

## **Fresno's new trash truck a treasure**

**Garbage vehicle hailed as world's first compressed natural gas hybrid variety.**

By Denny Boyles

The Fresno Bee, Friday, May 16, 2008

What is being called the world's first compressed natural gas and electric hybrid garbage truck was formally unveiled Thursday in Fresno, in what officials called the next step to a more environmentally friendly city.

"This is a [Toyota] Prius with an appetite for trash," said Rene Ramirez, Fresno's Public Utilities Director.

The new garbage truck cost \$400,000, about \$160,000 more than a traditional vehicle. The city used a grant from the Fresno Council of Governments to fund the difference, Ramirez said.

The truck has been in operation since January, and is used to pick up litter at illegal dump sites around the city.

The truck, which can carry up to two tons of debris, is completely silent when running on battery. During the demonstration, the yellow, green and orange truck rolled silently around the Woodward Park amphitheater, with the sound of the tires on the concrete much louder than the electric drive system.

The new hybrid truck uses compressed natural gas and an electric engine to provide power. Large batteries, which are recharged by plugging the truck in each night, can power the truck for 10 miles. Those batteries also can be recharged by a regenerative braking system similar to that used in hybrid passenger vehicles.

A gasoline engine provides power for the hydraulic trash collection system, and for an air conditioner in the truck's cab. The hybrid truck is expected to offer a 40% improvement in fuel economy, saving the city \$1,400 in fuel costs each year over a traditional garbage truck.

"It will also reduce smog-forming emission by 90%," Ramirez said. "It will help us be good stewards of the environment, and provide a good example to the community."

Gus Sfakianos, executive vice president of Odyne Corporation, which built the hybrid drive system, said his company was pleased to be a part of what he called a world-leading effort.

"Fresno is the first city to go out and procure such an advanced product," Sfakianos said. "Now there is a tremendous amount of interest in this system for many types of large vehicles."

## **Bike to Work Day draws about 200 riders in Modesto**

By Dan Day

Modesto Bee, Friday, May 16, 2008

About 200 bicyclists converged on Modesto's Tenth Street Plaza this morning on the city's annual "Bike to Work Day."

Cyclists arrived at the plaza on their own or from one of three formal routes that the city had designated for the event.

"We're having a better turnout, maybe because of the weather, maybe higher gas prices," said Megan Distaso, ride share coordinator for the city and organizer of the event.

"We're hoping to get more people aware that cycling is a great way to commute. It's good for your health, it's great for traffic and congestion, it saves money," she said. "We're hoping more people will get in the habit of it."

Katherine Boyd, a Modesto attorney who rode from home and joined up with a group of riders en route, said she was pleased to see so many people involved.

"It would be great if more people rode," Boyd said. "It's a lot of fun."

Anthony Presto, spokesman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, also was pleased by the number of bicycles parked outside Tenth Street Place.

He said the dry, warm weather makes it even more important for people to leave behind their cars for the sake of improving the air. Air quality is listed as moderate today.

"We've had a great turnout today, and that is really important," Presto said. "It's important for people to realize our air quality situation and to take alternate modes of transportation like a bicycle."

## **Weekend promises sizzling weather**

### **Temperatures about 15 to 20 degrees above normal await in Valley.**

By James Guy

The Fresno Bee, Friday, May 16, 2008

Get ready for the year's first hot weekend.

The National Weather service is forecasting weather in the high 90s or 100s through Monday -- about 15 to 20 degrees above normal. That's prompting utilities to issue cautions about power usage and air quality officials to warn of bad air quality.

Some cities are readying cooling centers as a refuge against the heat.

Fresno's high today and Saturday is forecast to be 100 degrees.

The temperatures will be slightly lower Sunday and Monday, but it's likely to be Wednesday before the area sees temperatures in the 80s as cooling relief from coastal breezes reaches inland.

Because it will be the first weekend when air conditioners get a serious workout, Pacific Gas and Electric is reminding customers not to set thermostats below 78 degrees when they are home and to turn them up to 85 degrees when they are away. It's probably time to replace the air conditioning filter, too.

Air quality in Fresno County will be unhealthy today. In Tulare, Kings and Madera counties, it is rated as unhealthy for sensitive groups, meaning many people should limit strenuous outdoor activity. Only Merced County will have moderate air quality.

The forecast prompted officials in Visalia to ready a cooling refuge at the city's transit center at 425 E. Oak Ave. It will be open from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. Friday through Sunday.

All bus routes will provide transportation to and from the transit center.

Fresno and Clovis officials are also watching the thermometer and plan to open centers if temperatures rise to 105.

For those who need to be out of doors, the Red Cross advises drinking lots of water and wearing light clothing.

## **Special precautions are also urged for the elderly, children and pets.**

### **Farm bill will give local growers boost, but could hurt dairy industry**

By Carol Reiter

Merced Sun-Star, Friday, May 16, 2008

After years of pumping federal money into the pockets of growers of such commodities as corn, rice, wheat and cotton, this year's farm bill, if passed, will aim for the smaller niche farmer who represents a lot of California's growers.

"California agriculture is finally getting the respect and treatment it deserves," said Rep. Dennis Cardoza, D-Merced, who is the chairman of the Subcommittee on Horticulture and Organic Agriculture, and a member of the committee that hammered out the bill's details.

The bill has passed both the House and the Senate. However, President Bush has said that he will veto it.

Some of the California crops that will be helped by the \$289 billion package are specialty crops, such as almonds, walnuts, some types of vegetables and dried fruits.

"This is the kind of money that doesn't go directly into someone's pocket," said Diana Westmoreland Pedrozo, executive director of the Merced County Farm Bureau. The money will be used to market the crops that are unique to California, she said.

But the farm bill is a mixed bag for California's dairy farmers. Michael Marsh, chief executive officer of Western United Dairymen in Modesto, said the dairy commodity titles, a safety net for dairy producers that's part of the bill, just doesn't cut it.

Dairies are treated separately from the general crop provisions in the farm bill, and Marsh said that growers' costs are going up while prices for milk aren't. The dairy commodity title is supposed to help make up the difference when high production costs meet low prices, but the bill is only giving dairymen about \$10 per hundredweight, which is far below the cost of producing milk.

"It's like a trapeze artist who finds his net is 20 feet below ground," Marsh said. Currently, milk is selling for about \$16 per hundredweight, but the growers' costs are about \$20 per hundredweight.

"We're going to see a lot of dairies going out of business," Marsh said.

Although dairy farmers aren't happy with the bill, the environmental end of the bill has pleased a lot of people. The Environmental Quality Incentive Program will get about \$150 million to assist farmers in regions with serious air pollution. The money will pay for new engines, pumps and other equipment.

This program was written specifically with the San Joaquin Valley in mind, because of the problems with smog here.

"(Farmers) are being required to meet higher standards, and this money will help to meet some of those goals for air quality," Westmoreland Pedrozo said.

For David Robinson, the farm bill would help him do his job. The agricultural commissioner for Merced County said the bill has dollars in it to help local ag departments keep pests out of their counties.

"With the light brown apple moth and the glassy winged sharpshooter on the move, we need money for additional resources to detect these pests," Robinson said.

The farm bill will also set aside dollars to be used in emergency declarations, such as frost damage or heat loss, Robinson said: "When we had a disaster in the past, there was no funding in place for it. This will fix that."

Though the bill may have its faults, most local ag experts would like to see Bush avoid a veto.

"We hope he will sign it; we need new direction. It's a new time and a new day, and we need to respond," said Westmoreland Pedrozo.

Although the farm bill is being watched closely by people in the agriculture industry, Westmoreland Pedrozo said that everyone is affected by its passage or failure.

"There isn't a region in California that isn't impacted by ag," she said.

### **Farm bill and California**

The farm bill's California-related provisions and impacts include:

**SCHOOL SNACKS:** The bill includes \$1 billion to expand a fresh fruit and vegetable snack program to all 50 states.

**CROP SUBSIDIES:** The payments are concentrated. Fresno, Kern, Kings and Tulare county farmers alone account for about one-fourth of the state's total.

ENVIRONMENT: The Agriculture Department's existing Environmental Quality Incentive Program will include \$150 million to assist farmers in regions with serious air pollution. The money will help pay for new engines, pumps and other equipment, as well as air-friendly activities like chipping orchard clippings instead of burning them.

### **Bike to Work event meets record-setting heat**

By Rachel Gordon, Staff Writer  
S.F. Chronicle, Friday, May 16, 2008

Thousands of people in the Bay Area heeded the call to travel by pedal power Thursday for the 14th annual Bike to Work Day event.

"It's fun, but boy is it hot," said Ellie Ross, as she leaned on her bike on a street corner in San Francisco's Glen Park neighborhood Thursday afternoon before proceeding home - an additional three-plus blocks uphill - from her job near Civic Center as a technical writer.

"Normally I take BART," said Ross, 44, "but my co-worker talked me into biking with her."

Exactly how many Bay Area commuters hopped on their two-wheelers is unknown, but the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency counted cars and bicycles heading east on Market Street at Van Ness Avenue and found that cyclists accounted for nearly two-thirds of the traffic. Between 8 a.m. and 9 a.m., the survey logged 812 bicycles and 403 cars.

Events were held around the region, with so-called energizer stations set up along busy corridors offering bicyclists water, juice, bagels and other edibles.

Organizers - a coalition of government, business and activist groups - use the yearly promotion to draw attention to the benefits of bicycling, saying it's good for the body, the environment and the pocketbook. Like Thursday, today is a Spare the Air Day, when commuters are encouraged to try transit, biking or walking to work to fight the anticipated high levels of air pollution.

### **Second consecutive Spare the Air Day called Friday**

By Denis Cuff  
In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Friday, May 16, 2008

Friday will be the second consecutive Spare the Air Day because of smoggy air.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District asks the public to voluntarily minimize driving, and refrain from using gas-powered mowers and garden equipment, barbecue lighter fluid or other products that emit smog-forming fumes.

No free public transit rides will be offered.

Unhealthy concentrations of ozone, the irritant in smog, are forecast Friday for most of Contra Costa, Alameda and Solano counties. Because smog-forming pollutants drift long distances, the air district asks people throughout the Bay Area to reduce pollution.

### **Cyclists ride the heat wave**

By Kelli Phillips  
Contra Costa Times, Friday, May 16, 2008

Charles Martin doesn't mind the heat.

The soon-to-be 68-year-old said he didn't think twice about biking to work Thursday despite the threat of triple digit temperatures and the Bay Area's first "Spare the Air Day" of the year.

The Martinez accountant said he has participated in Bike to Work Day since it started 14 years ago.

"Heat is a psychological thing," he said. "The temperature, I don't feel. But having someone watch you prepare their tax return while you're fumbling through papers, that's when I notice the heat. That's pressure."

Martin lives a mile-and-a-half from his Ferry Street office and he bikes to work as often as possible. Commuting on two wheels is not only fun but it is good exercise, he said. It also saves him from parking tickets.

"With all those meters downtown, by the time you unlock your door, you have a ticket. They're serious down there," he said.

Bike to Work Day organizers worried that high temperatures and poor air quality would keep some of the anticipated 100,000 Bay Area cyclists at home this year, said Cole Portocarrero, Bay Area Bicycle Coalition executive director and Bike to Work Day event coordinator.

"It's amazing what we're seeing out there," Portocarrero said Thursday afternoon. "We're seeing an increase of 50 to 200 percent ridership in some areas. I think people are choosing to stay out of their cars and bike to work because they know it's going to help with the poor air quality."

Temperatures in Contra Costa County simmered in the low 90s about 9 a.m. and by 4 p.m., Concord had reached 97 degrees and Livermore hit 94, according to the National Weather Service. Record temperatures were recorded across the Bay Area — with Oakland and downtown San Francisco reaching 96 by late afternoon, breaking previous highs of 87 degrees in 1976 and 91 in 1970, respectively.

The heat is expected to continue today, and not let up until well into the weekend. Nights will remain warm, with temperatures in the upper 60s, according to the weather service.

Despite the rising mercury, a record number of cyclists stopped to refuel at an "energizer station" set up in Bishop Ranch Business Park in San Ramon, said Marci McGuire, Bishop Ranch program manager. The station, one of many in the Bay Area where cyclists could rest and get bottled water, served 463 riders from 6 a.m. to 9 a.m.

"It's a new best for us," McGuire said. "It seemed there were more local cyclists this year. I think we would have had more first-timers, if it had been a bit cooler."

The weather was just perfect for Denise Huynh, who said she has been riding her bike to work for years.

"It's a perfect day to ride," she said. "It beats driving and wasting all that gas we're paying so much for."

Just outside the Pleasant Hill BART station, Huynh peeked inside the Bike to Work Day tote bag she received at an energizer station near the BART fare gates. Items inside the bag included a T-shirt and a water bottle.

Huynh said she pedaled from her San Leandro home to the Bay Fair BART station, where she caught a train to Pleasant Hill. From there, she biked to her job as a marketing coordinator for the Sports Basement store on Ygnacio Valley Road.

"I like to ride everyday if I can get a chance," she said. Bike to Work Day is "saving the environment and is raising awareness for cycling," she added.

Patricia Campbell, Contra Costa County's Bike Commuter of the Year, does her part to raise awareness of cycling year round. The Antioch Middle School teacher not only commutes to work via mountain bike, but she finds ways to incorporate cycling issues into the classroom. For example, she's taught lessons on bicycle safety, and what helmets are made of and how they work.

She helped to organize a Bike to Work Day for middle school staff, but it was held a day early.

"We actually had a bike to work day (Wednesday) because (Thursday) is our 'Open House,' and some people were worried about biking home so late at night," she said.

Campbell has been biking to campus almost everyday for the past three years — and Thursday was no exception.

"I really like the example that I set for my students," she said. "Every year, I have students ask: 'Do you ride everyday?' Yes. 'Do you like it?' Yes. 'Do you have a car?' Yes. They're seeing an adult who is choosing to ride a bike, and I enjoy it."

## **Bike commuters spared \$4-a-gallon gas**

By Erik N. Nelson - Oakland Tribune

In the Tri-Valley Herald, Friday, May 16, 2008

Braving unseasonably warm weather that threatened unhealthy levels of smog, an estimated 100,000 Bay Area commuters took to two wheels Thursday in observance of Bike to Work Day.

As a landscape contractor, Jean Robertson of North Oakland bikes to work "hardly at all." Even the most strident supporters of human-powered transport would have to agree that hauling shovels, rakes, bags of compost and, um, rocks are a bit much for a bike trailer.

But this morning at 7:30 a.m., Robertson stopped off in front of the Emeryville Civic Center with fellow pedaler Claire Wings of Oakland to pick up a free canvas tote bag full of transit guides, maps, a free Clif Bar and a TransLink microchip-embedded transit fare card with \$5 on it.

"I have a big truck, and have to schlep a lot of (stuff) to work," said Robertson, 50, "but today I'm just having fun with my friend to encourage biking."

But it was another day at the office for Wings, a gardener who was toting baby buttercup and kabocha squash plants in a saddle bag.

"I use my bike to go everywhere," she said, standing astride her "dirt-red" hybrid Trek. "Within three miles of home, I can do every kind of errand I need to do."

It was the 15th Bike-to-Work celebration at City Hall in Oakland, where the Bay Area tradition was born, and thousands of cyclists showed up for free pancakes, valet bike parking and bike tune-ups. San Francisco observed its 14th Bike-to-Work Day with a host of events, one cheering bicyclists as they streamed across the Golden Gate Bridge from Marin County.

"We have definitely seen an increase overall," said Cole Portocarrero, executive director of the Bay Area Bicycle Coalition, who estimated that the daily total would reach 100,000 riders. "There's double the number of bikes than cars on Market Street."

Organizers attributed the increase to area gas prices surpassing \$4 a gallon along with ever-increasing concern over emissions from cars and trucks that cause global warming.

Back in Oakland, the usual crush of cyclists showed up, many sporting bright new reflective and/or stretchy biking togs.

One of the newcomers was Oakland City Council President Ignacio De La Fuente, who has historically preferred the loud, motorized two-wheeled bike manufactured by Harley-Davidson.

"It was a piece of cake, to tell the truth," De La Fuente announced to the crowd after riding downtown from the Fruitvale District.

But the event's mayoral curse continued, as Mayor Ron Dellums had more important things to do.

"His schedule is heavily impacted today," said mayoral Special Assistant Trina Barton, who pedaled to work and appeared at the pancake breakfast along with Marisol Lopez, the mayor's executive assistant.

Mayor Elihu Harris rode to work, helmet on backward, on the first Bike-to-Work Day in 1993, but none of his successors have pedaled in his tracks.

Across the Bay, San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom also begged off, citing out-of-town commitments.

But politicians and officials of every other stripe were in abundance at the pancake breakfast, perhaps even outnumbering more workaday commuters.

Caltrans District 4 Director Bijan Sartipi pedaled to the event sporting a yellow windbreaker and a sky-blue-and-teal bike shirt emblazoned with the Caltrans logo.

He described how his agency is working with the City of Oakland to find a non-life-threatening route for bicyclists to take to the bike lane across the new eastern span of the Bay Bridge now being constructed.

Stuart Cohen, executive director of the Transportation and Land Use Coalition, met with the Metropolitan Transportation Commission's bike-pedestrian coordinator to talk about how to scrape together \$1.3 billion for bicycle and pedestrian access proposed for the MTC's regional transportation plan.

City Councilwoman Nancy Nadel once again proved that you don't even have to know how to ride a bike to participate, riding her three-wheeled rig from her home in West Oakland.

And would-be council members also showed up. AC Transit board member Rebecca Kaplan, who is running for a city council seat, said she bikes most days, "so it's no big deal" for her personally.

The big deal, she said, are things like global warming and smog — the day was designated a "Spare the Air Day" by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, so commuters were already being discouraged from driving.

"We should make the connection," she said, "that there is a broader reason to bike to work."

## **Green goals take hiring, city advised**

By Katherine Tam, West County Times

In the Contra Costa Times, Friday, May 16, 2008

Richmond needs to hire more staff dedicated to creating and developing environmental programs if it wants to be as green as it says it wants to be, a consultant told the city.

A new environmental manager came on board in January, but one person isn't enough, said Sara Minor-Massy of the Goldman School of Public Policy.

Officials should fill the city's energy-conservation manager position, which has been vacant for four years and could pay for itself through cost savings, and hire someone dedicated to reducing waste, she said.

A city "green team" consisting of someone from every department should meet regularly.

And the city must set specific goals and develop specific programs to move those goals forward, she said.

The recommendations come amid a continuing slump in the housing market, a sluggish economy and state budget cuts.

Last month, the City Council enacted a hiring freeze for the rest of this fiscal year, except in public safety, summer youth programs and positions funded by something other than the general fund.

Despite the financial constraints, City Manager Bill Lindsay said the green recommendations are doable.

"It does need to be a cultural change," Lindsay said. "With a change in the culture in an organization, you don't need in all cases more staff and, with some of the recommendations here, you don't always need more money. But you do need to have a concentrated approach and a value system that says promoting and implementing environmental policies is an important policy."

The City Council is slated to begin budget deliberations Tuesday and adopt a budget June 17.

The council Finance Committee, meanwhile, is looking at which environmental recommendations the city can afford.

Richmond has made some strides to be more environmentally friendly, including reducing fees for residential solar panel installation and looking at alternatives to toxins and pesticides at parks. But consultants and officials agree it's not enough.

Among the steps the city can take, Minor-Massy said, are:

- Establishing a "zero waste" goal. Berkeley and Oakland, for example, have set benchmarks to reuse, recycle or compost everything people use by 2020.
- Increasing recycling and composting by 20 percent.
- Developing an energy-saving plan at City Hall with such strategies as lowering the thermostat and turning off computer monitors at night and working with the Association of Bay Area Governments to explore other ways to conserve energy.
- Partnering with the International Council for Local and Environmental Initiatives to create a climate action plan to reduce greenhouse gases.
- Creating a Web site to tell the public about services the city provides, rebates and tips for what residents can do.
- Developing a green purchasing policy in which the city pledges to buy more recycled, less-toxic products.
- Asking the East Bay Municipal Utility District to help the city assess its water usage and identify where it can save water, and encouraging the public to conserve water.
- Applying to the Bay Area Air Quality Management District for grants to buy low-emission vehicles and equipment or retrofit existing ones so they pollute less, and encouraging people to carpool and use public transit more.

Councilman Harpreet Sandhu and Councilwoman Ludmyrna Lopez proposed partnering with the Goldman School to perform the analysis for the city. Mayor Gayle McLaughlin, who has made green policies the focal point of her administration, said adopting more environmental practices will bring jobs and strengthen the economy.

"How can we afford not to?" she said. "The environment and the economy are intrinsically linked. ... Environmental damage always comes back and bites us, by way of creating future costs in terms of repairing the damage."

### **Owner of Hayward building convicted under Clean Air Act**

Modesto Bee, Thursday, May 15, 2008

SAN FRANCISCO — The owner of a Hayward commercial building is facing possible prison time after being convicted of violating the Clean Air Act.

Wassim Mohammad Azizi was convicted Wednesday of three felony counts of violating the Clean Air Act for tearing down a two-story building that contained significant amounts of asbestos.

During his five day-trial, jurors determined that during the demolition of the building in late 2002 and early 2003 Azizi failed to comply with the federal law regulating the removal of asbestos.

The maximum penalty for each count of violating the Clean Air Act is five years imprisonment, plus fines and possible restitution.

The 37-year-old Azizi is due to be sentenced on Aug. 27.

### **Port is putting electric big rig to work**

By Art Marroquin, Staff Writer

LA Daily News, Friday, May 16, 2008

Waymond Banks slid into the driver's seat of a shiny new big rig parked at the Port of Los Angeles and turned the key.

Unlike most trucks operating at the nation's busiest port, this engine was eerily quiet.

Exhaust fumes didn't spew from the tailpipe.

And a gauge indicated that the drayage truck was charged with enough electricity to be able to haul a fully loaded cargo container from the port's shipping terminals to nearby warehouses and rail yards.

"It runs just like a regular big rig, except for the simple fact that it runs on electricity and has no emissions," said Banks, a senior truck driver for the Port of Los Angeles.

"It's nice. It's quiet. And you don't have to worry about filling it up, just charging it up."

After two months of intense testing, port officials are scheduled today to officially roll out the Nautilus E30, a new electric short-haul truck developed by Santa Ana-based Balqon Corp.

Port officials hope to eventually expand their "green fleet" of electric vehicles as a way to reduce harmful pollutants generated by port operations.

"I think this is a very promising way to eliminate one of the many sources of exhaust and emissions at the port," said Geraldine Knatz, executive director of the Port of Los Angeles.

The prototype truck was developed over the past year by Balqon as part of a \$527,000 grant program funded by the port and the South Coast Air Quality Management District.

Electric vehicles are not a new concept but development has been slow, mostly because early models experienced problems with speed, range, strength and cost.

"We approached this with some skepticism because we saw projects like this before," said Matt Miyasato, assistant deputy executive officer for the AQMD's technology advancement office.

"But, we took interest in this test vehicle because the port is the greatest emissions polluter in the area," Miyasato said. "We want to find a way to fix that."

The port's new truck runs on a rechargeable lead-acid battery, which takes up to four hours to load and is considered to be cheaper and easier to change than other batteries that were developed for electric vehicles.

And so far, the truck has exceeded expectations in speed and strength.

Port and AQMD officials ordered up an electric truck that was capable of hauling 68,000 pounds, but initial tests show that it can haul closer to 77,000 pounds, according to Balwinder Samra, president and CEO of Balqon Corp.

Additionally, the electric truck is expected to have a 15-year life span, Samra said. Diesel trucks typically operate for seven years before they start experiencing problems, he added.

"Technically, I think it's a myth that people think electric vehicles have less power," Samra said. "We have a balancing act to perform on how much power to provide to the vehicle so that it can have the best energy efficiency. We don't have a gas tank to work with here."

The Board of Harbor Commissioners agreed last month to purchase five of the electric trucks at a cost of \$208,500 each, along with \$542,250 worth of chargers and battery packs from Balqon Corp. Port officials also agreed to purchase 20 of the Nautilus E20 electric yard tractors from Balqon at a cost of \$189,950 apiece.

As part of the agreement, Balqon agreed to move its operations next month from Santa Ana to Harbor City, where the electric trucks will be manufactured about three miles from the port's maintenance building, according to Samra.

The port also will receive \$1,000 for every truck sold to other companies and government agencies, Knatz said. The money will be placed in a technology fund that the port will use to invest in future projects aimed at cleaning up operations, she said.

Additionally, Balqon will hire its employees with help from the Los Angeles WorkSource service center, she said.

"Not only do we have a clean, new technology, but we're creating a new business in the city of Los Angeles and creating a new set of jobs for our residents," Knatz said. "It's a win-win-win all the way around."

**Peaker plant could operate at 10 times its original capacity, county says  
County advises judge that a new environmental review is needed, according to a court document filed Tuesday.**

By Erika I. Ritchie and Rashi Kesarwani

The Orange County Register, Friday, May 16, 2008

Ladera Ranch A 48-megawatt power plant proposed for construction in the community could operate at 10 times its capacity and exceed allowed noise levels, the county said in court documents filed this week.

The plant – known as the Margarita Energy Center – would also be larger and more visible in the community, the county says. In addition information provided by the proposed developer – Wellhead – inaccurately depicted air quality issues associated with the plant, the county said.

Based on these results, the county is asking an Orange County judge on Monday to decide if a new environmental review will be required because the previous review by the county's Planning Commission appears to have been based on "faulty information."

Wellhead, meanwhile, contends it doesn't intend to run the plant 2,000 hours a year, 10 times the level that had been announced, unless there was need, and stands by its previous descriptions of the plant's operations.

County attorneys filed the document Tuesday after Ladera Hope – a community group borne from the controversy – conducted an independent study on the proposed plant and found what it alleged were inaccuracies and misinformation.

"The county's position is that a new environmental review should be conducted," said County Counsel Ben de Mayo. "We'll have to evaluate what this environmental review will entail."

In a request to the county for revocation of the plant's permit, Ladera Hope said: "The county's decision to approve the project was based on inaccurate information provided by Wellhead and SDG&E regarding the intended hours of operation, plans to expand the facility, environmental impacts, public input and the project's scope."

"We discovered a document dated January 2008 showing the Ladera power plant being a 99-megawatt facility," said Jon Forrest, a spokesman for the group. "All of the misinformation and cover-up was part of the game plan to come in with a single 48-megawatt single turbine, sneak it under the California Energy Commission's radar and three years later in goes a second turbine."

Ladera Hope has sued to force a full environmental review.

"It is our position that this is a case where the defendant (the county) now agrees with the plaintiff (Ladera Hope) as to what should be done," said Ladera Hope attorney Mike Leifer.

Original plans submitted by the developer to the county described the plant as a natural-gas-fired turbine-engine power plant with a 50-foot smokestack. County plans showed that the plant would serve 30,000 homes and run about 200 hours a year under normal conditions to avert power shortages. It is, however, permitted to run 2,500 hours a year.

Mohsen Nazemi, deputy executive officer with the South Coast Air Quality Management District, said the agency's evaluation was based on more than 2,000 hours annually of operation but added that the application was only based on one unit at 48 megawatts.

Nazemi said if the plant's developer wanted to double it, more review would be required.

"They would have had to go through a full-blown permitting analysis and would have had to file an application with us and the CEC," said Nazemi. "They would not have been allowed to touch the ground to put in a second unit unless they had permits from both agencies."

This process would require public participation and would take at least six to eight months.

"The company may have had longtime plans to put in another unit but all the evidence we had didn't lead us to believe they were doing that," Nazemi said. "They have a 25-year contract with SDG&E to sell power from only one turbine."

Paul Cummins, Wellhead's project manager, commended the county's Planning Commission on its review last year and the county's decision to seek more comprehensive review.

"It was never intended to just start up and run 2,000 hours," said Cummins. "When we get to a broader environmental review that information will get represented and will be seen for what it is."

## **EPA easing rules on power plants near national parks**

### **Rank-and-file staff, managers who oppose Bush administration plan spread the word**

Juliet Eilperin, Washington Post

In the S.F. Chronicle, Washington Post and other papers, Friday, May 16, 2008

Washington - -- The Bush administration is on the verge of implementing new air quality rules that will make it easier to build power plants near national parks and wilderness areas, according to rank-and-file agency scientists and park managers who oppose the plan.

The new regulations, which are likely to be finalized this summer, rewrite a provision of the Clean Air Act that applies to "Class 1 areas," federal lands that currently have the highest level of protection under the law.

Opponents predict the changes will worsen visibility at many of the United States' most prized tourist destinations.

Nearly a year ago, with little fanfare, the Environmental Protection Agency proposed changing the way the government measures air pollution near Class 1 areas on the grounds that the nation needed a more uniform way of regulating emissions near protected areas. The agency closed the comment period in April and has indicated it is not making significant changes to the draft rule, despite objections by EPA staff members.

Jeffrey Holmstead, who now heads the environmental strategies group at the law firm of Bracewell & Giuliani, helped initiate the rule change while heading EPA's air and radiation office. He said agency officials became concerned that EPA's scientific staff was taking the most conservative approach in predicting how much pollution new power plants would produce.

The move is the latest in a series of administration efforts going back to 2003 to weaken air quality protections at national parks, including failed moves to prohibit federal land managers from commenting on permits for new pollution sources more than 31 miles away from their areas and to only protect air resources for parks that are big and diverse enough to represent complete ecosystems.

For 30 years, regulators have measured pollution levels in the parks, over both three-hour and 24-hour increments, to capture the spikes in emissions that occur during periods of peak energy demand. The new rule would average the levels over a year so that spikes in pollution levels would not violate the law.

Many National Park Service and EPA officials have challenged the rule change, arguing that it will worsen visibility in already-impaired areas, according to internal documents obtained by the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform.

In one set of comments, EPA's regional computer modeling staff wrote that the proposal would allow for significant degradation of the parks' air quality. An e-mail from National Park Service staff called aspects of the plan bad public policy that would make it much easier to build power plants near Class 1 areas, which include some Fish and Wildlife Service-protected land.

When committee Chairman Henry Waxman, D-Los Angeles, asked the EPA whether the rule would lead to construction of more power plants near protected areas, Robert Meyers, principal deputy assistant administrator for EPA's Office of Air and Radiation, replied in an April 24 letter that this was not the intention of the rule, but he could not rule it out.

"We developed this proposal based on the need to clarify how increment consumption must be addressed, and not whether or not it would be easier to build power plants," Meyers wrote. "In the absence of any data or evidence provided by the National Parks Service, we are unable to conclusively confirm or deny their suggestion."

On Thursday, the National Parks Conservation Association, a lobbying group, issued a report estimating that the rule would ease the way for the construction of 28 new coal-fired power plants within 186 miles of 10 national parks.

In each of the next 50 years, the report concludes, the new plants would emit 122 million tons of carbon dioxide, 79,000 tons of sulfur dioxide, 52,000 tons of nitrogen oxides, and 4,000 pounds of toxic mercury into the air over and around the Great Smoky Mountains, Zion and eight other national parks.

"It's like if you're pulled over by a cop for going 75 miles per hour in a 55 miles-per-hour zone, and you say, 'If you look at how I've driven all year, I've averaged fifty-five miles per hour,' " said Mark Wenzler, director of the National Parks Conservation Association's clean air programs. "It allows you to vastly underestimate the impact of these emissions."

Don Shepherd, an environmental engineer at the National Park Service's air resources division in Denver, said of the new rule: "I don't know of anyone at our level, who deals with this day to day, that likes it or thinks it's going to make sense."

"We really want to have clean air at national parks all the time, and not just at average times," Shepherd said. "All of our national parks have impaired visibility. ... It would really be a setback in trying to make progress."

## **Microsoft in deal on European environment data**

The Associated Press

In the Contra Costa Times, Friday, May 16, 2008

AMSTERDAM, Netherlands—Microsoft Corp. says it is collaborating with the European Environmental Agency to make information about local air and water pollution levels freely available to consumers through Microsoft Web portals.

EEA spokeswoman Gulcin Karadeniz says no money is changing hands in the 5-year deal. The arrangement is not exclusive.

She said Thursday the project will begin using government data that is now dispersed and difficult to access. It will expand gradually to include feedback and data from environmental groups and individuals.

Frank McCosker, a Microsoft manager, said a 12-person team has been working on the project since February and hopes to launch a first product in June.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Friday, May 16, 2008:](#)

### **'A sense of urgency'**

I have asthma, and, on certain days, I have to refrain from going outside and enjoying physical activities because our air quality is bad. In Fresno, we have a rise in asthma patients each year, all because of Fresno's poor air.

Since each one of us contributes to the dirty air we breathe, the first step toward a solution is to ask yourself a simple question. What am I, personally, willing to do in my everyday activities to help our environment?

To come up with just one lifestyle change, however small, will still have an impact. If each and every one of us did just one thing, it would make a huge difference.

Let's take these Hummers off the road. I'm not saying replace them with hybrids, but do people really need a car that was originally designed for the military in Fresno? We need to approach our pollution problem with a sense of urgency, because everyone's health is in danger. No one else is going to do it for us.

*Kenyon Whitman, Fresno*

[Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Letter to the Editor, Friday, May 16, 2008:](#)

### **Local board cannot clean up the air**

Once again, Visalia ranked No. 3 on the list of most polluted cities for ozone pollution and No. 5 for particulate matter pollution nationwide. The implications of dirty air are clear: death.

The California Air Resources Board estimates that PM pollution results in 1,200 premature deaths in the Valley alone.

Despite these alarming numbers, Supervisor Steve Worthley of Tulare was one of eight members of our local air district to approve an inadequate cleanup plan that ignores proven technology and strategies that would clean up our air faster and instead relies entirely on the state.

The cities' representatives on the board and the new governor-appointed member to the local air district and the state CARB, Dr. Telles, voted against the plan because of its inadequacy and its inability to ensure the health of residents.

The CARB will be coming to Fresno on May 22-23 to consider the plan for approval and have the authority to amend the plan to include a faster path.

It is clear we cannot count on our local county Board of Supervisors to do the right thing; it is now up to the state to protect us against deadly pollution. For more information on the CARB meeting, please visit [www.arb.ca.gov/board/board.htm](http://www.arb.ca.gov/board/board.htm).

*Liza Bolanos, Visalia*

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the airbus looks for alternative means of fuel like vegetable oil and algae to pollute less. For more information on this Spanish clip, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

### **Airbus busca biocarburante**

#### **Aeronaves volarán con vegetales y algas**

AFP

Univision, Friday, May 16, 2008

PARIS – El constructor aeronáutico europeo Airbus, el grupo de defensa estadounidense Honeywell, el consorcio International Aero Engines (IAE) y la aerolínea estadounidense JetBlue, anunciaron una alianza para conseguir un biocarburante para aviones.

¿Golpe publicitario?

Los socios quieren dar con combustibles de vegetales y algas que sean menos contaminantes que los querosenos actuales, informó Airbus en un comunicado.

El objetivo es concentrarse en energías renovables que no compitan con la producción agrícola, agregó Airbus, avanzando que en 2030 este tipo de combustible podría suponer el 30 por ciento del total consumido por los aviones comerciales.

El 22 de febrero la compañía Virgin Atlantic realizó con éxito un primer vuelo entre Londres y Amsterdam usando biocarburante. El avión utilizado fue un Boeing 747 sin pasajeros, alimentado por una mezcla de aceite de babassú, coco y queroseno normal.

Los ecologistas calificaron el experimento de "golpe publicitario" e insistieron en que lo urgente es frenar la expansión de la industria aeronáutica.

Según algunos científicos, la destrucción de los ecosistemas naturales para sustituirlos por cultivos para la producción de biocarburantes genera más dióxido de carbono del que ahorra.

Las emisiones de gases de efecto invernadero del sector aéreo representan actualmente un 2 por ciento de las globales.