian smokestacks are creating a massive plume of pollution that makes it to California in about two weeks, sometimes much faster. Along the way, the pollutants act as cloud-seeding agents for storms gathering in the Pacific. By reviewing satellite imagery of Pacific storm systems over the years, the researchers found an increase of as much as 50 percent in deep convective clouds, which can reach six miles into the sky and produce remarkable downpours and thunderstorms.

That Asia's industrial activities are having such a direct, dangerous effect on our weather is alarming and eye-opening. The world seems to be getting smaller as it is most definitely getting warmer. Climate change not only demands a response by the United States, the biggest emitter of greenhouse gases on the planet, but from every country. If only the United States could lead by example.

[Letter to the Editor, Contra Costa Times, Friday, March 9, 2007](#)

### **Third World outpost**

In a recent letter in the Times, a writer asks American "bigots" to tell her if immigrants, legal or illegal, are a burden to this society.

As stated in a column by Dan Walters, "Population overload" (Times, May 7, 2006), California's population has grown by more than 50 percent since 1980. The increase is because of unchecked illegal and legal immigration. Without the immigration, California would have almost zero population growth.

That growth lies at the root of virtually all of California's pressing public policy issues, including traffic congestion, land and water conflicts, [air pollution](#), public school performance, health care access, college crowding, and the state's chronic budget deficits.

America is no longer a "nation of immigrants." The last federal census revealed that 65 percent of us were born here. The beautiful Golden State is nothing but an outpost for the Third World. I would rather be called a "bigot" than "stuck on stupid."

*John Crowell, Hercules*

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses a new automobile battery concept which would end vehicle pollution. South Coast Air Quality Management District will be funding these prototypes. For more information, contact Maricela at (559) 230-5849.

### **Un nuevo concepto de baterías automotrices terminaría con la contaminación vehicular**

**La Oficina de Administración Distrital de Calidad del Aire del sur de California, en la zona más contaminada del país, accedió a financiar a las trasnacionales para probar prototipos de baterías dentro del plazo que exige la ley**

Noticiero Latino, California

Radio Bilingüe, Friday, March 9, 2007

Un nuevo concepto de baterías automotrices de mayor capacidad y más ligeras que las actuales terminaría en unos años y gradualmente con la contaminación vehicular, según opinión conjunta de las dos trasnacionales de autos más grandes en el mundo.

De acuerdo con las empresas General Motors y Toyota, que han presentado una demanda conjunta contra California por obligarlas a cumplir en un plazo con autos anticontaminantes, el diseño de nuevos modelos híbridos requiere solamente planear y producir ese tipo de batería, pero su diseño podría tomar varios años.

La Oficina de Administración Distrital de Calidad del Aire del sur de California, en la zona más contaminada del país, accedió a financiar a las trasnacionales para probar prototipos de baterías dentro del plazo que exige la ley.