

## **Officials want composting firms to reduce emissions**

### **Local composting firms say proposed policy will make them lose money**

BY GERALD CARROLL

Visalia Times Delta, Wednesday, August 13, 2008

Composting, a time-honored method for recycling solid waste, has come under fire from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

District officials say composting — from gardeners' backyard mounds to large-scale green-waste processing — contributes to Valley air pollution. Up to 2 percent of all volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, emitted into the atmosphere come from the practice, said Rick McVaigh, deputy air pollution control officer for the district's Fresno headquarters.

"We want to reduce those emissions 15 percent," he told the Visalia City Council last week.

McVaigh was challenged, however, by commercial composting firms and College of the Sequoias President and Superintendent Bill Scroggins. Scroggins, who has a biochemistry background, said natural sources are responsible for 50 percent of all VOC emissions and that anti-composting efforts would be of little value.

They would have an effect, however, officials said.

"We would go out of business," said John Jones, operations manager for Tulare County Compost and Biomass.

A proposed district policy would require all companies processing at least 50,000 tons of compost annually to install expensive devices to "digest" compost and seal off any emissions. Jones, who likened a digester to "a giant crock pot," said a modest-sized device costs \$2 million or more.

"We can't afford it," he said.

The district plans to put the policy into effect in 2009, after more public hearings and research.

Jones said the district should consider doubling the compost threshold, to 100,000 tons. That would spare his company the expense of such an elaborate procedure, he said.

Jones' main customers are farmers who use processed compost as an alternative to caustic chemical fertilizers, which dissolve during winter rains and spill into Tulare County waterways.

The cities of Visalia and Tulare also have contractual arrangements with Jones' company to collect and remove all green waste.

"This [arrangement] benefits everyone," Jones said.

City Councilman Greg Collins sees other conflicts between the district's plan and safe-environment procedures long practiced by Visalia.

"Environmental objectives are colliding," Collins said. "Composting reduces solid waste going into landfills and reduces water consumption. There has to be some give and take here."

## **Fresno County approves gravel mine**

### **Calaveras project near Kings River first proposed 12 years ago.**

By Brad Branan

The Fresno Bee, Wednesday, August 13, 2008

Fresno County supervisors approved a 315-acre gravel mine near the Kings River, going against the wishes of the county Planning Commission and many residents of the area.

Supervisors voted 3-2 for the project Tuesday. Supervisors Henry Perea and Judy Case, who represents the area, voted against it.

The decision means Calaveras Materials can move forward with a mining project originally proposed 12 years ago. The site east of Sanger is on the south side of Goodfellow Avenue, between the Riverbend Avenue alignment and Cameron Slough.

"It's been a long time," said Burt Gilpin, a vice president with the company. "We're pleased to finally get approval."

The vote upset nearly 50 opponents who crowded the board's meeting room for nearly three hours of discussion. Several of them told the board to vote against the project.

"It's a bunch of garbage," Gloria Unruh, who owns a ranch near the mining site, said after the vote. "They never investigated our complaints."

Case said she couldn't support the project because the "impacts are too high for the public." Perea didn't explain his opposition.

In March, the Planning Commission voted against the mining proposal, a scaled-down version of the original plan by Calaveras. In recent months, the Board of Supervisors twice put off voting on the plan as it tried to resolve complaints by opponents.

The main issues discussed by the board Tuesday involved truck traffic and loss of farmland.

County staffers recommended that Calaveras preserve the same amount of land it will use for the mine, which would be the most farmland ever set aside in Fresno County to offset loss to development.

On Tuesday, the board increased the staff's recommendation.

If Calaveras can't find river bottom property to offset the lost farmland, it will have to buy twice as much land elsewhere, the board decided. The land cannot be west of Highway 99.

Gilpin told supervisors that the requirement may end up killing the project, if the cost of such land is too high. But after the vote, he said the company will work with conservationists to try to meet the requirement. Opponents also complained about the damage they say the heavy trucks will do to county roads.

But county staffers recommended approval of the project, in part because Calaveras agreed to pay about \$1 million to improve roads the company will use regularly.

Supervisor Phil Larson said opposing the mine would end up hurting the environment.

Otherwise, construction projects will continue to require the long-distance shipment of gravel, increasing truck emissions, he said.

Supervisor Bob Waterston said the county has a duty to approve gravel mining because it will lower the cost of public works projects, including road work under the Measure C sales tax.

### **Commenters largely support refinery alternative**

BY STACEY SHEPARD,

Bakersfield Californian Tuesday, August 12, 2008

A recent proposal to expand the Big West of California refinery on Rosedale Highway without using new toxic chemicals has been gaining public support.

In comment letters submitted to the county in response to a revised environmental impact report on the project, individuals and groups have favored Alternative D, the new approach that's been called "environmentally superior" to the company's original plans to use the toxic chemical modified hydrofluoric, said Kern County Planning Department Division Chief Lorelei Oviatt.

"Overall, people think Alternative D is a good idea," Oviatt said.

The county also received some 1,500 form letters expressing blanket support for the expansion in any form from residents around Kern County, including some as far away as Boron and Ridgecrest.

But some concerns still persist.

Adams, Broadwell, Joseph and Cardozo, a San Francisco law firm representing local building trade unions and an environmental group, filed more than 100 pages of comments that raised questions about additional air pollution and the threat of contaminated soil becoming airborne during construction.

The firm's letter also sharply criticized development plans that could put thousands more people close to the refinery. It referred to the Westside Parkway, a major new east-west roadway that would run along the refinery's south side, and West Village, a massive commercial/residential development planned for the corner of Brimhall and Coffee roads.

"Neither of these projects must be allowed to go ahead," attorney Gloria Smith's comment letter said. "The county has already allowed profoundly incompatible land uses through residential and commercial development all around the refinery ... These poor planning decisions may now put tens of thousands of residents at risk should there be a refinery accident. The county must not further compound these irreconcilable land uses by permitting additional non-industrial development in the refinery's shadow."

County planners will respond to the comments in an official document in coming weeks. They also plan to hold public workshops on the expansion project leading up to votes by the county Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors.

While the official comment period has ended, county planning officials said they will continue to accept and respond to any additional feedback received on the project until the matter goes before the Board of Supervisors for approval.

Big West officials received copies of the comments Tuesday afternoon but said they couldn't respond yet as they hadn't reviewed them.

Company officials have said they prefer their original expansion plan but would be comfortable with Alternative D, despite some of its economic drawbacks.

## **Dinuba-Reedley transit makes its debut**

By Lorie Ham

Reedley Exponent, Wednesday, August 13, 2008

At a time when gas prices are keeping people at home, alternative means of transportation are becoming more and more popular. In response to a need for more such services, the City of Dinuba together with Fresno County Rural Transit Agency (FCRTA), will soon be offering a transit service between Dinuba and Reedley.

This idea came about as a way to enhance the programs at the Dinuba Vocational Center, according to Blanca Beltran, Public Works Director for the City of Dinuba. "We kept hearing that some students weren't able to get to and from Reedley College. So this came up as a need that we needed to address."

Dinuba approached FCRTA about the idea, as this was a project they could not accomplish on their own, stated Beltran. FCRTA said they would be interested if a stop could be included at Wal-Mart, a destination they had received many requests for.

They moved forward with the project and are sharing the costs of approximately \$47,000 each, according to Jeff Webster, General Manager at FCRTA. "Fresno County's share comes from Measure-C and Tulare County's comes from their Measure-R."

The Dinuba/Reedley Transit service will begin on August 11 and provide a set route between the cities. It will run from the Dinuba Vocational Center to Reedley College, Sierra Kings Hospital and then back into Dinuba to Ridge Creek Golf Club, Wal-Mart and then return to the Vocational Center. During the summer, the first run will begin at 9:05 a.m. and continue round trips until 4:55 p.m., with an hour break from noon to one. Once school begins, the trips will run from 7:05 a.m. until to 8:55 p.m. with a break from noon to one and five to six. "We tried to incorporate other stops for other needs," reported Beltran. "That's why we added the stop at the hospital."

Fares for this route will be \$1.50 for adults, \$1.25 for students and seniors and free for children under five. There is also a 20-day student pass available for \$25.

Blanca feels that there is a regional benefit because it crosses two counties, and if needed a person could use the Fresno County Transit system to go from Dinuba to Fresno, Parlier or Sanger. For more information about inter-city service, you can call 1-800-325-7433.

Because Reedley Transit has been so successful, FCRTA will also be purchasing a fifth van for Reedley. According to Webster, two years ago Reedley attained the highest rider ship of their operations. "They have been averaging 75,000 passengers a year and requests continue to increase. We are adding the fifth vehicle to the operation in an effort to reduce waiting times and transport more passengers."

Webster went on to state that the funds for the new van would be paid for with the FCRTA's Measure-C funds, at a cost of approximately \$98,300. Those same funds will also cover the cost of a new two-way mobile radio system that includes vehicle tracking by GPS. "This will enable our dispatcher to better coordinate passenger requests to nearby vehicles." The system will also permit notification of on board emergencies.

Unlike the Dinuba/Reedley Transit service which runs on a set schedule, Reedley Transit operates on a demand responsive basis between 7 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday and 8 a.m. to noon and one to five on Saturdays. Fares are \$.75 per one-way trip for the general public, while those ages 60 to 64, the disabled and children with an adult can ride for \$.50. Those 65 and older are free with an ID.

To help with the demand of riders asking drivers to help them with their grocery bags, Reedley Transit will now be selling blue recyclable grocery bags for \$.50 each. Save Mart is discounting customers \$.10 when they bring in and use that type of bag. This service is also a benefit to the environment. An added benefit to the environment is that the transit vans are all powered by compressed natural gas for [cleaner air](#), stated Webster.

For more information on the new Dinuba/Reedley transit call 591-5924. For Reedley Transit information call 638-7057.

## **EcoChef: Small, traditional farms make big environmental impact**

By Aaron French

Tri-Valley Herald, Wednesday, August 13, 2008

CHEESEMAKER MANDY JOHNSTON of the Pedrozo Dairy and Cheese Company family loves her farm in the Central California town of Orland. Johnston makes about 600 pounds of cheese a week, starting with the raw milk from her cows.

In a several-step process of heating, cutting and pressing, she makes large wheels of cheese by hand, which then age for at least two months before they are ready to eat.

Johnston is part of a growing number of small meat and dairy producers who are returning to time-honored traditions of working with the land, not taking from it. For example, Johnston and her family run far fewer cows on their 20 acres than most dairy operations, because, she says, "It's important to us that we only keep the amount of cows that our pasture can healthfully maintain. We want the grass to be the main source of their diet, not a supplement to grain or hay."

I have previously written about the [high environmental costs](#) often associated with meat and dairy farming, including [greenhouse gas emissions](#) and land degradation. But as the above example illustrates, not all farms are created equal.

"The continuum of environmental impact is extremely wide," says Marissa Guggiana, president of Sonoma Direct meats.

The most important thing to look for, Guggiana says, are pasture-raised animals. Pasture-raised animals are able to walk around and graze naturally. Unfortunately, this is a far cry from the conditions in the typical Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) that have become the predominant method of raising livestock in the United States.

In fact, conditions are so extreme in many confined animal operations that the animals can't walk or even turn around. While many studies have shown that higher animal density does not necessarily lead to higher profits, the practice is encouraged by government subsidies and policies. In addition to the animal welfare concerns, CAFOs are also responsible for considerable water and air pollution that lower-density farms avoid.

The Prevention of Farm Animal Cruelty Act (California Proposition 2, on the state ballot this November) is a step in the right direction. Sponsored by the Californians for Humane Farms, its goal is to require that animals have the space to turn around and extend their limbs. The fact that such a reasonable idea needs a state proposition shows just how far removed from nature these farms have come.

Pasture-raised animals have none of these associated problems. While waste from confined high-density animals accumulates and can poison ground water, at lower densities the manure can naturally break down and form a beneficial fertilizer. What is toxic can become nourishment in the correct amount.

I asked a number of small dairy operations to tell me what made their farm more sustainable or environmentally friendly than a larger operation, and received a variety of answers. Sue Conley from the Cowgirl Creamery mentioned the solar panels at their creamery, and the fact that most of their staff can walk to work in Point Reyes. The nearby Strauss Dairy, used for Cowgirl Cheese, utilizes a methane digester to create electricity from manure.

Benoît de Korsak is proud that the ceramic containers St. Benoit yogurt uses keep hundreds of thousands of plastic cups out of landfills, and of the fact that their out-of-date yogurts are fed to the pigs, reducing waste. At Pedrozo dairy, they feed leftover whey from the cheese-making process to their animals.

Many of these are also farmstead operations, meaning that they only use milk from their farm to make cheese and yogurts. This increases freshness and also reduces the energy used in milk transport.

## **Highway 50 plan may not be green enough for state**

By Tony Bizjak

Sacramento Bee and Modesto Bee, Wednesday, August 13, 2008

In what appears to be a California first, state highway officials are shelving a major Highway 50 widening plan in Sacramento until they can study whether the expansion will contribute to global warming.

The state Department of Transportation announced Tuesday it will not fight a Sacramento court ruling that the agency conducted an incomplete environmental review for a project that would add lanes on the congested Rancho Cordova freeway.

For commuters in the fast-growing Highway 50 corridor, it means no new freeway elbow room – if any at all – until at least 2014.

The added lanes, planned between Sunrise Boulevard and Watt Avenue, would be designated for carpools, buses and high-mileage vehicles during morning and afternoon commutes.

The freeway already has carpool lanes between Sunrise Boulevard and El Dorado Hills, and Caltrans officials have talked of extending carpool lanes into downtown Sacramento.

The court ruling, issued in July by local Judge Timothy Frawley, marked the first time a California court ordered a study of greenhouse gas emissions for a transportation project, highway officials said. Scientists consider transportation a key source of greenhouse gases, which contribute to global warming.

Ironically, Caltrans had billed the project as environmentally sensitive because the lanes would encourage people to double up in cars or take transit, but the lawsuit came from the environmentalists.

The Environmental Council of Sacramento and Neighbors Advocating Sustainable Transportation contend that adding new lanes could encourage more car use and pollution. They challenged Caltrans to show otherwise.

In his ruling, Judge Frawley concluded the California Environmental Quality Act requires Caltrans to do more detailed analyses. He wrote that, in order to comply with the law, Caltrans also must look into whether more transit, such as buses and light rail, could serve a similar purpose as a widened freeway.

ECOS representative Eric Davis called Caltrans' decision to comply "fantastic."

"We want to have all the facts out there so we can get the public in Sacramento thinking about whether this is the direction we want to go," Davis said. "Do we want to build (big road) projects like we did in the 1950s, or do we really change our region?"

Jody Jones, Caltrans' Sacramento area district head, said the studies will be slow but hopefully won't derail the project.

"We'll be breaking new ground," Jones said. "It is going to take some time, a year to a year and a half."

The court ruling is limited to the Highway 50 expansion project, officials said. However, Jones said the Sacramento district office also will conduct greenhouse gas emission studies on future freeway-widening projects, such as planned HOV lanes on Interstate 5 between Elk Grove and downtown Sacramento.

Jones said Caltrans still hopes to build a seamless HOV network on Sacramento's core freeways, with HOV-only flyover ramps at major interchanges.

"Caltrans still believes that has tremendous benefits for mobility in the region," Jones said.

Caltrans officials said they also are reviewing the local court ruling to determine whether they should conduct more detailed environmental reviews on future projects elsewhere in the state.

State Attorney General Jerry Brown applauded the ruling and Caltrans' agreement to comply.

"This should quiet some of the more misguided critics who have been claiming the (California Environmental Quality Act) did not require analysis of greenhouse gas impacts," Brown said.

Although the ruling is limited to one project, it offers an indication of the role state agencies likely will play as California attempts to meet its mandate to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020.

The Governor's Office recently asked the state Air Resources Board to come up with guidelines next year for agencies such as Caltrans on how to conduct greenhouse gas emission studies.

## **Fewer Americans hit the road in June**

By JOAN LOWY, Associated Press Writer

Merced Sun-Star, Washington Post and other papers, Wed., Aug. 13, 2008

WASHINGTON -- As summer vacation season kicked in, Americans got out of their cars, driving 12.2 billion fewer miles in June than the same month a year earlier.

The 4.7 percent decline, which came while gas prices were peaking, was the biggest monthly driving drop in a downward trend that began in November, the Federal Highway Administration said Wednesday.

"Clearly, more Americans chose to stay close to home in June than in previous years," said Transportation Secretary Mary Peters.

Overall, Americans drove 53.2 billion fewer miles November through June than they did over the same eight-month period a year earlier, according to the highway agency's latest monthly report on driving. That's a larger decline than the 49.3 billion fewer miles driven by Americans over the entire decade of the 1970s, a period marked by oil embargoes and gas lines, the agency said.

Travel Industry Association spokeswoman Cathy Keefe said the June driving decline "is not surprising, given the environment that we were in." But she was optimistic that the recent drop in gas prices to below \$4 a gallon in many parts of the country will have travelers on the road again.

"I think people have started to take the increase in gas prices somewhat more in stride," Keefe said. The trade association is predicting only a 1.2 percent decline in all forms of business and leisure travel this year.

Some of the biggest declines in June compared with a year ago were in such popular vacation states as Maine, down 7 percent, and Florida, down 6 percent. Western states with wide-open spaces were also part of the trend - down 7.7 percent in Montana, 6.9 percent in Washington, 6.8 percent in Wyoming, 6.7 percent in Nevada, 6.2 percent in Kansas and 6.1 percent in Alaska.

The June driving data, collected by more than 4,000 automatic traffic recorders operated round-the-clock by state highway agencies, were supported by a telephone survey by AARP of people age 50 and over in which 67 percent said they have cut back on their driving because of high gas prices.

Four in 10 said they have used public transportation, walked or ridden a bicycle more frequently since gas prices have risen, according to the AARP poll, which was being released Wednesday.

Elinor Ginzler, AARP's senior vice president for livable communities, said she's concerned that communities don't have adequate sidewalks, bus shelters, bike lanes and public transportation options as more people look for other means to get around.

"More Americans age 50-plus are trying to leave their cars behind but face obstacles as soon as they walk out the door, climb on their bikes or head for the bus," Ginzler said.

AARP polled 1,006 people nationally between July 9 and July 15. The poll has margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

Gas consumption was down, too. The highway administration said motorists consumed 400 million fewer gallons of gasoline and 318 million fewer gallons of diesel in the first quarter of 2008 than in the same period in 2007.

Peters said the decline in driving will mean less money for highway repairs and construction projects needed to relieve traffic congestion. The Highway Trust Fund, which underwrites the projects, is funded by the federal 18.4 cents a gallon tax on gasoline and 24.4 cents a gallon tax on diesel.

"We can't afford to continue pinning our transportation network's future to the gas tax," Peters said. "Advances in higher fuel-efficiency vehicles and alternative fuels are making the gas tax an even less sustainable support for funding roads, bridges and transit systems."

The driving drop was not all bad, however.

"There is at least one silver lining in what's otherwise fairly painful news and that is that less driving means less air pollution and fewer global warming emissions," said Frank O'Donnell of the environmental group Clean Air Watch. Emissions from cars and trucks, along with power plants, are the top sources of air pollution, he said.

## **In Hanford, Wash., the country's most polluted nuclear reactor site draws tourists**

By Hugo Martin

L.A. Times, Wednesday, August 13, 2008

HANFORD REACH NATIONAL MONUMENT, WASH. -- A platoon of double-crested cormorants took flight from the eastern shore of the Columbia River, skimming the sun-sparkled surface as two slender white egrets stood in the nearby shallows, hunting small fish hiding in the reeds.

Twenty kayakers, mostly tourists from the Pacific Northwest, paddled along, letting the steady current do most of the work. They coasted past mule deer grazing on the shore, coyotes stalking the sandy beaches and cliff swallows buzzing the nearby white bluffs. But the main attraction was on the western shore: several bland, industrial-gray structures and towering smokestacks, a collection of buildings that gave birth to America's atomic age.

Welcome to the Hanford Reach, where one of the last free-flowing stretches of the Columbia River encounters America's most contaminated nuclear site. Along this flat, mostly treeless scrubland, the U.S. government built nine reactors between 1943 and 1963, including the historic "B" plant that produced the world's first weapons-grade plutonium for the nuclear bomb dropped

on Nagasaki, Japan, in World War II.

The reactors have leaked so much radioactivity into the air, land and water that the contamination caused by the Three Mile Island nuclear accident seems trivial by comparison. Yet merchants and tourism directors here in southern Washington state see the river and the shuttered reactors as a growing tourist draw.

Imagine a theme park next to the Chernobyl nuclear power plant.

As odd as it may sound, the idea seems to be working at Hanford.

The popular kayak tours are one example. Pat Welle, owner of Columbia Kayak Adventures, who leads two or three groups each month past the nuclear site, said her business had more than doubled since she started it in 2004. A jet-boat tour operator plans to add a second boat, and the river hosts several bass fishing tournaments each year.

"I think the attraction is the unique combination of scenery -- the white bluffs and the wildlife -- and that odd collection of nuclear sites," Welle said.

The reactors have long been shut down, but the surrounding land rumbles with bulldozers, dump trucks and crews in radiation suits working on a \$2-billion-a-year cleanup project -- the most expensive such project in the world, according to the U.S. Department of Energy.

The irony is that although the reactors contaminated hundreds of acres, government restrictions on access left the surrounding lands largely undisturbed for more than 40 years, allowing wildlife to flourish.

The effort to make the Hanford Reach a tourist hot spot got a boost in 2000, when President Clinton proclaimed 195,000 acres along the river and around the nuclear site a national monument. About 60,000 people now visit annually, including anglers, hikers, birders and history buffs.

That number is likely to grow under a plan by the National Park Service to upgrade boat launches and picnic sites and to open the B reactor for regular public tours. Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne is also expected this month to approve a recommendation by the park service to declare the B reactor a National Historic Landmark.

"I would like to see the B reactor preserved, because I would like that story to be told," said Kris Watkins, who heads the Tri-Cities Visitor & Convention Bureau, representing the nearby cities of Richland, Kennewick and Pasco. "I think it's a fascinating story."

The story began in 1942 when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began searching for a plutonium production site for the then-secret Manhattan Project. With large tracts of land and access to large volumes of water to cool the reactor, the Hanford area along the Columbia River seemed perfect.

The only problem: About 1,200 people in the small agricultural towns of Hanford, White Bluffs and Richland called it home.

But everyone had to sacrifice for the war effort. That is what the U.S. Department of War said in 1943, when it condemned the land, evacuated the towns and leveled all but a few buildings to make way for the nuclear facilities. Some residents had just a few days' notice to leave. Only the town of Richland was rebuilt and reincorporated, in 1958.

America's first large-scale nuclear reactor was built in only 11 months. Most workers at the B reactor were clueless about what they were developing until the atomic bomb was dropped on

Nagasaki. Later, a headline in the local paper announced: "Peace! Our Bomb Clinched It!"

During the next 20 years, the federal government built eight more reactors along the Columbia River in a 586-square-mile area known as the Hanford site. The reactors became the area's largest employer, with more than 51,000 local jobs.

But by the end of the Cold War, all the reactors had been shut down, and the challenge fell to the Department of Energy to clean up the contamination. The legacy of Hanford is now measured in half-lives.

In 1948, a dike at a reactor waste pond broke, dumping 28 pounds of uranium into the Columbia River. A federal report released in 1992 estimated that 685,000 curies of radioactive iodine-131 had been released into the river and air from the Hanford site between 1944 and 1947.

In comparison, about 43,000 curies of radioactive krypton and less than 20 curies of the particularly hazardous iodine-131 were released in the 1979 Three Mile Island nuclear accident. Exposure to iodine-131 can increase the risk of thyroid cancer.

Today, scientists and biologists extensively test almost every creature along the river, whether a tadpole or a deer.

Critics say that tourists who occasionally visit the Hanford Reach should be safe but that locals who regularly swim in, go boating on and eat fish from the river may have a higher risk of exposure to harmful contaminants, a charge that state health officials dispute.

"Would I eat fish out of that river? No way," said Gregory deBruler, an environmental health specialist with the Columbia Riverkeeper, a nonprofit environmental group dedicated to protecting the river.

A spokeswoman for the Washington State Department of Health's Office of Radiation Protection said that tests of fish from the river had not detected levels exceeding public health standards for radiation.

The task of cleaning up the mess has been daunting, involving the removal of millions of gallons of contaminated ground water, hundreds of tanks of liquid radioactive waste and thousands of tons of spent nuclear fuel. Even the tumbleweeds that blow across the site are scanned for radiation before being carted away for disposal.

Department of Energy officials say they don't know how long the cleanup work will take because they still don't know the extent of the contamination. The agency has built a massive landfill at the Hanford site to hold up to 10 million tons of contaminated materials. The still-radioactive cores of the reactors will be entombed in 4-foot-thick walls of concrete and steel for a minimum of 75 years. All the nuclear facilities except the B reactor will be off-limits to the public while the soil cleanup continues.

The cleanup project has become the second-largest employer in the region, behind agriculture, generating about 11,000 jobs. But locals hope that when the cleanup is done, tourism will take over as the region's new economic engine.

The jet boat roared to life at the wooden dock at Howard Amon Park in Richland and rocketed up the Columbia River toward the Hanford Reach National Monument. Seated inside, 15 tourists craned their necks over the side, the brisk morning air blowing in their faces.

The high-speed, 60-mile tour of the river extends to the heart of the monument, where radiation warning signs and shuttered nuclear reactors dot the flat landscape.

Clarence Reynolds, a contractor for the city of Walla Walla, took the boat tour on a recent

Saturday morning with a group of friends to celebrate his 73rd birthday. Along the way, he spotted deer grazing along the shores, a coyote sauntering in the shadows of 300-foot bluffs, white pelicans feeding along a beach and several blue herons and white egrets soaring over the river.

Near a popular fishing spot called Ringold, the boat passed an angler who had hooked a 4-foot sturgeon, a prehistoric-looking fish that can grow up to 15 feet long in these waters.

A few minutes later, the boat's captain stopped the engines near the shore so the tourists could get a closer look at two osprey chicks squawking in a twig nest perched on an old telephone pole.

Reynolds took the tour to see the wildlife, the scenery and the historic reactors. And it didn't disappoint. "It was great," he said afterward. "Awesome."

Even more popular than the boat trips are the occasional tours of the historic B reactor offered by the Department of Energy. Visitors can see the original controls, dials and nuclear core that produced the world's first weapons-grade plutonium.

But getting a spot on the tour is mostly a matter of luck and mouse-clicking speed. When the federal agency opens online registration, the tour fills up in five or six minutes. Visitors, according to the Energy Department, are mostly history buffs and World War II veterans who want to see the reactor that helped end the war.

Even though the agency has increased the number of tours from 18 last year to 48 this year to meet the demand, all those for the rest of 2008 have been filled. If the National Park Service takes over the tours, they would be expanded significantly.

Kayak outfitters and tour operators say that despite Hanford's contamination problems, few visitors express fear about swimming, fishing or boating near the reactors.

Grant Nakamura, a computer programmer from Kennewick who took a kayak tour of the Hanford Reach, said that he had faith in the crews monitoring and cleaning up the land.

"People in the tri-cities know what it's all about, and they are not worried," he said.

In fact, Hanford's contamination is fodder for some lighthearted humor in nearby Richland.

At the Octopus' Garden, a T-shirt and novelty store, customers can buy shirts emblazoned with the radiation warning symbol and expressions such as "I came, I saw, I glow," "Hanford is a rad place to work" and "Kiss me, I'm hot."

And if the Hanford site becomes the tourist hot spot that locals envision, visitors can pick up souvenirs at the Octopus' Garden and then walk a few blocks to the Atomic Ale Brewpub and Eatery, where they can order atomic chicken skewers, chocolate containment cake and Atomic Amber beer, which is promoted as "radiating with flavor."

## **Suppliers say U.S. risks losing electric car race**

By Soyoung Kim

San Diego Union-Tribune Tuesday, August 12, 2008

TRAVERSE CITY, Mich. – Mounting losses for the U.S. auto industry threaten investment in cutting-edge battery development, raising the risk U.S. companies will be shut out in the race to produce the most valuable components in electric cars, industry executives say.

Executives at U.S. auto parts companies gathered for a forum in Traverse City, Michigan, said the U.S. government needs to provide incentives to support the industry until costs for electric vehicles, including plug-in hybrids, fall far enough to make investments profitable.

That process could take up to a decade, executives said, warning that key battery technology for the emerging electric car market will otherwise be dominated by companies from Japan, Korea and China.

“For electric vehicles, nearly all major components come from Asia. We don’t want to create another cartel for renewable energy, sustainable mobility,” said MaryAnn Wright, who runs the hybrid business of Johnson Controls Inc.

The U.S. auto industry has become increasingly outspoken about the need for the next administration to dedicate more funding to support electric car development efforts, shifting the focus of policymakers away from hydrogen and ethanol production.

While automakers including General Motors Corp are racing to take a lead in electrification of vehicles, the bulk of key components, such as next-generation lithium-ion batteries, are supplied by Asian companies.

Toyota Motor Corp, which dominates the global market for gasoline-electric hybrids with its Prius, plans to start producing lithium-ion batteries next year from a joint venture with Matsushita Electric Industrial Co.

Nissan Motor Co also has joint ventures with NEC Corp to mass-produce lithium-ion batteries next year.

Lithium-ion batteries – lighter, smaller, longer-lasting and capable of holding more power than the nickel-metal batteries which power the current gasoline-electric hybrids – are used for plug-ins such as GM’s heavily-touted Chevrolet Volt, which will be powered entirely by an electric motor and can be charged through an ordinary power socket.

“The role of the local and state governments is going to be the incentives they can provide to companies who want to get into the business and establishing that infrastructure,” said Wright, who previously headed hybrid development efforts at Ford Motor Co.

A sharp rise in gasoline prices and a consumer stampede from large trucks and SUVs have made it more urgent for the U.S. automakers to develop fuel-efficient cars. But investment costs are a big burden to the struggling U.S. automakers and their suppliers, executive say.

U.S.-based auto suppliers lost a combined \$10 billion between 2002 and 2007, while Asian suppliers racked up a combined \$42 billion profit in that period and European suppliers earned \$24 billion, according to restructuring advisory Alix Partners.

In addition, analysts estimate plug-in batteries could add \$10,000 or more to the cost of a vehicle, a higher premium on the sticker price than for current gas-electric hybrids.

GM, which plans to limit production of the highly-touted Volt, has indicated it will not make money on the planned 2010 launch of the plug-in hybrid.

Toyota, the world’s largest automaker, has plans for more extended real-world testing of a plug-in Prius around the time of the Volt’s planned launch.

## LOBBYING FOR HELP

In June, the U.S. Department of Energy announced it would give \$30 million over the next three years to help fund plug-in projects undertaken by Chrysler LLC, General Motors Corp and Ford.

"We must ensure we have a domestic battery supply," Ford's president of North American operations Mark Fields said at the time in urging more substantial government aid.

Arvin Innovation Inc, the auto parts business being spun off from ArvinMeritor Inc, plans to focus in part on electronic control systems and electric motors, aiming to take advantage of the industry's move toward electric and hybrid vehicles.

Chief Executive Phil Martens, speaking to Reuters on the sidelines of the Center for Automotive Research's Management Briefing Seminar, said U.S. government support was crucial for the industry.

"We have to become competitive with worldwide capabilities for fuel economy and emissions, and I think in certain areas we are behind," Martens said.

### **Car-crazy Beijing staying parked**

By Kevin Johnson

USA TODAY, Tuesday, August 12, 2008

BEIJING — For months, Rebecca Wong had been pressing her husband, Jackie, for a second car.

With a baby on the way and her husband, who was taking the couple's BMW to work, the family desired a bit more mobility to navigate the enormous city.

But now, Jackie Wong said outside a downtown BMW dealership, is not the time.

High fuel prices and new anti-pollution regulations that restrict the use of personal vehicles to alternate days based on odd and even license-plate numbers has put a damper on Beijing's car-crazy culture.

Of the estimated 3 million cars in the capital, the Beijing Municipal Government estimates that at least half have been forced off the road each day to comply with the new driving rules aimed at reducing city smog for the Olympic Games.

The guidelines were put in place July 20 and will be enforced at least through Sept. 20, for the duration of the Olympic and Paralympic games as part of the city's initial bid agreement to deal with its longstanding air-pollution problems. Government officials have said they also are considering some traffic-related anti-pollution measures after the games are over.

The smog still lingers, but the usual traffic-choked streets have begun to open up.

"Air quality is not where it should be, but there has been a remarkable improvement against the backdrop of enormous economic growth," Achim Steiner, director of the United Nations environmental program, recently told Beijing's Olympic organizers.

The forced — although temporary — closing of pollution-belching factories and the new driving controls are being credited with some of the improvements.

But not everybody is so enthusiastic.

"There is no way it (vehicle restrictions) can continue after the Olympics," said Derek Zhang, senior sales consultant at the sleek Dong Bao BMW showroom in the city's central Chaoyang District.

Although Zhang said there has been little impact on the business so far, the new rules of the road certainly weren't helping.

The well-appointed showroom was quiet on a recent afternoon even as the sidewalks outside were bustling.

"I think that people can accept it now because of the Olympics," he said. "But I don't know whether people will accept it after the games are over."

Frustrated by the new rules, Jackie Wong said he parked his BMW two weeks ago and is now taking the subway to his office, where he works as an information technology products salesman.

Reaching into his wallet, he proudly produced a shiny new subway fare card.

"It's my first one," he said, adding that public transportation has extended his commute by about 20 minutes.

Others, however, are reaping some major benefits from the Olympics-related regulations.

Bike dealers and repair-shop owners around the city are reporting a brisk business.

From the high-end road bikes stacked in Jia Qie Dong's Windspeed shop to the classic Beijing "flying pigeons" offered by Li Xue Fang at Yong Feng Jie Mei and Miss Liu's cluttered showroom, recent sales have owners smiling and hustling.

Liu's shop has been in its downtown location for about 40 years. She said the Chinese government once came calling to present former President George H.W. Bush with a classic model, outfitted with basket and bell.

These days, local Chinese are fueling a steady demand.

At Windspeed, weekly sales are now up by about 50%.

"Business has been great," Jia said.

## **China raises tax on big cars to cut pollution**

By Elaine Kurtenbach

USA Today, Washington Post and other papers, Tuesday, August 13, 2008

SHANGHAI, China—China is raising its sales tax on big cars to as high as 40 percent, and drastically cutting taxes on small cars, in its latest attempt to combat emissions that contribute to heavy blankets of smog over most of its cities.

The tax on passenger vehicles with engines bigger than 4 liters will be doubled to 40 percent from 20 percent, effective Sept. 1, the Finance Ministry said Wednesday in a statement on its Web site. Those buying vehicles with engines sized from 2 liters up to 4 liters will have to pay a 25 percent tax, up from the current 15 percent, it said.

"Autos are the giants of energy consumption and pollution emissions and this is a major part of the effort to conserve resources and reduce emissions," the ministry said.

The sales tax for cars with engines at or smaller than 1 liter would drop to 1 percent from the current 3 percent, the Finance Ministry said.

Tax rates of 5 percent to 9 percent for vehicles with other-sized engines remain unchanged.

China is the world's second biggest market for passenger cars, with some analysts forecasting that sales could reach 10 million this year.

The country's big cities have imposed auto emissions standards that exceed those in the U.S. and are at least equal to European levels. Shanghai has banned heavily polluting small motor scooters and limits access to its downtown areas by vehicles failing to meet clean air standards.

At the same time, authorities are seeking ways to reduce fuel consumption amid major shortages, especially of diesel.

But overall, China appears to have made little headway in its struggle to reduce auto emissions, seen most prominently in the effort to keep smoggy Beijing's skies clear during the Olympic games.

Vehicle exhaust accounts for about 80 percent of urban air pollution. Many cities are frequently cloaked in a toxic gray haze that has grown worse as the numbers of vehicles on the roads has risen precipitously in recent years.

Pollution by large commercial vehicles and many buses appears to go unchecked.

Auto purchases are less affected by high global oil prices in China than in the West because government controls keep retail gasoline and diesel prices at levels that are among the world's lowest.

While the majority of passenger cars sold in China are compact cars, drivers who can afford them are increasingly opting for bigger vehicles. The China Association of Automobile Manufacturers reported that sales of big sedans rose nearly 50 percent in the first half of this year, while automakers say sales of SUVs and luxury sedans have doubled.

[Washington Post Letter to the Editor Wed., Aug. 13, 2008](#)

### **Real Help for Smart Growth**

The Aug. 11 editorial "Smart Growth" described part of Sen. Barack Obama's "New Energy for America" plan this way:

"The effort puts a premium on residential and commercial development that minimizes fuel use and cuts greenhouse gas emissions by maximizing density and transportation alternatives that get people out of their cars."

Fine. But why stop at that? How about some tax incentives to make companies want to locate (a) where their workers live or (b) where their workers can afford to live close to the job? How about financial help with telecommuting, or a fund to allow people to move closer to work by providing help with closing costs on a home purchase?

Think how much we would save for every person who could walk to work.

GARY MASTERS

Rockville

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses more than 20 cities in the US have committed to a cleaner environment. Cities such as New York and Las Vegas have announced that they will begin to measure gas emissions and how they will reduce them to have a lesser impact on the environment. For more information on this and other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at (559) 230-5851.

### **Más de 20 ciudades de EE.UU. se comprometen con el medio ambiente**

Terra, Monday, August 11, 2008

Washington.- Una veintena de ciudades estadounidenses, entre las que se encuentran Nueva York y Las Vegas, anunciaron que empezarán a medir sus emisiones de gases con efecto invernadero para intentar reducir en el futuro su impacto medioambiental.

Además, otras nueve ciudades están considerando incorporarse al programa creado por Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP), organización sin ánimo de lucro fundada en el 2000, que representa a 385 inversores institucionales mundiales con unos activos combinados de más de 57 billones de dólares y que se dedica a recoger información sobre el cambio climático de más de 3.000 empresas internacionales.

Paul Dickinson, consejero delegado de CDP, señaló que las 21 ciudades que anunciaron su participación en el proyecto utilizarán las herramientas de su organización para analizar las emisiones de operaciones como los servicios de bomberos, policías municipales y transporte.

Dickinson destacó que "más del 70 por ciento de las emisiones globales son generadas por las ciudades. Si esas emisiones no se miden no se pueden controlar".

El consejero delegado añadió que el entendimiento de sus emisiones "es un paso vital para los gobiernos municipales que desean comprender mejor los riesgos y oportunidades asociados con el cambio climático y preparar mejor sus ciudades para el futuro".

Por su parte, el alcalde de [Nueva York](#), Michael Bloomberg, afirmó a través de un comunicado que su ciudad "se une a las principales empresas del mundo en proporcionar una contabilidad completa y exacta de sus emisiones de carbono, las estrategias que está empleando para mitigar esas emisiones y los resultados de sus esfuerzos".

Dickinson señaló que CDP tendrá los primeros datos de emisiones de las 21 ciudades estadounidenses a finales de año y animó a los gobiernos municipales de cualquier ciudad del mundo en participar en el proyecto.

"Solo tienen que contactarnos y expresar su deseo de participar en el programa a largo plazo. Nosotros les proporcionaremos las herramientas para evaluar su impacto medioambiental", dijo Dickinson.

Terra/EFE

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses California must maintain strict objectives on the automotive industry to push them to produce more less contaminating vehicles.

### **California debe mantener objetivos estrictos en vehículos anticontaminantes**

Manuel Ocaño

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingue, Wednesday, August 13, 2008

La Unión de Científicos Comprometidos contra el sobrecalentamiento instó hoy a la Oficina de Recursos del Aire de California a mantener objetivos estrictos con las empresas automotrices para que produzcan más autos y más modelos anticontaminantes.

La oficina concluye este jueves una consulta sobre una propuesta de reducir de 25 mil, a dos mil 500 los vehículos de cero emisiones que deberán circular en el estado entre los años 2012 y 2014.

Los científicos advirtieron que deben mantenerse los 25 mil vehículos anticontaminantes, por objetivos ambientales de California, pero también para evitar que el reducido número de modelos quede sólo en muestras para exhibiciones automotrices.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses that if gas emissions are not measured, they can not be controlled.](#)

### **Si las emisiones de gases no se miden, no se pueden controlar**

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingue, Monday, August 11, 2008

Ante el hecho de que más del 70 de las emisiones globales de carbono son generadas por las ciudades, de acuerdo con el Proyecto de Divulgación del Carbono (CDP, por sus siglas en inglés), la ciudad de Nueva York y Las Vegas se unen junto con otras 19 ciudades al esfuerzo de medir sus emisiones de gases con efecto invernadero para intentar reducir en el futuro su impacto medioambiental.

La CDP anunció que las 21 ciudades que aceptaron unirse al proyecto global de medición de la contaminación, utilizarán las herramientas y tecnología con que dispone esta organización no lucrativa fundada en el año 2000 y con un capital activo de 57 mil millones de dólares, que recoge datos sobre la contaminación de unas tres mil empresas en el mundo.

El consejero de CDP, Paul Dickinson declaró a la prensa que el proyecto de medir las emisiones de dichos gases “es un paso vital para los gobiernos municipales que desean comprender mejor los riesgos y oportunidades asociados con el cambio climático y preparar mejor sus ciudades para el futuro”.

Se calcula tener listos los primeros datos de emisiones de las 21 ciudades estadounidenses afiliadas a dicho programa, a finales de este año; y animó a los gobiernos municipales de cualquier ciudad del mundo a participar en el proyecto, para lo que sólo tienen que contactar a CDP y expresar su deseo de participar en dicho programa y recibirán las herramientas adecuadas para evaluar su impacto medio ambiente, declaró Dickinson.

Si las emisiones de gases que producen efecto invernadero no se miden, no se pueden controlar, sostuvo la CDP.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses warnings about the air quality have risen amongst Olympic athletes in Beijing.](#)

### **Aumentan advertencia a competidores olímpicos sobre contaminación**

Manuel Ocaño

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingue, Monday, August 11, 2008

El inicio de los Juegos Olímpicos en Bejín despertó tanto interés entre aficionados como entre científicos que analizan el impacto de la contaminación del aire.

Especialistas estadounidenses advirtieron que aunque el gobierno chino redujo emisiones durante las olimpiadas, persisten factores de riesgo especialmente para atletas con asma.

La combinación de calor, humedad y contaminación puede disparar el asma en atletas con mucha mayor notoriedad que entre personas con niveles de salud promedio, según expertos canadienses y estadounidenses.