

SEYED SADREDIN: Still much work ahead on air

A recent survey by the Public Policy Institute of California found that 64% of Valley residents believe that air quality today is worse than it was 10 years ago. The truth is that we have made significant progress in reducing air pollution. Air quality is much better today, but due to the Valley's pollution-retaining bowl shape and weather conditions, we still face enormous challenges.

Extensive air monitoring and scientific data show that air quality today is better than it was 10 years ago, 15 years ago or even 25 years ago. Since 1980, air pollution from manufacturing, industrial and commercial businesses in the Valley has been reduced by 80%.

Since 1980, total emissions -- even including cars and trucks -- have been reduced by approximately 60%, despite a tremendous growth in population. Exposure to high air-pollution concentrations has been reduced significantly throughout the Valley.

The PPIC poll, nonetheless, provides a valuable glimpse into Valley residents' attitudes and preferences about environmental and air-quality issues. For those charged with the responsibility to protect and promote public health, the reported public opinions on a couple of questions raise interesting public policy issues.

In particular, the public understanding of the current state of air quality in the Valley, and its views on the balance between economic and environmental concerns, warrant further debate and can be a guide in formulating effective future actions.

Does acknowledging past progress diminish or enhance our ability to compel the general public to do its part to clean the air, and to pressure the state and federal government to come through with their fair share of funding for the Valley? This is a real question for those of us who advocate for clean air in the Valley.

Honesty is always the best policy. Truthfully pointing to major progress in improving our air quality and acknowledging the sacrifice and investments made by Valley businesses and residents is essential to building the trust and confidence necessary to ask for more. It will be difficult to ask businesses to spend more if we cannot point to the fact that the billions of dollars they have already spent has resulted in real and significant improvements in air quality.

As for the balance between health and economy, 50% to 65% of the respondents in the poll support tougher regulations on agricultural and industrial operations, even if it increased business costs.

Valley businesses are already subject to some of the toughest air regulations in the nation, and the smog-causing emissions from these businesses have already been reduced by 80%. The regulations in the recent smog plan adopted by the Valley Air District will have an additional compliance cost of \$20 billion for businesses.

Knowing this, would Valley residents support additional measures, such as banning business activities on high smog days, if that resulted in the loss of businesses and jobs or higher costs on goods and services? The answer may hinge on the level of personal sacrifice that we might be willing to pay, and the economic and health cost of air pollution.

Effective solutions will require a complete understanding of the complex scientific, socioeconomic and technological issues that affect our air. We should resist poll-driven impulses and have a robust and well-informed dialogue on these questions.

There should be no debate, however, that there is still work to be done, and the Valley should speak with one voice in demanding that the state and federal government do their fair share for the Valley.

Seyed Sadredin is the executive director/air pollution control officer for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Crews gain upper hand on Tar fire

By Natalie Ragus

Hanford Sentinel, Tuesday, August 14, 2007 (pm edition)

Firefighters have gained control over the Tar fire southwest of Avenal, officials said today, and firefighters may be able to move out of the area as early as Wednesday.

The fire -- which has burned more than 5,600 acres -- is 75 percent contained, said Calfire spokesman David Brooks.

The blaze first broke out just after 5:30 p.m. Friday about nine miles southwest of Avenal in Diablo Canyon. It later spread south and west to Tar Canyon.

Brooks said investigators are still trying to determine exactly what caused the fire.

So far, no homes have burned, said Brooks.

On Monday, firefighters cleared brush in order to keep the fire away from a power grid which provides power to homes and businesses throughout the Central Valley.

As of today, the grid is no longer threatened, Brooks said.

As well, fire officials said concerns regarding naturally-occurring asbestos have abated, but firefighters must still have the proper equipment in order to fight the section of the blaze near the asbestos.

A total of 1,340 personnel from around the state are fighting the fire, said Brooks. One broke a wrist, and two others suffered from heat-related illness.

All are expected to make a full recovery.

Meanwhile, the Valley Air District released an air quality alert today.

In addition to the Tar Canyon fire, the Zaca fire in Santa Barbara is also affecting air quality in the Central Valley, the district said, due to various particles the fires release into the air.

"These fires are producing large amounts of smoke, which is resulting in elevated particulate readings," said Shawn Ferreria, a meteorologist for the district, in the statement. "If you smell smoke, you are likely breathing it."

The fires are expected to affect Kings, Tulare, Fresno, Madera and Merced counties.

People with heart or lung diseases should follow their doctors' advice for dealing with episodes of unhealthy air quality, and older adults and children should avoid prolonged exposure, strenuous activities, or heavy exertion, air district officials said.

It's getting hard to breathe in Visalia

By Jed Chernabaeff, Staff writer

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Wednesday, August 15, 2007

Smoke from two California wildland fires has prompted air district officials to issue a health warning in Tulare County.

Hovering over the Valley is smoke from the Zaca fire in Santa Barbara County and the Tar Canyon fire along the border of Fresno and Kings counties. Today's air-quality forecast for Tulare County: "unhealthful for sensitive groups."

The health warning - directed at those with lung or heart disease, among others - will remain in effect indefinitely.

Smoke from the fires also is expected to affect Fresno, Madera, Merced, Kings and Kern counties, though air quality there remains in the good to moderate range. Stanislaus and San Joaquin counties also may be affected, depending on wind patterns, said Brenda Turner, a spokeswoman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

CAL FIRE reported that the Tar Canyon fire nine miles southwest of Avenal had covered about 5,600 acres and was 75 percent contained.

The area contains rock containing naturally occurring asbestos, said CAL FIRE. As a result, firefighters were using precautionary measures and aircraft were providing much of the fire control.

The Zaca fire had burned about 101,472 acres as of Tuesday, according to InciWeb, which reports wildland fire and incident information.

Exposure to particle pollution can cause serious health problems, aggravate lung disease, cause asthma attacks and acute bronchitis and increase risk of respiratory infections.

People with heart or lung diseases should follow their doctors' advice for dealing with episodes of unhealthful air quality. Additionally, older adults and children should avoid prolonged exposure, strenuous activities or heavy exertion, officials say.

Ash, smoke may affect health

Locals believe fire fallout to blame for respiratory ills

BY FELIX DOLIGOSA JR. AND EMILY HAGEDORN, Californian staff writers
Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, August 15, 2007

Betty Brown's grandson coughed all night long Monday in their Rosedale home.

He hasn't coughed like that all summer, until recently when ash from California fires fell on their home, the grandmother said.

"It can't be good," Brown said about the blazes' effects on local air. "You can smell fire and smoke out there."

Rosedale residents are getting sick and many are blaming it on the ash falling from fires in Santa Barbara and Fresno counties.

On Tuesday, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issued a health warning for Fresno, Madera, Merced, Kings, Tulare and the valley portion of Kern counties, with the potential to affect Stanislaus and San Joaquin counties, depending on wind patterns, according to a release from the district.

The district's air monitoring stations in Bakersfield recorded elevated particulate matter levels Tuesday morning, and Kern residents have reported ash falling from the sky, the release says.

"These fires are producing large amounts of smoke, which is resulting in elevated particulate readings," district meteorologist Shawn Ferreria said in the release. "If you smell smoke, you are likely breathing it."

Exposure to the smoke and ash can aggravate lung disease, increase the risk of respiratory infections and prompt asthma attacks and acute bronchitis.

People with heart and lung diseases should follow their doctors' advice for dealing with bad air quality. Older adults and children should avoid prolonged exposure, strenuous activities or heavy exertion, as conditions warrant, the release says.

Scott Houchin has seen the ashes whenever he goes to his construction job out in the fields.

"You can see it floating like whiteflies," Houchin said.

Houchin said his roommate has gotten sick lately and he questions if the ash is the cause.

"This isn't flu season," he said. "It makes you think."

Brown said she noticed a little bit of ash falling Monday but much more Tuesday morning. A fine layer of white ash was on her car, patio table and barbecue pit, she said. Brown lives off Rosedale Highway, between Jenkins and Renfro roads.

She is not 100 percent certain that the ash is tied to her grandson's coughing since he has asthma.

Jackie Moreland, a bartender at Vi's Cocktails in Rosedale, said her 58-year-old father has been congested all week.

"I didn't think much of it until I kept seeing ash on my car," Moreland said. "The sky has been dark and ugly."

For more information, go to www.valleyair.org or call the district's Bakersfield office at 326-6900.

Zaca fire facts

Acres burned: 101,472

Percent contained: 44

Expected containment: Sept. 7

People injured: 25

Structures threatened: 595

Destroyed: 1 outbuilding

People fighting blaze: 2,783

Equipment: 95 engines, eight air tankers, 21 helicopters

Suppression costs: \$69.2 million

Information: www.sbcfire.com or www.fs.fed.us/r5/lospadres/

Sources: Los Padres National Forest and Santa Barbara County Fire Department

Fires may be affecting residents' health

The Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, August 15, 2007

While the air quality forecast for today is "moderate," meaning acceptable, ash from fires in Santa Barbara and Fresno counties could be aggravating residents' health.

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Betty Brown of Rosedale said she noticed a little bit of ash falling Monday but more this morning. There was a fine layer of white ash on her car, patio table and barbecue pit, she said.

Brown lives off Rosedale Highway, between Jenkins and Renfro roads.

She said her grandson, who has asthma, coughed all night Monday night. She couldn't be 100 percent certain it was tied to the ash but said her grandson hasn't coughed like that all this summer.

"It can't be good," she said the blaze's effect on local air, "you can smell fire and smoke out there."

Blazes smoke, Valley chokes

Airborne particles from two fires are trapped over the San Joaquin basin.

By Tim Sheehan / The Fresno Bee

Wed., Aug. 15, 2007

AVENAL -- Summer weather patterns are pumping smoke from a pair of California wildfires into the southern San Joaquin Valley, providing the potential for sunsets that could literally be breathtaking.

The Valley's air quality is never the best in the hot summer months, but officials with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issued a health advisory Tuesday that smoke plumes from the Zaca fire in Santa Barbara County and the Tar fire near Avenal are having noticeable effects on the amount of fine particles in the atmosphere.

The Tar fire, burning since Friday in the Diablo Range at the convergence of Fresno, Kings and Monterey counties about nine miles southwest of Avenal, has consumed about 5,600 acres of dry grass and scrub brush. But it's the much larger -- and more distant -- Zaca fire that is most responsible for the haze that has enveloped the Valley over recent days.

As far north as Visalia, fine bits of ash could be found Tuesday afternoon.

At the Gill Ford dealership in Coalinga, service manager Mike Simpson said the Tar fire has been leaving its mark since Saturday.

"It looked like someone was standing up on the roof with 40 cigarettes and flicking the ashes. ... It was coming down just like it was snowing."

Brenda Turner, an air district spokeswoman in Bakersfield, said she saw ash from the Zaca fire on her car as she came out of her house to go to work Tuesday morning.

The Zaca fire has charred more than 101,000 acres since it started July 4 and was only 44% contained Tuesday. Its plume of smoke is plainly visible from Avenal's hills, about 100 miles away, as something resembling a towering thunderhead and casting a gray pall over the Valley.

Turner said that monitoring stations in Bakersfield were showing higher-than-normal levels of PM-10 -- shorthand for fine particles measuring 10 microns or less, or about one-seventh the diameter of a human hair, far smaller than the visible ash.

"It's a little bit above normal for what we'd see this time of year," Turner said. "It's nothing above the federal standard, and it's not causing a widespread problem where air quality is just bad."

But the levels were high enough Tuesday to warn people to be cautious with their outdoor activities, particularly people with heart disease or lung ailments.

Senior citizens and children who might be more sensitive to bad air are encouraged to avoid prolonged outdoor activity or strenuous exertion.

"If you smell smoke, then you are likely breathing it," said Shawn Ferreria, a meteorologist with the air district.

Although Valley residents appreciate the occasional cooling delta breezes that blow from the north, Ferreria said it's not unusual in the summer for winds to push into the Valley from Southern California.

A satellite photo taken Monday afternoon clearly shows a large plume of smoke flowing north from the Zaca fire to Visalia before dissipating into the omnipresent haze. The same photo shows a much smaller wisp of smoke emanating from the Tar fire and drifting northeast.

Add the heat that essentially places a lid on top of the Valley, and once the smoke gets in, there's no way for it to get out.

"If we didn't have the fires, we wouldn't have this smoke," Ferreria said.

The smoke's effects are already evident in Kern, Kings, Tulare, Fresno, Madera and Merced counties, and could ultimately affect Stanislaus and San Joaquin counties if weather patterns persist.

Because there's no way of knowing when the smoke may clear, officials said, the advisory is in effect indefinitely.

"One of the main things is to get control of the fires and get the emissions to cease," Ferreria said.

More than 1,300 firefighters are using bulldozers, shovels and helicopters to build a fire line around the Tar fire.

Matthew Watson, a Cal Fire Madera-Mariposa unit spokesman at the command center near Avenal High School, said crews had achieved 73% containment by Tuesday and hoped to have it completely encircled by this evening.

Complicating the weekend work was naturally occurring asbestos, found along the southern edge of the fire. That prompted fire commanders to stop using bulldozers that could disturb the soil and order crews to use protective breathing gear and wash down their clothes and equipment.

Watson said the asbestos was not a danger to downwind communities including Avenal and Coalinga because the fibers are too heavy to drift with the smoke.

At the bustling tent city in a park next to Avenal High, firefighters were briefed daily of the other hazards they faced on the fire lines -- rugged terrain, dehydration and wildlife including rattlesnakes, wild boars and mountain lions, said Tony Guzman, a spokesman from Cal Fire's Fresno unit.

Watson said commanders expected to begin sending some crews from other parts of the state home starting today. But there are no such expectations for the Zaca fire, where containment isn't likely until at least early September.

Ferreria said there may be hope this weekend for winds to stir up the atmosphere and create breezes that could clean up the air and shove the Zaca plume to the east, where it would stay south of the Tehachapi mountains.

Redwood City OKs Costco expansion

Neighbors protest decision, predicting increased noise, traffic

By Shaun Bishop, MEDIANEWS STAFF

Tri-Valley Herald, Wednesday, August 15, 2007

REDWOOD CITY — A contentious proposal for a new Costco warehouse and gas station in Redwood City got a final OK from the City Council late Monday night after more than five hours of discussion.

Ending a two-year debate over the proposal, the council unanimously denied a neighborhood group's appeal of previous decisions by the Planning Commission and zoning administrator that allowed the Costco project to proceed.

As a result, Costco effectively won approval to construct a new 160,000-square-foot store to replace the existing 121,000-square-foot one at 2300 Middlefield Road, add a 12-pump gas station to the rear of the property and re-orient its tire center to the side of the building closest to Middlefield Road.

The decision came despite protests from the Redwood

Village Neighborhood Association, which represents residents who live north of the retailer's site. For months, they have said consultants' studies predicting the impacts of the expansion on traffic, noise, pollution and other factors, were underestimating what the true results would be and how they would affect residents' quality of life.

In the end, the council had to rely on the hours of analysis by city staff and the numbers in the studies, which show the project will have manageable impacts on nearby roads and air quality, Mayor Barbara Pierce said.

The council added several items to a list of more than 70 conditions of approval, including city reviews at 12 months and 24 months to ensure the project's impacts were accurately described. Other conditions include a hot line for construction complaints and various noise mitigation measures.

NYC to Get \$354M for Traffic Toll Plan

By DEVLIN BARRETT and SARA KUGLER, Associated Press Writers

In the S.F. Chronicle, Contra Costa Times, Tuesday, August 14, 2007

NEW YORK, (AP) -- Mayor Michael Bloomberg was promised \$354 million in federal funds Tuesday to help launch his ambitious plan to reduce traffic and pollution by charging extra tolls for driving into the busiest parts of Manhattan.

The catch: He gets the money only if he can persuade the state Legislature to back the effort, called congestion pricing. New York's would be the first such toll program in the U.S., although similar programs already exist in London and Singapore.

Bloomberg has touted the toll plan to reduce gridlock and pollution, but federal support was jeopardized by weeks of haggling among New York state leaders, who finally struck a temporary compromise that at least allowed the city to apply for the money.

Nine cities were competing for a pot of money targeted toward innovative local traffic solutions. U.S. Transportation Secretary Mary Peters announced the funding Tuesday for New York along with San Francisco, Miami, Seattle and Minneapolis.

San Francisco is due to get \$158 million; Miami will receive \$62.9 million to build "hot lanes," in which drivers pay extra to bypass traffic; and Seattle gets \$138.7 million for a new floating bridge

connecting the city to suburbs. The grant requires state officials to levy a toll for the bridge, which is estimated to cost at least \$4 billion, Peters said.

Another \$133.3 million will go to Minneapolis, where divers are still trying to find the remains of four missing motorists from a catastrophic bridge collapse. Nine people are already confirmed dead in the Aug. 1 disaster.

Atlanta, Denver, San Diego, and Chicago also sought federal money but didn't make the cut.

New York's congestion pricing scheme stood out, Peters said.

"Unlike building new roads, this plan can be implemented quickly and will have an almost immediate impact on traffic," Peters said.

Bloomberg's plan would charge cars \$8 and trucks \$21 to enter Manhattan south of 86th Street on weekdays between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m.

The majority of the money would go toward other transit projects such as better park-and-ride bus facilities, ferry improvements and a new rapid bus system, which cities including Miami are already using. Rapid buses use dedicated bus lanes and have the technology to change traffic lights when approaching intersections.

Opponents of congestion pricing argue that it won't affect driver behavior enough to improve air quality or overall traffic patterns. They also say it amounts to a tax on middle-class New Yorkers who live outside Manhattan.

It is still unclear whether the deal struck weeks ago by New York state leaders will hold. Under that agreement, a commission will be formed to examine the overall concept of reducing traffic. After hearings and reviews, the group is to make a recommendation by the end of January. The Legislature has 90 days after it reconvenes to approve the plan, Peters said.

One opponent, Rep. Anthony Weiner, said last week's rainstorm, which shut down subways citywide, shows the transit system isn't ready to absorb all the extra riders who would give up their cars.

"You have to invest in the mass transit system first, before you start penalizing people for not using it," he said.

Bloomberg said the city would work on transit improvements before the federal money is certain.

[Hanford Sentinel, Editorial, Tuesday, August 14, 2007:](#)

Our View: Partnership gives more bang for Valley buck

Once upon a time, there were four people who lived in the country. One had a bucket of nails, another had a hammer. A third had a stack of wooden boards, and a fourth had some whitewash.

They all wanted to build a fence, but knew they didn't have enough money to buy all the supplies. So they pooled their resources and built the best darned fence in the whole land.

As simplistic as this example may be, it's a telling example of the impetus behind the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley.

Last week, members of the Partnership and state politicians brainstormed their way through two days of talks in Hanford, planning for the short- and long-term future of the Central Valley.

Formed two years ago by executive order of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, the Partnership brings together representatives from all eight Valley counties, who want to add timbre to their collective voice in Sacramento.

Prior to their second session on Friday, several members of the Partnership sat down with us to discuss the challenges they face.

The bottom line, according to Tulare County Supervisor Connie Conway, is quality of life. It's a no-brainer. California is growing at such a huge rate -- and not just her county, or ours, but the whole state. And there are only so many dollars up for grabs to make sure we have clean air and water and hassle-free roads.

After all, how can we attract new and larger businesses to Kings County? By providing easy freeway access in and out, a workforce that is educated and trained in various vocational skills, as well as cities with reasonably-priced housing and good schools for their employees.

It's a daunting task, one that the Partnership knows could take years to accomplish. But it's not outside the realm of possibility, according to member counties. In fact, funding for upgrades to Highway 99, a water conservation plan in the Legislature and a clean energy group can be directly linked to the group's work.

The best part is that its plan is not a study that is doomed to sit on a shelf and gather dust. It is a living document.

We all want to drink clean water. We all want to breathe clean air. We all want to drive on highways that are safe and well-built.

And when it comes to playing with the big boys -- Los Angeles or the Bay Area -- there's more power in numbers. And that's the thinking behind this coalition of like-minded government officials.

[Washington Post OpEd, August 15, 2007](#)

Hope on Climate Change? Here's Why

By Michael Gerson

In the field of environmentalism -- where brows tend to be frozen in furrow and despair is a professional credential -- Gregg Easterbrook of the Brookings Institution is notable for his optimism. And one cause of his sunniness is smog in Los Angeles.

In 1975, Los Angeles exceeded the ozone standard 192 days out of the year -- meaning the choking smog was so bad that children, the elderly and the infirm were better off avoiding the risky practice of outdoor breathing. In 2005, the ozone standard was exceeded on just 27 days. Los Angeles has had 30 years of consistent improvement in reducing smog.

As conservatives would expect, these gains were largely the result of technology -- the catalytic converter in automobiles and reformulated gasoline -- and not by pedaling to work or undoing the Industrial Revolution. Smog was reduced mainly by innovation, not austerity.

But liberals are correct about something else: This technological progress would not have taken place as a result of the free market alone. Easterbrook argues that as long as producing pollution is a free good -- without cost to the polluter -- there is little economic incentive to produce new methods to restrict it. Federal and state regulations on auto emissions and air quality created an environment in which the invention of new technologies was economically necessary.

There are lessons here in the controversy over global warming. The debate is less and less about the existence of the problem itself. A consensus has hardened and broadened that global temperatures are increasing, that humans have contributed to the rise and that this is eventually a bad thing for the planet -- views held by the environmental movement and publicly affirmed by the current president. The differences come on whether these environmental changes are likely to be gradual and manageable or swift and apocalyptic. Here, the scientific computer simulations are complex and speculative, and their conclusions are sometimes wildly overplayed.

Hysteria on the environment is a liberal temptation. Prudence, however, remains a conservative virtue, and it requires the issue of warming to be addressed.

But is it addressable? Would any politically feasible policy changes by Congress and the president make a dent in this trend? There is good reason for skepticism. American emissions of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide are only part of a global problem. China and India are quickly building new coal-fired power plants to sustain massive economic growth. According to one estimate, China surpassed the United States in the production of greenhouse gases last year. We are only at the beginning of globalization -- and right now, that process is inseparable from the burning of fossil fuels. American restrictions on greenhouse gases, in isolation, would not be decisive.

This is not, however, an excuse for inaction. There is another, more compelling reason to consider a cap on the production of carbon dioxide. As in the case of fighting Los Angeles smog, this type of government regulation would create economic incentives for the development of new technologies -- incentives that do not exist in the free market. Capturing and storing carbon dioxide from power plants, by all accounts, is a difficult technical challenge. But the problem is much more likely to be solved if someone has a direct economic interest in solving it.

There are several proposals by members of Congress -- including a bipartisan bill from Sens. Joseph Lieberman and John Warner due next month -- that take a "cap-and-trade" approach to greenhouse gases. The government mandates overall reductions in emissions and lets companies decide how to implement them. If someone produces less carbon dioxide, for example, that reduction can be sold to another producer and yield some money in the process. This kind of market-based system has been used successfully to cut coal-powered plants' emissions of sulfur dioxide, the main cause of acid rain.

A cap-and-trade system isn't perfect. It is open to fraud -- companies in other countries have sometimes increased their production of pollutants to get benefits for cutting them later. A cap-and-trade bill could be used by Congress to push subsidies toward pet environmental projects of questionable value.

But the overall argument for a cap-and-trade system is strong. The answer to global warming will eventually be technological -- the production of energy without the production of heat-trapping gases. But only the government can create the incentives for Americans to work on this problem with urgency and seriousness. And there is hope to be found in the clearer skies of Los Angeles.

"We are the Central Valley! Hear us roar!"

[Tri-Valley Herald, Commentary, Wednesday, August 15, 2007](#)

Brown sees future — and it looks just like Marin

By Daniel Weintraub

IT IS only 83 miles — as the SUV drives — from the Capitol offices of the Republicans in California's state Senate to the Marin County Civic Center in San Rafael, near the shore of San Pablo Bay. But it might as well be a million, given how differently the occupants of the two places view the world and the issue of global warming.

In Sacramento, Senate Republicans have been holding up passage of the state budget for weeks while demanding that their fellow lawmakers rein in Attorney General Jerry Brown, pressuring cities and counties to consider the effects on climate change before approving new development.

In Marin County, government officials are more likely to say, "What's the problem?" They have been doing what Brown is insisting upon for years, without anyone having told them to.

Brown, in fact, cites Marin as a model for how every local government should comply with the California Environmental Quality Act, which requires cities and counties to identify potential environmental impacts from proposed developments and take reasonable measures to mitigate them.

And Marinians are glad to be setting an example.

"This isn't rocket science," Marin County Supervisor Charles McGlashan told me last week as we chatted in his office in the Civic Center, the last building designed by Frank Lloyd Wright before he died in 1959. "Anybody can do what we have done."

McGlashan was an environmental consultant and activist before entering politics, and he can recite from memory the long list of steps Marin County is taking to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions believed to cause global warming. But he is also not afraid to admit that Marin has more work to do than most.

"Marin County is no saint," he says. "We have an ecological footprint that far exceeds our land area."

The amount of greenhouse gas a place generates is, more or less, correlated with wealth. Marin is one of the wealthiest places in America. And its global footprint (which includes more than just its emission of greenhouse gases) was estimated in 2001 at 27 acres per person, the amount of land it takes to support each person's lifestyle. The U.S. average is 24 acres.

If everyone had Marin's footprint, it would take nearly five Earths to support the globe's population.

"When you're as affluent as Marin County is, you tend to have larger houses, you tend to drive more, fly more, consume more," said Alex Hinds, head of the county's Community Development Agency and the man directly responsible for Marin's "sustainability" ethic.

To shrink that footprint, Marin adopted a "greenhouse gas reduction plan" last year committing the county to lowering emissions at least 15 percent from 2000 levels by 2020, and by as much as 20 percent for the government's own operations.

To get there, the county plans to take steps affecting nearly every aspect of life in the region, from transportation and energy consumption to agriculture, housing development, building design and water use.

The county already promotes the consumption of locally grown vegetables and grass-fed beef, and it provides a "green building" seal of approval to structures that are built or modified to meet the latest energy efficiency standards. It has the highest recycling rate in the state.

Perhaps the boldest measure the county plans to take is to break free from Pacific Gas & Electric for its electricity supply and instead buy, and generate, its own energy. The county's goal is to increase the share of renewable energy in its electricity portfolio to 40 percent by 2015, which could include a big expansion in the use of solar power and even a plant powered by wave energy from the Pacific Ocean.

Energy consumption is responsible for an estimated 44 percent of Marin County's greenhouse gas emissions. But an even larger share — 53 percent — comes from transportation. To reduce that output, the county is promoting policies that locate shopping and jobs close to where people live, and it hopes to vastly increase the availability, and use, of public transportation for those who cannot walk or bike to where they need to go.

The county plans an elaborate network of buses, shuttles and jitneys to help people avoid the use of single-occupant cars, and there are still hopes for a commuter rail corridor connecting to Sonoma County, although a proposal to fund that train with a sales tax increase fell short at the polls last year.

"It's an all-out effort in every respect of public policy and county operations," McGlashan said. "We need to do anything and everything we can to avert the worst effects of climate change."

Even in Marin, some of these policies have prompted fierce debate, especially the idea of building densely populated "infill" housing in already urbanized areas.

But is what might be good for Marin good for every city and county in California? The Republicans in the Senate say no, or at least that no other county should be forced to follow suit. The Democrats say yes. And on that dispute hangs resolution of the next state budget.

[Merced Sun-Star, Letter to the Editor, Wednesday, August 15, 2007](#)

Letter to the Editor: Help the environment

Editor: To all environmentally aware persons wishing to make a positive change in our environment.

I am looking for board members, or anyone interested in research regarding cleaning up our breathing environment, to assist in forming a nonprofit organization in hopes of reaching this goal. The organization will research the development, production and marketing of biodiesel, biolubricants and other bio-organic related products made from the Honge tree and from various other types and species of biodiesel-producing vegetation.

If you are interested in helping us form and/or participating in this organization in any way, shape or form, your active participation and input is very much welcome and would be very appreciated.

I am hopefully looking forward to all of us and every other environmentally conscientious person working as a very like-minded team to fight air pollution worldwide.

RON ARAGON, Merced