

Pollution danger higher than earlier estimated

By Jane Kay, Chronicle science writer
S.F. Chronicle, Friday, May 23, 2008

Microscopic air pollutants from trucks, cars, power plants and wood burning may pose greater health problems than previously believed, according to state researchers.

The new estimates were released Thursday in response to a request from the California Air Resources Board, which was seeking up-to-date research on premature deaths associated with inhaling particles one-thirtieth the width of a strand of hair.

Based on 60 studies worldwide and advice from a team of experts, including the World Health Organization, the researchers concluded that the new risk factor for fine-particle pollution is 70 percent higher than previously estimated.

The report, also reviewed by scientists at UC Berkeley, could serve as the basis for strengthening state - and perhaps federal - air-quality regulations.

"Particle pollution is a silent killer," state Air Resources Board Chairwoman Mary Nichols said after receiving the report Thursday at a board meeting in Fresno.

Most of the premature deaths linked to California's bad air occur in regions surrounding San Francisco Bay, Los Angeles and the San Joaquin Valley. The drop in fine particulates statewide in the last decade, particularly in cities, has been 30 percent.

One region that saw even greater improvement, the San Joaquin Valley, decreased 45 percent over the same time period due to new regulations, according to state air officials. The board added even more regulations Thursday by restricting wood burning to up to 35 days in the winter as well as requiring employers to start carpools.

Direct link

The state's study found a direct correlation between increased pollution from specks of dust, soot, metals and soil and a greater number of hospitalizations, emergency visits and missed school days.

Health problems were generally related to respiratory illnesses and heart disease. Some studies reported bouts of asthma and bronchitis. Even small increases can affect children, the elderly and people with chronic diseases, researchers say.

The cost of hospitalizations, physician visits and lost work days connected to airborne specks of dust and tiny droplets could reach \$70 billion a year, health officials said.

Numbers of premature deaths are difficult to estimate because the scientific knowledge isn't far enough along to determine a safe level of the tiny particles. California's average small-particle concentration is about 14 micrograms of PM2.5, or particles less than 2.5 micrometers in diameter, per cubic meter of air. The San Francisco Bay's average over the past three years is 10.69 micrograms.

Assuming that a safe level is 7 micrograms of PM2.5 per cubic meter of air - half as clean as the state's air - means that there would still be about 14,000 to 24,000 premature deaths every year in the state associated with these small particles, the study said. That is two to three times the number of deaths previously predicted.

Currently, the cleanest cities in the country generally measure 7 micrograms of PM2.5 per cubic meters of air in the atmosphere.

At that level, there would still be 1,800 to 3,200 deaths a year in the Bay Area; 8,100 to 14,000 in the Los Angeles region, and 2,000 to 3,500 in the San Joaquin Valley.

"The risk in a highly polluted area is similar to living with a smoker," said Bart Croes, the board's chief of research.

The forest fires burning in the Santa Cruz Mountains can cause serious health problems for people breathing in the smoke, he said. The assessments on premature deaths in the study include the effects of California fires in the last few years.

Fine particles - whether from fires or industrial emissions or traffic - penetrate deeply into the lung and inflame the lung tissue. There is evidence that they can cross the tissue into the blood stream, and accumulate in the organs.

Scientists today believe that it's the size that causes the problem. However, research continues to see if materials in the particles such as metals or other toxic compounds may be the ones most responsible for the damage to the body.

Cancer study

Most of the studies used in the re-evaluation were epidemiological studies. Included in the report was an American Cancer Society study of 300,000 people in cities nationwide. Over 18 years, the cancer society looked at people who lived in cities that had low levels of small particulate matter and compared them to people who lived in cities with higher levels.

Researchers looked at diet, smoking habits and other factors in trying to isolate the pollution effects, which Croes noted was a difficult task.

As part of the assessment, they looked at changes in death rates during a coal-burning ban in Dublin, Ireland, sulfur dioxide reduction under new regulations in Hong Kong and a steel mill strike in Utah Valley.

Representatives of the Western States Petroleum Association said they hadn't yet evaluated the draft of the study. The California Truckers Association, which is expected to comment, didn't respond to queries from The Chronicle.

The air board will accept comments until July 11. The study could be accepted by the board as early as August.

See the study

Read the draft study on premature deaths associated with fine particulates:
links.sfgate.com/ZDMA <http://links.sfgate.com/ZDMA>

Fierce winds in Lodi knock down trees, knock out power

By Layla Bohm - News-Sentinel Staff Writer
Lodi news Sentinel, Friday, May 23, 2008

Last week, Lodi sweltered through triple-digit heat. This week, it's howling winds. Does that mean next week will bring rain?

Well, no, but the wind will die down, forecasters say.

The strong winds knocked down several large trees, including a well-recognized one at Lodi Lake and another that knocked out power to 4,001 customers Thursday morning.

A city wind gauge clocked gusts at 38 mph, and that was the cause of Thursday's power outage that began at 8:44 a.m., said Rob Lechner, customer service manager for Lodi Electric Utility.

The culprit, he said, was a tree at Hale Park, at Stockton and Locust streets. The locust tree had split years ago, and half of it blew into power lines and came to rest against a power pole.

The power lines actually held the tree up, and the only actual damage was a bent bolt on the pole and a broken glass encasing, both minor issues, Lechner said.

Electric crews isolated the problem and began rerouting electricity, restoring it to 2,000 customers by 9:02 a.m., Lechner said. Another 1,300 got power at 10:07 a.m., and the remaining 701 customers had electricity at 10:23 a.m.

Areas affected by the power outage included neighborhoods between the Mokelumne River and Kettleman Lane, and from Hutchins Street to Highway 99, Lechner said.

Meanwhile, Lodi residents pulled branches from yards and dodged blowing leaves and dust. Despite the power outage that temporarily blackened some traffic signals, no vehicle collisions were attributed to the signal lights, according to police.

Around 10:15 a.m., a large tree branch broke loose across from the Lodi Public Library, 201 W. Locust St., and landed on a Toyota pick-up truck.

Owner Mike Sudderth walked out of the library to find that the roof was dented and a side mirror was mostly demolished. He'd almost parked one space back when arriving at the library, and he wondered what would have happened if an elderly woman had instead parked in his spot.

"That's a lot of weight," he said of the large tree limb. "It could have killed somebody if they'd been walking by."

Tree branches, large and small, littered the city, but they were all small compared to the giant tree that fell at Lodi Lake.

Countless visitors who travel around trees in the middle of the road to the nature area will no longer see one of them — it fell across the northbound part of the road. By 7 a.m., city workers had assessed the damage and checked the nature area.

On North Sacramento Street, a tree limb broke loose, just missed a telephone line and came to rest in a small pond in Dennis Norton's front yard.

Next door, at Llantera Paz Tire Shop, a metal roof flapped in the wind, and Francisco Cuen was soon put to work, using an electric drill to keep his uncle's roof from flying away.

And at University of the Pacific in Stockton, wind knocked out an entire section of the stained glass in Burns Tower. The frame landed in a tree, glass shards scattered and the building was evacuated.

The wind is expected to die down by today, according to a spokesman with private forecasting firm AccuWeather, with winds from the west at 6 to 12 mph today, and 7 to 14 mph through the rest of the Memorial Day weekend. Temperatures should be around 70 today, and in the low 70s this weekend.

In the meantime, the [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#) warned residents to avoid lengthy exposure to blowing dust. It especially affects those with breathing problems, and can raise the risk of heart attacks for those with heart troubles, spokesman Anthony Presto said.

Winds whipped waves in the Delta, where no boating incidents were reported, according to the U.S. Coast Guard, which issued a wind and wave advisory. The warning, which extends through this afternoon, affected Point Reyes to Pigeon Point.

High winds cause power outages in Tracy

By Jennifer Gokhman

Tri-Valley Herald, Friday, May 23, 2008

TRACY — Students sat in darkened classrooms with light coming through the windows on Thursday at South/West Park School in Tracy, where the electricity was out. Every time the doors opened, gusts of wind blew in, causing papers to flutter.

Winds blew at 15 to 25 mph with gusts over 30 mph Thursday, following a windy Wednesday, said Steve Anderson, a forecaster with the National Weather Service. The winds caused tree branches to fall, and a brown cloud of dust hung over Tracy. The wind is expected to be lighter today and will die down to a breeze with temperatures in the 70s for the Memorial Day weekend, according to the National Weather Service.

The Tracy Public Works department removed 14 trees, some of which had fallen and some that were too risky to leave in place, as well as fallen branches throughout the day, said Kevin Tobeck, director of public works. The trees did not cause property damage.

"We were very fortunate," he said.

Power was out in several areas throughout town, said Nicole Tam, PG&E spokeswoman, leaving nearly 750 customers without power.

"It was all wind-related," Tam said. "Some areas, I heard, have record-breaking winds."

Wind knocked trees into power lines, and lines were hitting one another, Tam added.

Students at South/West Park School happened to be studying pioneer activities — such as churning butter — that did not require electricity.

The school was set on a rainy-day schedule to keep the students indoors and out of the wind, said Principal Ramona Soto.

"Because of the air quality "... when it's so windy like this, we keep kids inside," she said.

This is the first time this year the school has been on a rainy-day schedule because of wind, though it has happened in previous years, Soto added.

The air quality in Tracy was moderate as of Thursday afternoon, said Anthony Presto, [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#) spokesperson.

"Areas (with) gusty winds were kicking up fine particulate matter," he said, suggesting that on days where there are high winds, people should limit their time outside.

Particulate matter can cause lung damage, asthma problems and harm people with heart disease, he added.

If the wind dies down today, as forecast, the dust should settle. If not, the amount of particulate matter in the air will be high again, he said.

The Worst is over

By Eric Firpo

Tracy Press, late Thursday, May 22, 2008

Tracy's police department had to use a backup generator for about three hours today after a second day of fierce wind downed lines that knocked out power in spots all over the city and for a time blotted out the sun with a cloud of dust.

Swirling gale-force gusts shoved over trees in parks and next to streets throughout town, snapped limbs and branches, and were partly responsible for power failures as they cut through lines like a karate chop, said Pacific Gas and Electric spokeswoman Nicole Tam. Power was lost when lines slapped together, she said.

At about 9:30 a.m., the police department fired up a backup generator to keep on the electricity and stay open for business.

The Lolly Hansen Senior Center and the parks department next door were less fortunate, as offices went dark for about three hours before electricity was restored. The Grand Theatre Center for the Arts also lost power for a few hours.

Tam said about 745 customers in Tracy lost power because of the windstorm, and about 4,400 customers were without power countywide.

The debris sent city workers scrambling, with about 25 or 30 people in crews for the public works department scurrying around to clean up detritus from the powerful windstorm.

Fourteen trees had to be taken out after they fell over, said Public Works Director Kevin Tobek, and countless more limbs were cleared from streets, sidewalks and parks. But the downfalls caused surprisingly little wreckage.

"We don't have any reports of property damage or bodily damage," he said. "Everything fell in the right place."

While whipping winds sent limbs crashing to the ground, it also lifted clouds of dust so large and thick that by mid-morning, it turned a blue sky brown and left the taste of dirt on tongues.

"A lot of dust was being picked up everywhere," said Anthony Presto, spokesman for the [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#). "What's most important is that people really limit their exposure to it. It's not a good time for kids to be out playing."

The National Weather Service predicts the end of the windstorm is in sight, though gusts are still expected Friday morning.

"By tomorrow afternoon, things will start to calm down," said Jared Leighton of the weather service.

Conservative group hits senators on climate bill

By JIM KUHNHENN , Associated Press Writer

Modesto Bee, Tuesday, May 27, 2008

WASHINGTON — A conservative, free-market advocacy group will begin airing ads this week pressing Senate Republicans and Democrats to vote against a bill that aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The Club for Growth wants to scuttle a bill by Sens. Joe Lieberman, an independent from Connecticut, and John Warner, R-Va., that the Senate is scheduled to begin debating next month. Despite the ad campaign, the bill seems to lack the votes needed to overcome a filibuster.

With \$250,000 in radio and television spots, the Club for Growth is targeting Republican Sens. Elizabeth Dole of North Carolina and Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, and Democratic Sens. Robert Byrd and Jay Rockefeller of West Virginia and Max Baucus and Jon Tester of Montana. Dole, a co-sponsor of the bill, as well as Alexander, Baucus and Rockefeller face re-election this year.

"Congress is at it again," a television ad airing in Tennessee says. "This time they're pushing massive new taxes and regulation in the name of global warming. But let's ask ourselves, are the unproven benefits of legislation worth the major job losses, new taxes and increased energy costs that could result?"

"Call Senator Lamar Alexander and tell him to vote no on the Lieberman-Warner climate bill. Tennesseans just can't afford another huge, costly government program."

All but the Montana ads will air Tuesday. Ads aimed at Tester and Baucus will air next week.

The proposed legislation calls for capping carbon dioxide emissions from power plants, transportation and industrial sources with a goal of reducing greenhouse gases by 71 percent by mid-century.

Democrats have proposed huge tax reductions to help people pay higher energy prices as a result of the shift from fossil fuels to other energy sources. The money would come from auctioning off greenhouse gas emission allowances to utilities and industry.

Club for Growth President Pat Toomey, a former Republican congressman from Pennsylvania, called the legislation a "massive redistribution of wealth."

"This would be extremely destructive to economic growth," he said. "If it dies here in June, we will be very alert to any prospects of its revival."

The Club for Growth ads also come after Republican presidential candidate John McCain recently spelled out an energy policy that embraces a cap-and-trade system similar to that envisioned by Warner and Lieberman. McCain, however, has not endorsed the Lieberman-Warner bill and has called for greater reliance on nuclear power to reduce greenhouse gases.

"The fundamentals that Senator McCain seems to support are badly misguided," Toomey said.

Despite its conservative outlook, The Club for Growth has shown no qualms about targeting Republicans in the past. It has supported conservative challengers to incumbent Republicans in congressional primaries. And earlier this year, an affiliated group, ClubforGrowth.net, aired ads that criticized the tax record of former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, a Republican presidential candidate.

Agreement on 2020 emissions target eludes G8 ministers

By JOSEPH COLEMAN - Associated Press Writer

Sacramento Bee, Monday, May 26, 2008

KOBE, Japan -- Under pressure to boost talks on a new global warming pact, Group of Eight environment ministers on Monday endorsed slashing greenhouse gas emissions in half by mid-century, but failed to agree on much more contentious near-term targets.

The three-day meeting in Kobe was dominated by calls from the U.N., European countries and developing nations to move forward on setting targets for cutting emissions by 2020. Scientists say those targets are needed to avoid the worst effects of global warming.

But the ministers from the U.S., Japan, Germany, France, Britain, Canada, Italy and Russia, in a carefully worded statement, mentioned only the need to set such targets eventually. That frustrated environmentalists and some European ministers.

"From a scientific point of view, we need a clear reduction target, because the next 20 years are very vital, very important for climate change and the decisions we make in this process," said Matthias Machnig, Germany's state minister for environment.

The Kobe meeting was meant to set the stage for the G8 summit in Toyako, Japan, in July. Tokyo has put climate change at the center of the agenda, and many are hoping for a strong signal from the summit to push forward wider international talks on global warming.

In their statement, the ministers said there was "strong political will" to reach agreement at the summit to cut emissions 50 percent by 2050. The statement also cited the need for global gas emissions to peak within the next 10 to 20 years, and it called on developing countries with rapidly expanding greenhouse gas emissions to work to curb the rate of increase.

"As we head toward the Toyako summit, I believe this meeting has provided momentum," said Japanese Environment Minister Ichiro Kamoshita.

The ministers also acknowledged developing nations' demands for help in financing and technology transfer to become more energy efficient, develop their economies more cleanly, and adapt to changes wrought by warming, such as rising sea levels.

The U.N. launched negotiations late last year on a new climate change pact to take over when the first phase of the Kyoto Protocol expires at the end of 2012. Negotiators face a deadline of December 2009, when some 190 nations will meet in Copenhagen, Denmark.

Deep divisions, however, have plagued the talks.

European nations support a U.N. scientific finding that emissions cuts of between 25 percent to 40 percent by 2020 are needed to stop global temperatures from rising so high they trigger widespread environmental damage. The United States, however, considers such cuts beyond reach, while Japan says it's premature to commit to 2020 limits. Developing nations are clamoring for commitments by rich countries before they discuss what poorer countries should do.

Environmentalists were disappointed with Monday's announcement.

"Kobe gave ministers the opportunity to accelerate the slow progress of G8 climate negotiations, but they failed to send a signal of hope for a breakthrough" at the July summit, said Naoyuki Yamagishi, head of the Climate Change Program at WWF Japan, in a statement.

U.N. climate chief Yvo de Boer said strong national commitments to cut gases by industrialized countries were needed to encourage rapidly developing nations such as China and India to curb their own emissions.

"While I think a long-term goal is good, I hope that agreeing to one doesn't consume too much time and detract from what I think should be the primary focus, namely providing clarity on where rich nations intend to be in 2020," he said.

The United States, the top greenhouse gas emitter in the G8 and the only leading industrialized nation that has not ratified the Kyoto Protocol, argued that midterm goals were too sensitive to be set without lengthy negotiations.

Scott Fulton, deputy assistant administrator at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, called for commitments from heavily polluting emerging economies. He also defended U.S. action on climate change, citing billions of dollars spent on environmental research and other anti-warming steps.

"We've not been sitting on our hands by any means," Fulton said. "We understand and recognize the imperative associated with this issue."

Japan also managed to largely defuse furor over its so-called sectoral approach, which would set sector-specific fuel efficiency goals.

Developing nations feared the method could be used to foist reduction goals on them while allowing energy efficient nations like Japan to avoid emissions cuts. But delegates said they were happy with Japan's explanation, enshrined in the final statement, that sectoral approaches would not be a substitute for national reduction targets for rich countries.

'Spare the air!' alerts come with stricter limits this year

By Chris Bowman

Sacramento Bee, Saturday, May 24, 2008

Those "Spare the air!" alerts heralding the dog days of summer will have a bit more bite to their bark this smog season.

A tighter federal smog standard that took effect May 1 has redefined as more serious the pollution level that triggers local regulators' calls for reducing driving.

Under the stricter limit, pollution that has reached the spare-the-air threshold is deemed "unhealthy" for all people – not just for asthmatics and other "sensitive groups," as under the previous standard.

Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District officials said tightening the benchmark would have them ringing the spare-the-air bell at a deafening rate. "We want to keep that sense of urgency," said Lori Kobza, district spokeswoman.

The district calls spare-the-air days 10 to 15 times in the May-to-October smog season, Kobza said. It's a plea to carpool, postpone driving errands and abstain from barbecues or gas-powered yard work.

The Sacramento air district issues a spare-the-air alert when ozone levels are expected to reach at least 95 parts per billion in the federal "ozone nonattainment zone" – Sacramento and Yolo County, southern Sutter County, eastern Solano County and the foothills of El Dorado and Placer counties.

The Sacramento region has ranked for years among the 10 most persistently smoggy urban areas in the nation.

The federal smog standard is designed to limit the amount of nitrogen oxides and hydrocarbons released into the air by vehicles, manufacturing facilities and power plants. In sunlight, the pollutants form ozone, the harmful gas in smog. Production accelerates as temperatures rise.

The gas aggravates respiratory infections and shortness of breath, triggers asthma attacks and does its greatest harm to children, the elderly and those who exercise or work outdoors.

Earlier this year, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency lowered the allowable amount of ground-level ozone in the air to 75 parts per billion, averaged over an eight-hour period, compared with the 84 ppb level that had been the limit since 1997.

Fires add to already poor air quality in the Valley

BY ALEX CANTATORE - Staff Reporter

Turlock Journal, Saturday, May 24, 2008

It's often said that where there's smoke, there's fire, but the reverse is also true. When close to 90 acres in and around Turlock were set ablaze on Thursday afternoon, the smoke could be seen, and smelled, for miles around.

"You're definitely going to see serious spikes in particulate matter levels as a result of the wildfires," said Dimitri Stanich, Spokesperson for the California Air Resources Board.

Particulate matter, one of the two measured components of air quality, is a term that refers to the microscopic bits of junk that are just small enough to remain suspended in the air when a fire breaks out. Put differently, it's all the parts of smoke that aren't just the air that is always around us.

The particulate matter created by wildfires is incredibly small, with microscopic flecks of ash often measuring less than one micrometer in diameter. For comparison, a single human hair is about 60 micrometers wide.

While the tiny matter may not seem like much of a problem, wildfire smoke is made up of such small particles that it can circumvent many of the body's built-in filtering mechanisms and work its way deep into the lungs. Coincidentally, on the same day that the fires broke out, the CARB was presented research that found PM2.5, or particulate matter smaller than 2.5 micrometers in width, is 70 percent more toxic than had been previously thought.

"That research was looking at long-term exposure though," clarified Stanich, "not at the short-term effects."

Short-term exposure to smoke from wildfires is generally thought to be relatively benign to those who are not members of at-risk groups, such as small children, the elderly, or those who suffer from asthma or cardio-pulmonary disease. For those whose respiratory systems may already be in a weakened state, however, the particulate matter in smoke can sometimes act as an antagonist that may lead to life-threatening complications.

Fortunately, representatives from Emanuel Medical Center in Turlock reported that their emergency room did not see any surge as a result of the fires and generally poor air quality this week.

The particulate matter from the smoke was just part of Turlock's air quality woes over the past week. Strong winds on Wednesday and Thursday kicked up huge dust clouds, impairing vision and affecting sensitive groups for most of the week.

"Dust from the ground is more coarse, and what we'd classify as PM10 (particulate matter greater than 10 micrometers in diameter)," said Stanich. "The body is able to deal with it a lot better, using nasal hair and phlegm to capture a lot of it before it gets to the lungs."

As a result of the body's inborn protection, the frequent dust storms the Valley experiences do not pose major long-term dangers. In the short-term, however, dust does serve as an antagonist to those with allergies, many of whom have been suffering from itchy, watery eyes for most of the week.

Exposure to dust can also be detrimental to at-risk groups, with the potential to aggravate lung disease, cause asthma attacks and acute bronchitis, and increase the risk of respiratory infections. As such, regardless of whether the particulate matter in the air is dust or smoke, the CARB recommends staying inside when the air quality is poor.

"If you have a re-circulating feature on your air conditioning, I suggest switching to that option to keep out the particulate matter," said Stanich. "If you have an air purification system, such as a HEPA filter, put it in one room and try to spend as much time in that room as possible."

While the heavy winds may be largely responsible for poor air quality the region is experiencing, there may still be a chance for that wind to do some good. Should it keep blowing, the wind may help to clear the Valley of the pollutants that can linger in an area for weeks after a major fire.

"It all depends on meteorology," Stanich said. "Once the fires are all out, if the wind continues to blow, it should all move out pretty quickly."

Those looking for more information on how to deal with smoke or what to do when the air is unhealthy are invited to visit the CARB website, <http://www.arb.ca.gov/>.

DESTRUCTION IS 'GUT-WRENCHING'

SMOKE HAZARD: With air quality poor in South Bay, officials recommend limiting exposure

By Erin Allday, staff writer
S.F. Chronicle, Saturday, May 24, 2008

The noxious orange haze hugging parts of the South Bay from the Summit Fire can be a serious health risk for people with lung disease or weak immune systems, and public health officials recommended Friday that even healthy residents stay inside until the smoke clears.

Schools canceled recess and offices relied on recycled air in the ventilation systems. Residents were advised to keep their windows closed at home and shut the air vents on their cars to keep out the smoky air.

Even Memorial Day was at risk: If the smoke lingers through the weekend, public health officials said residents should stay inside and cancel barbecues that could add to air pollution.

Both the Santa Clara Public Health Department and the Bay Area Air Quality Management District issued health advisories on the risks of smoke inhalation. The rule of thumb is, if you can smell smoke, it's probably a bad idea to be outside for very long.

"Right now there's a light haze outside, and the air feels a little dirty," said Joy Alexiou, spokeswoman for Santa Clara County public health. "We're telling people to take precautions. If the smoke gets heavier, really limit your exposure outdoors."

Alexiou said her office had received several phone calls from residents concerned about the air quality - in particular, several school administrators asked whether it would be safe to hold outdoor graduations this weekend. Most planned to hold the events as scheduled.

In the early afternoon Friday, the areas most affected by the smoke seemed to be those closest to the Santa Cruz Mountains, Los Gatos and Saratoga in particular. But by 4 p.m., the Air Quality Management District announced that the smoke had spread throughout the South Bay region.

Fire smoke contains particulate matter that can become trapped in the lungs and even travel through the bloodstream and into the heart. Exposure to large quantities of particulate matter can cause coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath and irritation in the eyes, nose and throat.

It can also lead to severe reactions in people with pre-existing conditions such as asthma. Public health officials said people with respiratory conditions should make sure they take their regular medication and see a doctor if they have repeated instances of coughing, wheezing or chest tightness.

Children and older people are especially vulnerable to the smoke. But public health officials said healthy people also should be careful and avoid strenuous outdoor activities.

In Mountain View, resident Anne Sandman said that when she woke up Friday morning, "it smelled like someone had a campfire down the road." Sandman, who is training for triathlons and

running races, said she considered skipping her usual bike ride to work and the run she had scheduled later in the day.

"I wasn't sure if it was going to be a great idea," said Sandman, who ended up biking and running despite the smoke. She felt fine.

"I figured if I got out and it was affecting me, then I would just turn around and come back," she said.

Tulare Residents Air Concerns over Motor Sports Complex

By Dave Adalian

Valley Voice Newspaper, Monday, May 26, 2008

Tulare - Traffic snarls, polluted air, inescapable noise at hearing-damaging levels, loss of agricultural land, inflated estimates of potential earnings and unforeseen future failure of its business model were among a myriad concerns voiced by potential neighbors of a 711-acre, 90,000-seat proposed motor sports complex planned for southern Tulare during the first of two public hearings on the matter before the Tulare Planning Commission.

If approved, the complex could play host to as many as 451 events annually, possibly drawing some 1.6 million visitors and nearly a billion dollars in revenue to the area, according to a recently released draft environmental impact report. The public has until June 20 to submit written comments on the EIR, and a second meeting before the commission will be held June 2.

Those tantalizing numbers, however, may be mere wishful thinking say some who spoke against the complex during the meeting Monday.

"Please, make it so we can turn it into a mall, because that's what they did in Ontario," said Tulare resident Sherwood Westra, a former neighbor of the Ontario Motor Speedway in that Southern California city. Constructed in 1970 as a replica of the Indianapolis 500 Speedway, the Ontario Motor Speedway failed and was demolished 11 years later. Now, after 27 years, half of the former speedway has been turned into a series of commercial developments.

Developer Bud Long, the man behind the Tulare proposal, has said NASCAR has expressed interest in holding a race at the site, though no agreement has been reached. Self-proclaimed NASCAR fan Eric Nunes, however, doubts that claim, as well as the claim more than 16,000 jobs will eventually be created should the project win approval.

"Dale Earnhardt Jr. is not coming to Tulare, people," Nunes said during his testimony. "This will bring a lot of jobs for construction, but in five years what's going to happen?"

David Lance, a resident of Sunrise Estates, a subdivision near the proposed complex, told the commission he hoped it would require developers to deposit funds to pay for mitigation of the traffic problems created by tens of thousands of vehicles coming and going from the complex before construction begins, rather than allowing the costs to be covered later on. A similar arrangement between the city and developers at Sunrise Estates left Lance living without a paved main road for a decade, he said, and he wondered what would prevent an identical situation at the motor sports complex.

"What possible guarantee can a builder give for future revenue?" he asked planning commissioners.

Susan Starr, who lives on Laspina Street, voiced concerns about the negative economic effects of creating a large business center - plans call for 1.2 million square feet of building space - away from the city's downtown business district.

"Who benefits from this?" she asked. "Does the city get money? Does Bud Long get money?"

And, Starr sees a potential for failure.

"If you build it, they might not come," she said.

Rancher Lance Mouw, whose dairy is located on Road 132 near the proposed construction site, echoed David Lance's worry over the way developers fees would be paid, and also expressed concern the EIR that listed a need to improve all intersections within three to five miles of the complex to accommodate increased traffic, while the developer's financial responsibility would be limited to only a percentage of the cost of such improvements.

"I think the city's going in too blind," he said. "There's too much trust."

Mouw also said bringing 1.6 million visitors to the area each year would have a marked negative impact on air quality.

"I think they're going to drive cars to get here," he said. Pollution from vehicles makes up some 60 percent of impurities in Valley air according the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

"My main concern is our air quality," said Pat Phillips, another potential neighbor. "We're already third in the nation for ozone [pollution]. Tulare County is fifth in the nation for particulate matter [pollution]. This will only make it worse."

Of particular concern to Bud Mouw, father of Lance Mouw, was the potential stress to his dairy herd from sustained noise levels of up to 100 decibels during races. That level of sound equals the noise of a jet at takeoff as heard from 2,000 feet away and has the potential to cause hearing damage in humans. While noise pollution declines quickly over distance, some nearby residences would experience levels above 60 dB, the local legal limit.

While the impact report states that no data is available on the effect of noise on dairy cattle, Bud Mouw said he was easily able to find such information online, causing him to question the EIR's other findings.

"This dumb farmer can find it on Google," he said, referring to himself.

Bill Thrasher, who can already hear the races held at the Tulare County Fairgrounds from his home, said the problem will be far worse if the motor sports complex is approved. He fears the noise will go on until late at night as it does now at the fairgrounds.

"It was 12:26 before they shut that shoot-out [drag racing competition]," he said. "I do enjoy a drag race. I go to Famosa [in rural Kern County]. There's nothing there, no cows, a couple of liquor stores. Blink and you miss it."

Rachel Dysart, who can see the site of the proposed drag strip from her backyard, said the complex represents a looming disaster for her family.

"In my home, we will not be able to escape this noise," she said. "The dust will fall on my children's toys."

Dysart also pointed out local officials will be at the mercy of Caltrans regarding the schedule of the upgrades to State Route 99 required to mitigate traffic congestion should the complex be given a green light, a revelation that seemed to give planning commissioners pause.

Concerns about the impact of the complex on animals was not limited to livestock. Tom Jones, who lives near Elk Bayou Tulare County Regional Park and not far from the area to be developed, fears the noise and traffic the complex could drive wildlife, including endangered species, away from the area.

"In the last couple of weeks, my wife and I observed a kit fox and a lot of hawks [within the 100-foot buffer zone between the complex and the banks of Elk Bayou]," he said.

Robert Clark, who plays golf at the Tulare Golf Course, said the possible benefits of the complex are outweighed by its negative impacts.

"The EIR itself says it all: Noise will be significant and unavoidable. Traffic will be significant and unavoidable. Air pollution will be significant and unavoidable. Blight will be significant and unavoidable. Agricultural conflicts will be significant and unavoidable," he told commissioners.

"It's all avoidable. We don't have to do this."

Mike Lampe, a Visalia attorney representing opponents of the complex's construction, said in the

face of such a laundry list of potential harms, the only reason to approve the development would be its economic benefits.

"It's the only rational basis for telling these people they have to live with the noise," he said. However, Lampe questioned revenue projections supplied by the developers, such as the \$42 million in annual income from go-cart and bicycle motor cross events.

"Has anyone thought about his numbers?" Lampe asked.

While no one spoke in favor of building the racing complex, commission chairman Richard Miller said he felt it might have been because of feelings of intimidation.

"There probably are people in this audience who support this project," he said.

City Attorney Steve Kabot then reminded the packed audience that written commentary on the EIR could be submitted as late as the close of business on June 20. Those comments should be mailed to the City of Tulare Planning and Building Department, 411 E. Kern Ave, or emailed to motorsportsEIR@ci.tulare.ca.us.

Miller also reassured audience members their concerns would be addressed in the final EIR.

"Whatever you have to say, we'll listen," he said. "You will be responded to."

Those who have yet to express their concerns will get a second chance to do so in person when the commission continues its hearing on June 2.

"We don't usually do this, but since it has such wide ranging impact... we'd like everyone to have the opportunity to comment," said Planning and Building Department Director Mark Kielty.

The second EIR, containing responses to citizens' concerns, should be completed in late summer or early fall when it will be presented to the public before being voted upon by the Planning Commission and sent to the city council, Kielty said.

Text of the draft EIR can be viewed at the Planning and Building Department offices at Tulare City Hall, at the Tulare County Library, 113 N. F St., Tulare, or online at

www.brandman.com/TMSC-EIR/index.html.

Honda's CEO gears up for next hybrid race

By Chang-Ran Kim

Washington Post, Monday, May 26, 2008

TOKYO (Reuters) - When CEO Takeo Fukui says he would spend \$10 billion to rack up a Formula One victory for Honda, you get the sense that he really means it.

Under Fukui's five-year leadership, Honda Motor's car sales have jumped by a third and profits by an even bigger margin to a record \$5.8 billion last year.

But it's the lack of an F1 win that sticks in the craw of the 63-year-old former engineer, who joined Honda precisely because it was the first Japanese automaker to enter the world's premier motor sport.

Fukui just doesn't like to lose.

"When it comes to F1, our score is zero. It kills me," Fukui, once an amateur racer himself, told a small group of reporters last week. "If I could fix it with a trillion yen I would, but it's not a problem that money can solve."

The Tokyo native is taking that same fierce competitive streak to the battle against giant Toyota Motor in gasoline-electric hybrid technology.

Toyota beat Honda to the hybrid market by two years with its Prius in 1997. The vastly improved second-generation Prius in 2003 became an instant hit, helping Japan's top automaker win a reputation overnight as the frontrunner in green technology.

Honda's own efforts have been stop-and-go. After launching the Insight two-seater in 1999, Japan's No.2 automaker discontinued sales of two underpowered hybrid models, leaving the gasoline-electric Civic and hybrid sales at a fraction of Toyota's.

Honda detailed plans last week to change that. Using technological advances that would make its hybrid system cheaper and more profitable, Honda will roll out three affordable hybrid cars over the next few years.

With gasoline prices going through the roof, Honda hopes to sell about 500,000 hybrids a year by 2015 -- nine times what it sold last year -- rivaling Toyota's own goal of boosting hybrid sales to a tenth of its total sales after 2010.

"We're losing the image game in Japan to Toyota, and that's tough to take," Fukui said, before adding that he believed Honda's environmental cachet was still superior to Toyota's in the United States, the world's biggest market.

Fukui knows what it feels like to persevere in the face of failure and end up winning big.

He got his first taste soon after joining in 1969, when Honda was mainly an engine and motorcycle maker. The first job assigned to Fukui was reducing toxic exhaust emissions from car engines -- a project that legendary founder Soichiro Honda had recently placed at the top of his priority list.

After Fukui failed several times, the late Honda, who headed R&D at the time, berated the young engineer, telling him to think out of the box, Fukui remembers.

It was sound advice. In 1974, Fukui flew to the United States for a government test that certified the vehicle based on the new CVCC engine as the first to clear the U.S. Clean Air Act based on engine performance alone.

Honda, which only started making cars in the 1960s, named the vehicle Civic, a runaway hit that helped put Honda on the global car industry map.

Occupying Honda's post decades later as head of R&D, Fukui, whom one engineer described as "cool and smart, unlike Soichiro-san, who was prone to yelling," pushed the rank and file to raise its game.

On the same day in December 2002, Honda and Toyota became the world's first automakers to put a hydrogen fuel cell vehicle on the road.

Fukui has also watched Toyota, with more than twice as many vehicle sales and nearly three times as much profit, follow Honda's lead in developing humanoid robots and airplanes.

So what about the elusive Formula One?

"We've done what needs to be done to win," said Fukui. "I think now it's only a matter of waiting."

Sooty air causing more early deaths

Study suggests prior estimates were too low

By Alex Breitler - Record Staff Writer

Sunday, May 25, 2008

FRESNO - An estimated 2,000 to 2,900 people in the San Joaquin Valley die prematurely each year due to a diminutive but dangerous kind of air pollution, according to a study released last week.

Tiny specks of dust and soot, known as PM2.5, account for anywhere from 14,000 to 24,000 early deaths statewide, the California Air Resources Board reports.

That's 6 to 10 percent of all the deaths in the state, and about double or triple the previous estimates.

AIR FUNDS

Some help in clearing California's air will arrive soon. The state Air Resources Board last week approved distributing more than \$221 million in state funds to local agencies to reduce nearly 30,000 tons of diesel pollution. The funds -- most of which are designated to retrofit and replace old diesel engines -- represent the first installment in the \$1 billion voters endorsed in approving Proposition 1B in 2006:

- \$122 million to the Los Angeles/Inland Empire
- \$55 million for the Central Valley
- \$31 million for the Bay Area
- \$13 million for the San Diego/Border region

To be clear, air pollution is improving, officials said. Levels of PM2.5 have been in decline this decade, saving thousands of lives.

But new research suggests deaths occur at much lower levels of pollution.

"It's so sad," said Betsy Reifsnider, who heads an environmental justice program for the Catholic Diocese of Stockton. "What concerns us most about these terrible statistics is the fact that once again it is the poor community, the vulnerable people who are already ill or have respiratory problems, the little kids or older people" who bear the burden.

Last week, air regulators approved a plan that would bring the Valley into compliance with federal PM2.5 standards, but not until 2014. Critics said news of the higher death toll is evidence that tough regulations are needed to get the job done sooner.

"This is about humans, this is about lives, this is about families," said Liza Bolanos of the Central Valley Air Quality Coalition. "We're concerned about the children, the grandparents, the families that will be impacted" by these deaths.

PM2.5 comes from many sources, including cars and trucks, wood-burning fireplaces, industrial facilities, roads and farmers' fields. The risk, therefore, is greatest near roads, power plants or in neighborhoods where a great deal of wood burning takes place.

The particles are especially dangerous because they are so small. The specks, about 3 percent as wide as a human hair, are inhaled deep into the lungs and embedded in tissue or absorbed in the bloodstream.

That can lead to aggravated asthma, chronic bronchitis and heart attacks. Those with heart or lung disease may face premature death.

Stockton and San Joaquin County already is in compliance with federal PM2.5 standards, while the southern San Joaquin Valley is not. But last week's study shows that deaths occur even in areas well within health standards.

The study does contain a large margin of error, meaning the statewide deaths could number anywhere from 4,300 to 41,000. The most likely range is 14,000 to 24,000, the state said.

Two other findings:

- » The shipping of goods throughout the state is accountable for about 3,700 premature deaths per year.
- » Emissions from the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach account for about 120 deaths per year.

The report does not number hospital admissions and lost workdays as a result of PM2.5, nor does it quantify some other problems, such as asthma.

The new data on deaths will be used to help craft new pollution reduction strategies, said Mary Nichols, chairwoman of the state air board.

"(This) is not something that indicates there's some new threat happening in California versus anywhere else," she said. "We think we have a better way now of quantifying it and more accurately explaining what's going on."

Navajos torn over proposal for a cleaner coal plant

It promises jobs, revenue - and more smoke

Felicia Fonseca, Paul Foy, Associated Press
In the S.F. Chronicle, Sunday, May 25, 2008

Burnham, N.M. -- In a corner of the Navajo Nation burdened by old and heavily polluting coal-fired power plants, it matters little to many tribal elders that another facility promises to be the most efficient and cleanest of all.

With two plants already a dozen miles away, the last thing they want is another one even closer, a 1,500-megawatt project barely two miles in another direction.

"We want the smoke to stop," said 76-year-old Alice Gilmore in Navajo, raising a hand toward the belching plants.

Others say the \$3 billion Desert Rock Energy Facility could invigorate the lagging economy of the Navajo Nation, which stretches across parts of Arizona, New Mexico and Utah. Backers say it would bring \$52 million a year in revenues to the tribal government and provide up to 400 jobs on a reservation where unemployment hovers around 50 percent.

The plan - the largest-ever economic development partnership for the Navajos - has prompted fierce debate, pitting that economic windfall against environmental concerns and traditional culture on the 27,000-square-mile reservation, rich with natural gas, uranium and low-sulfur coal.

Some Navajos believe they are inseparable from Mother Earth and Father Sky - stewards of the land who must live in harmony with the natural world. There are no Navajo words to describe the complexities of power plants; to many elders, they are big stoves that produce electricity, the emissions wild spirits capable of harm.

"You treat your mother with great respect and love," said Harry Walters, a historian and cultural anthropologist at Dine College in Tsaile, Ariz. "You don't give your mother bad food, you don't take your mother to a place where there is bad air, you don't let her drink dirty water."

Gilmore grew up tending goats on a homestead on the reservation, and recalls waist-high grass teeming with tiny ground lizards before the coal burning started 44 years ago. While the land is bare now, it would be obliterated by an advancing strip mine that would be tapped for the new plant.

"Sometimes she cries for it when she's alone, for the land and the destruction," says her daughter, Bonnie Wethington.

Walters said tribal leaders need only consider the legacy of uranium mining booms in the 1950s and 1970s, which brought cancer, lung disease and death to the Navajos - to know that Mother Earth will retaliate for coal digging and burning.

Others, however, see a gift in their land's fortune of low-sulfur but high-ash and medium-BTU coal. By various estimates the coal reserve would last a century or more of stepped-up burning.

"The creator blessed us with this land, where there is an abundance of natural resources," said Lucinda Bennalley, president of the Nenahnezad Chapter, one of 110 such tribal chapters, or local governing entities.

Navajo President Joe Shirley Jr., a staunch supporter of the project, says critics should "stop picking on the little Navajo" when countries like India and China are commissioning a new coal plant practically every week.

The debate over Desert Rock comes at a time when leaders in Congress and a number of states have begun questioning coal burning, and the volume of greenhouse gases it churns out.

The project's backers, a private equity group, are trying to build ahead of a possible regulation by Congress, the Environmental Protection Agency or states to limit carbon dioxide emissions, produced in abundance by coal burning that takes most of the blame for heating up the planet.

The Navajo Nation picked Houston-based Sithe Global Power, which is 80 percent owned by New York-based Blackstone Group, to build what amounts to a "merchant" plant for hire or sale. Blackstone executives say customers won't be hard to find - Phoenix or Las Vegas is the most likely consumer - among hard-pressed utilities in the booming Southwest.

Because of industry-wide improvements in pollutant-capturing technology over the years, Desert Rock's emissions would be as little as a fifth of the reservation's Four Corners Power Plant to the north. Four Corners, a 2,000-megawatt plant co-owned and operated by Arizona Public Service, routinely ranks No. 1 on dirty-power lists compiled by watchdog groups from emissions reports to the EPA.

But Desert Rock would hardly be a pollution slouch, despite new emissions technology.

Every year, according to figures compiled by the EPA, the station would pump out 6,644 tons of sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides, which are components of acid rain; 5,529 tons of carbon monoxide; 570 tons of lung-busting particulate matter and 166 tons of smog-forming volatile organic compounds, plus trace amounts of lead and mercury.

The EPA has yet to approve an air-quality permit, which Sithe Global first applied for in 2004. Sithe and the Navajo Nation's Dine Power Authority sued March 18 over the agency's delay, claiming the tribe is losing \$5 million in tax revenue for every month the permit is held up. The Bureau of Indian Affairs already has signed off on a lease.

Nathan Plagens, vice president of Sithe subsidiary Desert Rock Energy Co., believes the risk of more stringent carbon regulation will "work itself out" in a way that won't derail Desert Rock. But he said the project is stalled because it's seen as politically incorrect.

"It's all about politics. We've met all of the requirements, done all of the work, and yet we're still waiting," said Christopher Deschene, an attorney for the Dine Power Authority, the tribe's partner in the project. "This is our backyard. We can handle this."

The EPA says it was initially delayed by climate-modeling uncertainties for a region that includes several national parks, and then by nearly 1,000 mostly negative comments posted on the agency's Web site. Air-permit technicians say they have a duty to answer each of the comments.

Added to the debate is a recent analysis of government temperature data that shows the interior American West is heating up at twice the global rate.

"We think we're doing our job as best we can - the good technical work that we are required to do," said Colleen McKaughan, a Southwest region deputy air-division director for the EPA. She declined to provide a timeline for action.

Environmental groups have vowed to keep fighting any EPA permit.

"There's no such thing as clean coal," said Theodore Spencer, a climate policy analyst for the Natural Resources Defense Council. "Coal power is pretty much the dirtiest power there is, and that plant would do nothing to address global warming emissions."

Officials OK plan to fight dirty air

By The Record

Saturday, May 24, 2008

FRESNO - State air regulators on Thursday approved a contested plan to reduce harmful particulate-matter pollution in the San Joaquin Valley.

The California Air Resources Board voted unanimously for the plan after about two hours of public testimony, including that of environmentalists who argued the plan will not reduce pollution quickly enough.

The plan, crafted by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, includes tougher restrictions on industry, farms and residents, and requires upgrades of factory boilers and internal combustion engines. It could also trigger more wood-burning restrictions for Valley residents.

Deaths from the San Joaquin Valley's dirty air occur at much lower levels of pollution, new research indicates.

The plan targets the most harmful pollutant in the Valley - tiny particulates, known as PM2.5, that can lodge in the lungs and worsen existing health problems.

Critics say the document relies too heavily upon a separate plan by the state to clean up dirty diesel trucks. That plan has yet to be approved.

"We think the board needs to take a very cautious approach here given the pollution problems in the Valley," said Bonnie Holmes-Gen, an advocate with the American Lung Association in Sacramento.

James Goldstene, executive officer for the state air board, said the Valley is making good progress toward meeting PM2.5 goals; the northern counties are already in compliance, he said.

Ethanol plant opens doors

Magic Valley plant turns out fuel for cars, feed for cows

By Dave Wilkins

Capital Press Ag Weekly, Friday, May 23, 2008

BURLEY, Idaho - The public got its first look at Pacific Ethanol's newest plant last week during a grand opening of the Magic Valley facility. Officials said the \$120 million plant, which will produce 60 million gallons of ethanol annually, will be a boon to the local and state economy.

Idaho Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter told the crowd that in 1987 the state had two ethanol plants that produced a combined 7 million gallons of ethanol per year.

Pacific Ethanol will produce nearly 10 times that amount with its one plant near Burley, Otter said during grand opening ceremonies May 16.

The new plant's contribution to the Idaho economy will be "huge," he said.

Visitors were treated to guided tours of the plant after remarks by local and state officials.

Some marveled that the project was completed in just 15 months. Groundbreaking ceremonies were conducted Feb. 13, 2007.

The new plant employs 38 full-time workers with an annual payroll of \$1.5 million.

The plant will produce about 500,000 tons of wet distillers' grains per year as a byproduct of the ethanol-making process.

Pacific Ethanol is a fuel and feed business, Doug Dickson, vice president for agricultural products, said in an interview before the grand opening ceremonies.

"People don't realize that a substantial portion of our business is the feed business," Dickson said.

The Idaho plant is already producing about 45 truckloads of wet distillers' grains per day, he said.

The Magic Valley site was specifically chosen for the new plant because, with nearly 400,000 head of cattle nearby, it represented a good market for distillers' grains.

"That's why we're here," Dickson said.

Starch is removed from grain corn during the ethanol-production process. What remains is a high-energy livestock feed high in digestible fiber, protein and corn oil, he said.

Most ethanol plants in the Midwest dry their distillers' grains, a process that accounts for about 30 percent of their energy usage, Dickson said.

By marketing wet distillers' grain rather than dry, Pacific Ethanol is spared that expense.

"Our destination model is based on not drying the distillers' grains," he said.

The Magic Valley plant is Pacific Ethanol's latest effort to bring large-scale ethanol production to the West.

The company also has ethanol plants in operation at Boardman, Ore., and in Madera, Calif., and it is a partner in the Front Range Energy plant in Windsor, Colo.

Construction is under way on another Pacific Ethanol plant at Stockton, Calif., while the company has temporarily suspended construction of a plant at Calipatria, Calif.

West Side to host meeting

Patterson Irrigator, Friday, May 23, 2008

WHAT: 2009 West Side Environmental Quality Incentives Program meeting

WHEN: 10 a.m. Wednesday

WHERE: Westley Firehouse, 8598 Kern St., Westley

Local residents can offer advice next week on a federal program that provides farmers with money to help preserve the environment. Local conservation districts plan to meet Wednesday at the Westley Firehouse to discuss the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, established by the federal farm bill.

"We're trying to help (farmers) be better stewards of the land," said Christopher Hartley, district conservationist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture-Natural Resources Conservation Service's Modesto field office.

The East Stanislaus Resource Conservation District and West Stanislaus Resource Conservation District are running public meetings to get input on natural resource management priorities in Stanislaus County.

In the past, meetings have been at the Stanislaus County's Agricultural Commissioner's office off Crows Landing Road near Modesto. However, organizers are offering the meetings throughout the county. Other meetings will be in Turlock and Oakdale.

The EQIP program, established in 1997, specifically provides funding for programs dealing with habitat conservation, pollution runoff, water conservation, [air quality](#) and soil erosion. In Stanislaus County, \$3.2 million was spent on 89 projects in fiscal year 2008. On the West Side, some of those projects include irrigation efficiency improvements, such as the use of drip irrigation systems, and tailwater return systems, in which tailwater runoff is collected in a pond and reused. Pasture management projects and support on dairies also are common in Stanislaus County.

Though the NRCS has yet to receive rules regarding the future EQIP program, this year's farm bill will provide more money for air quality, and California could potentially benefit, Hartley said.

Information gathered at the meetings will help direct locally led conservation efforts and advise the Natural Resources Conservation Service on implementing EQIP for the 2009 program year.

Written comments may be submitted via e-mail to lisa.alamo@ca.nacdnet.net; or mailed to Stanislaus County Natural Resources Work Group, 3800 Cornucopia Way, Ste. E, Modesto 95358.

For information: 491-9320, ext. 121.

Mighty winds wallop West Side

Written by Jonathan Partridge
Patterson Irrigator, Friday, May 23, 2008

Powerful winds rocked the West Side on Wednesday and Thursday, keeping city staff workers busy removing tree limbs and leaving much of Crows Landing without power for several hours.

The National Weather Service recorded wind speeds of up to 44 mph at nearby Modesto City-County Airport and wind speeds as high as 54 mph at Travis Air Force Base near Fairfield.

"It's definitely been a busy day," said Monica Sandoval, Patterson's public works management analyst, on Thursday.

She said the city had responded to about 50 to 60 calls Thursday regarding wind-related incidents and several on Wednesday as well, as high gusts toppled several large branches to the ground.

A few of the streets north of downtown, which were hit hard by the winds, looked like a lumberjack's haven, with giant tree limbs scattered along the roadside near where branches had fallen.

North Fifth Street resident Susana Araisa, whose sister's van suffered \$3,000 worth of damage after limbs fell on top of it Wednesday, said another limb fell in front of her home Thursday morning.

Araisa noted that many of the homes in her neighborhood were built in the 1940s, and she estimated the trees are just as old. Her family also dealt with fallen tree limbs last year, and she feared they may be a safety hazard for children playing nearby.

"We just want to get rid of the oldest trees," she said.

Though fallen tree limbs were common, Sandoval noted that no road signs were damaged in Patterson this week as they have been in the past. And though the fire department responded to a downed phone line Wednesday, the city did not report any power line problems.

Crows Landing was not so fortunate. A damaged Turlock Irrigation District power line left several residents without power for as long as 6½ hours Thursday.

TID initially received a report of a power failure in Crows Landing at 5:45 a.m. that day.

Workers restored power to about half of the 350 residents affected by 10:15 a.m. and restored power to remaining customers by 12:15 p.m.

TID spokeswoman Jill GeRue said the district responded to several “sporadic outages” throughout its coverage area Wednesday and Thursday as a result of high winds.

[Because of dry conditions, the air was filled with dust, leading the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to issue a health cautionary statement through late Thursday.](#)

Blowing dust can result in unhealthy concentrations of particulate matter 10 microns and smaller, PM10, valley air district officials explained. Exposure to dust and other particle pollution can cause serious health problems, aggravate lung disease, cause asthma attacks and acute bronchitis, and increase risk of respiratory infections.

Though the winds were moving quickly, the storm system that caused it was not, leading to the long periods of windy conditions, explained Jared Leighton, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service.

The eastward-moving winds, which also led to stormy weather in Colorado and the Midwest, were expected to remain calm after Friday afternoon.

Plan to combat tiny but deadly dust approved

BY STACEY SHEPARD, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Friday, May 23, 2008

State air quality officials OK'd a valley plan Thursday to clean up fine particulate pollution, which a recent report found is three times more deadly than previously thought.

Under the plan, the valley should meet federal health standards for the pollution by 2014. State officials required additional fallback measures to ensure the deadline is met.

The state's approval came one day after it released a study saying fine particulates kill 24,000 Californians each year - triple the previous estimate of 8,000. More than 3,000 of those deaths occur in the San Joaquin Valley annually.

The particulate cleanup plan was drafted by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District and approved by its board last month. It will now be forwarded to federal regulators for approval.

Fine particulates, also known as PM 2.5, are tiny specks of chemicals, dust and soot that linger in the air during winter months. The pollution is caused by emissions from factories, vehicles, farms and smoke.

While the valley has a severe smog problem, particulates are considered more dangerous. In addition to triggering asthma attacks and lung ailments, the tiny particles can pass through the lungs and into the bloodstream, where they can clog arteries. New research also shows the pollution may damage brain tissue.

Doctors have documented trends that show an increase in deaths from lung diseases, heart attacks and strokes on days when fine particle pollution is high.

A 2006 Cal State Fullerton study estimated particle pollution costs valley residents \$3.2 billion annually in health costs, though that number is expected to be much higher in light of the state's new study.

Fresno and Bakersfield have some of the highest levels of PM 2.5 pollution in the state.

The valley's cleanup plan largely targets diesel trucks and industrial plants but will also tighten a rule that prohibits residential wood-burning on days when air quality is bad. Under the new rule,

Kern County could see up to 30 no-burn days during winter months compared to about 12 this season.

Clean air advocates had criticized the plan for relying too heavily on a state law to clean up diesel trucks that has not yet been passed.

"We seriously doubt whether (state officials) will have the will to regulate the trucking industry," said Brent Newell, an attorney for the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment, which organizes and assists residents in rural areas with environmental problems.

They wanted contingency rules in place that would kick into effect if the plan fails to achieve the expected pollution reductions. One measure advocates proposed was to prohibit the operation of polluting farm equipment or trucks on days when air quality is poor.

Air Resources Board members agreed with advocates' concerns but not their ideas.

"Understandably, the community wants a commitment from us," said Air Resources Board Chairwoman Mary Nichols.

Instead, the state board required regional air officials to create other rules as fallback measures that would take effect in 2014 if the cleanup plan hasn't worked.

One would further strengthen the residential wood-burning rule in 2014 to a level that would virtually eliminate the use of fireplaces in the valley. The other contingency measures would affect industrial boilers and engines.

Plan to reduce soot in valley air OK'd with extra requirements

By MARK GROSSI - THE FRESNO BEE

in the Modesto Bee and the Fresno Bee, Friday, May 23, 2008

FRESNO -- State air officials Thursday approved a disputed valley cleanup plan for deadly soot, adding some requirements that, nevertheless, did not satisfy worried activists.

The California Air Resources Board told valley air officials to find any possible further restrictions for boilers, food dehydrators, glass furnaces and farm diesel engines.

But the order was too vague, said activists who wanted the plan to be more aggressive.

"We have no idea what pollution reductions will come from them," said lawyer Brent Newell of the Bay Area Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment, which represents valley activist groups. "We're left with a symbolic gesture but little else."

The cleanup plan for soot, known as PM-2.5, will be sent to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, which is expected to approve it.

The plan calls for San Joaquin Valley air to meet the federal-PM 2.5 standard by 2014. The valley ranks alongside the South Coast Air Basin with the worst PM-2.5 problems in the state.

PM-2.5 comes from vehicles, fires and other sources of combustion, such as boilers. But the region's biggest PM-2.5 problem is from airborne gases that combine in winter to form chemical specks of ammonium nitrate. Oxides of nitrogen from vehicles, such as diesel trucks, combine with ammonia from dairies to make the specks.

About 30 to 40 of these specks would span the width of a human hair, and they can evade the body's defenses, lodging deep in the lungs. They trigger asthma and heart problems, and they can cause premature death.

A state study discussed at the meeting Thursday in Fresno said the particle pollution is 70 percent more lethal than scientists previously suspected -- killing an estimated 3,000 valley residents prematurely each year.

The study added more emotion to the activists' argument against the PM-2.5 plan, which they say relies too heavily on the state's proposed diesel truck rules. The rules, which are meeting resistance from the trucking industry, may get watered down, activists said.

"Send this plan back to be strengthened or do it yourself," said Melissa Kelly-Ortega, program coordinator for the Merced-Mariposa Asthma Coalition. "You will be saving lives."

They made the same objections last month at a meeting of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District board. The district board approved the plan on an 8-3 vote.

One of the dissenting votes was the board's newest member, Dr. John Telles, who said he questioned the approach to PM-2.5 monitoring and didn't see enough of a backup plan in case the proposed measures don't work.

Telles is the valley air district's representative on the state board, but he missed Thursday's meeting because of a family commitment out of state. He sent an e-mail that was read aloud at the meeting. It echoed his concerns from the valley district meeting last month.

Like the valley air district, the state board is counting on the diesel truck rules. Air board staffers said the new rules, along with existing rules, will bring the valley's air into compliance with the standard.

Officials added that the PM-2.5 problem has been reduced through the hard work of the valley air district. State officials said the region's concentrations of the pollutant have dropped by 45 percent since 1999.

The northern valley -- with about 40 percent of the region's population in Stanislaus, San Joaquin and Merced counties -- has achieved the standard for PM-2.5.

"Tremendous progress has been made here," said state board Chairwoman Mary Nichols. "In fairness, the district has been doing a good job."

But she noted the concerns of activists and offered the possibility of further pollution reductions on boilers, farm engines, glass furnaces and food processing hydrators -- all of which were among suggestions from activists.

In addition, fireplace-burning restrictions, which the plan will tighten, also could be made more stringent if the valley's PM-2.5 levels don't drop fast enough, she said.

Activists were not assured. They said the state should have rejected the plan and sent it back to the valley air district to add many other restrictions, such as further controls on composting facilities and dairies.

Disputed air plan approved

Madera Tribune, Friday, May 23, 2008

By Garance Burke

FRESNO - State air quality managers approved a disputed plan Thursday to clamp down on airborne dust, smoke and soot - microscopic pollution particles that are linked to thousands of early deaths in the San Joaquin Valley every year.

The Air Resources Board voted unanimously to approve the air cleanup plan at its meeting in Fresno, on a day when thick dust storms and smoke from nearby wildfires obscured vision along the roads slicing through the region.

California's farm belt has some of the highest levels of fine particulate pollution in the country.

The new proposal aims to clean up the air by keeping families from using their fireplaces for up to 35 days each winter and requiring large local employers to encourage a portion of their workers

carpool.

It relies heavily on a draft state regulation that will curb emissions from diesel-powered trucks and buses, which the board is expected to make final in October.

Diesel exhaust is the major source of fine particulate matter, which sinks deep into the lungs and is closely linked to respiratory problems, heart attacks and lung cancer.

As a condition for approving the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's draft plan, board members ordered the local agency to include stronger safeguards to cut back pollution generated by industrial boilers and diesel engines on farms.

"We do want to hold their feet to the fire and tell them that if they don't meet the deadlines that we've given them for adopting these additional rules then we will have to take stronger action," said board chairwoman Mary Nichols. "Even at low levels, the health risks are still very high."

Nichols said the plan will allow the area to meet federal standards for fine particle pollution - airborne specks that are just one-thirtieth the width of a human hair - by the deadline of 2014.

The plan will not become official until it wins final approval from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Air quality advocates and community members said the board's action on Thursday didn't go far enough to protect public health.

The board's own scientists released new research Wednesday showing that as many as 24,000 deaths in California each year are linked to chronic exposure to fine particulate pollution. The soot particles kill at least 3,000 valley residents every year, almost triple the previous estimate, said Bart Croes, chief of the state agency's research division.

"When you see data showing that these fine particles are killing three times more people than was previously thought, we feel like there's plenty of reasons to do more sooner," said Tim Carmichael, senior policy director for the Coalition for Clean Air, a statewide group. "It remains to be seen whether EPA will think that this plan is acceptable."

Carmichael and others had pleaded with the board to reject the plan, or to amend it to do more to regulate dairies, wineries and diesel pumps on farms, which are among the many sources of air pollution.

Some help will be arriving soon: Also Thursday, the board approved distributing more than \$221 million in state funds to local agencies to reduce nearly 30,000 tons of diesel pollution. Those moneys represent the first installment in the \$1 billion voters endorsed in approving Proposition 1B.

Members voted unanimously to direct the following sums to the state's four major trade corridors:

- \$122 million to the Los Angeles/Inland Empire
- \$55 million for the Central Valley
- \$31 million for the San Francisco Bay area
- \$13 million for the San Diego/Border region

The bulk of that money will go to retrofit and replace old diesel engines on trucks, agency officials said.

Other funds will go to install low-emission locomotive engines, and to build electrical infrastructure at the Port of San Diego that will allow cargo ships to plug in at the port, instead of leaving their engines running once they dock.

New study finds steep costs of doing nothing on climate

By RENEE SCHOOF, McClatchy Newspapers
Modesto Bee, Friday, May 23, 2008

WASHINGTON — Doing nothing about global warming would cost America dearly in the rest of this century because of stronger hurricanes, higher energy and water costs, and rising seas that would swamp coastal communities, according to a new study by economists at Tufts University.

The study concluded that it would be cheaper to take aggressive action to cut greenhouse gas emissions than it would be to suffer the consequences of a dangerously changing world. "The longer we wait, the more painful and expensive the consequences will be," it said.

The Senate in early June will consider legislation to set a declining limit on emissions and establish a market for pollution permits that would reward companies that reduce pollution. The system is designed to reduce total U.S. emissions by an estimated 66 percent from 1990 levels by 2050.

"Most of the debate we expect will be about how much it will cost to implement the bill. This report provides the other side of the ledger - how much it will cost if we don't act," said Dan Lashof, the director of the climate center at the Natural Resources Defense Council, an environmental group that commissioned the study.

The Tufts study included a "bottom-up" analysis of the economic impacts in four categories and found that by 2100, annual costs would be \$422 billion in hurricane damage; \$360 billion in real estate losses, with the biggest risk on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, particularly Florida; \$141 billion in increased energy costs; and \$950 billion in water costs, especially in the West. (The estimates are expressed in today's dollars.)

That adds up to an annual loss by 2100 of 1.8 percent of gross domestic product, or GDP, the sum of the nation's output of goods and services.

The study's "business as usual" scenario, in which emissions of greenhouse gases continued at an increasing rate, was taken from the high end of the range of likely outcomes of inaction described by the Nobel Prize-winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change last year. The Tufts study also incorporated some later scientific findings.

The study projected that the average temperature would increase by 13 degrees Fahrenheit in most of the United States and by 18 degrees in Alaska in the next 100 years, bringing more severe heat waves, hurricanes and droughts.

The report also forecast stronger hurricanes as a result of higher sea surface temperatures; sea level rises of 23 inches by 2050 and 45 inches by 2100 that would inundate low-lying coastal areas; and higher air conditioning bills in the Southeast and Southwest that wouldn't be offset nationally by lower heating bills in the North.

The authors of the Tufts study also used a revised version of the model used by Nicholas Stern for his 2006 assessment of the cost of inaction on a global scale. Using that model, the Tufts economists found a U.S. loss of 3.6 percent of GDP by 2100.

There have been more than six studies of the cost of reducing U.S. greenhouse gas emissions as outlined in the bill that will be debated in the Senate. All use different assumptions and have different outcomes.

None of these studies looked at the costs of not acting, said Eileen Claussen, the president of the Pew Center on Global Climate Change, which recently examined some of these studies and reported on what they can and cannot show about the costs of reducing emissions.

The Pew Center's economists found that many of the studies of the costs of reducing emissions disregarded cost-saving technologies and programs. They also said that all models of the costs predict that if the measures outlined in the bill were put into effect, the economy would continue to grow. The costs would be felt as a reduction of future growth.

Frank Ackerman, an economist at Tufts who was one of the main authors of that study, said the impact of climate change would be worse than what his numbers showed "because of the human lives and ecosystems that will be lost and species that will be driven into extinction - all these things transcend monetary values."

Scientists already can observe signs that the Earth is warming, including diminishing summer ice in the Arctic Ocean, drier conditions in the West and more severe droughts and storms, Lashof said.

Most of the dangerous changes that are predicted can be avoided, he added, "but our window of opportunity is closing very rapidly."

To read the report, "What We'll Pay if Global Warming Continues Unchecked" go to:
<http://www.nrdc.org/globalwarming/cost/contents.asp>

The Pew Center report, "Insights from Modeling Analyses of the Lieberman-Warner Climate Security Act," is available at: <http://www.pewclimate.org>.

New technologies for fuel economy may carry hefty price tags

BY HERB SHULDINER - motor matters
Tri-Valley Herald, Friday, May 23, 2008

Skyrocketing fuel prices have shocked millions of motorists in the last couple of years. The shock has been so great that many vehicle buyers now shun the biggest gas-guzzlers in favor of smaller fuel-sipping vehicles.

There are other ways to achieve better fuel economy than merely shrinking vehicle size, something that is especially inconvenient for big families or businesses that require a lot of space for carrying big, heavy loads.

Most auto manufacturers are working feverishly to develop new technologies to provide better fuel economy, while maintaining occupant and cargo space in vehicles. The technologies include a new generation of hybrid electric vehicles capable of providing more than 50 miles per gallon.

Engineers are also working on a new generation of clean-burning diesels that provide a minimum of 25 percent greater fuel. Charles E. Freese V, executive director of diesel engineering for General Motors, says diesels can provide up to 40 - 70 percent more fuel efficiency under certain heavy-duty driving conditions.

GM, Honda, Mercedes and other auto companies are also working on Homogeneous Charge Compression Ignition engines. HCCI engines combine the best performance characteristics of diesel and gasoline engines to provide up to 15 percent greater fuel economy.

In HCCI engines, combustion occurs without spark ignition to provide an electric discharge that ignites fuel. Instead, hot exhaust gas and compression pressure are used to cause a flameless combustion of the fuel/air mixture at several places throughout the cylinder.

The combustion takes place at a relatively low temperature, using less fuel to produce power than a conventional gasoline engine. That's because there's more air in the mixture than in a standard

gasoline engine. This produces an efficiency that is close to what a diesel engine provides, but without the need for any special after-treatment to eliminate NOx, which can produce ozone in the atmosphere, one of the key constituents of smog.

Mercedes unveiled the F700 at the Frankfurt Auto Show last autumn that is powered by a DiesOtto engine -- the automaker's name for HCCI technology. At about the same time, GM demonstrated a Saturn Aura powered by an HCCI engine at one of its proving grounds.

I recently had an opportunity to drive the Saturn Aura with a 2.2-liter, 180-horsepower engine that generates 170 pounds-foot of torque. The engine has a direct injection system with variable valve lifters on both intake and exhaust sides.

The driving experience with the HCCI engine is very transparent. There are no special driving characteristics as the engine reaches cruising speed. However, when I accelerated to launch the Saturn from a standstill, a dieseling type of engine noise was very pronounced. GM engineers say that noise will be eliminated when the production version of the engine becomes available. They declined to say when that might be.

Dr. Matthias Alt, GM's global HCCI program manager, says that the company has invested millions developing the technology. But he declined to say how much cost HCCI technology would add to the price of a vehicle.

Other new technologies that are in the works include a new breed of eight-speed automatic transmissions that help provide greater fuel economy. Also on the horizon are new four-cylinder direct injection engines (similar to the one in the Saturn Aura, but without HCCI).

These engines provide the same power output while burning less fuel. The new technologies are needed, not only to help car buyers cope with astronomical fuel prices, but also to meet 2020 U.S. fuel-economy requirements.

GM Vice Chairman Robert Lutz says the new regulations, which call for auto manufacturer fleets to average 35 mpg by the end of the next decade, could add thousands to the price of new vehicles. Buyers will have to absorb price increases.

"It will cause a terrible sticker shock when the new technology starts to roll out. I'm not trying to scare people, but I'm trying to prepare them. Fuel economy doesn't come free," says Lutz.

Lutz says 80 percent of the future fleet will require eight-speed transmissions, adding hundreds of dollars to the cost of cars. The increased use of four-cylinder direct-injected gasoline engines will run \$1,100 to \$1,500 more than present engines.

Introduction of lithium-ion batteries required for hybrids will add costs in the low thousands of dollars, Lutz says. But GM's 2-mode hybrid system, currently offered on trucks (full-size SUVs), could tack on \$10,000 or more to the cost of cars, he says, adding the system currently costs more than that. GM says it currently loses money on every 2-mode hybrid it sells.

[Bakersfield Californian, Commentary, Tuesday, May 27, 2008:](#)

Big West refinery must do better to earn our trust

BY LOIS HENRY, Californian staff writer

If Big West of California really wants approval for its Rosedale Highway refinery expansion, it needs to come out of the closet, so to speak.

The old-school attitude of "the less the public knows the less they'll bother us" doesn't work anymore.

Pssst - everyone KNOWS you've got some bad chemicals over there. It's not a secret.

The real mystery is why Big West doesn't understand that cluing in the public about what's happening at the refinery - and I mean every little thing - is the only way to gain our trust.

If we don't trust you, why should we allow you to build a bigger operation, bring in more toxic stuff (as if Kern isn't already Chemical County) and endanger our lives and environment even more? For a few extra gallons of gas? Uh-uh.

You gotta do better than that.

A perfect example of what NOT to do is the bungled response to last Sunday's "little leak" of anhydrous ammonia.

An off-duty cop who heard the refinery alarm urging employees to evacuate is the ONLY reason county authorities knew anything about it. Makes me wonder what else we don't know about.

It was only a cup of ammonia and the refinery said everything worked as it should. I don't care if it was a teaspoon, when alarms go off the public needs to know what's happening.

The refinery initially told the paper they had called local authorities, then said they hadn't and then quoted California government codes saying they weren't required to report the leak to anyone.

Seriously, someone at Big West needs to put together these two words: "public" and "relations."

If this is the response when they're under intense public scrutiny, what can we expect if the expansion's approved and they don't need our good graces any more?

At this point, you probably think I'm against the expansion. Wrong. I actually favor it for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that many of our local independent oil producers rely on Big West.

But the expansion can only come after Big West proves it will operate safely, as cleanly as possible and without all the hush-hush of previous years.

So far, I don't see that happening.

When I asked about the ammonia leak, Big West Health, Safety and Environmental Director Bill Chadick said the refinery has a strong safety record and is eager to share information with the public.

In fact, he said they're building a public website which will detail leaks or gas releases and will even have real time video feeds from around the site. He said the idea started with Environmental Health but now, "We're doing that on our own," Chadick said.

Not exactly.

Two years ago, Kern County Environmental Health Director Matt Constantine proposed the website after Big West belched out 3,700 tons of hydrogen sulfide (the rotten egg smelling stuff).

Constantine told Big West that instead of paying a fine, they could set up a public website where every leak, spill or release was noted, including real-time video. He also wanted Big West to put sensors at surrounding businesses that would feed unfiltered, real-time information to the website so people would know if anything was wafting their way.

The cameras would also help pinpoint problems on the large property when responders, such as the Kern County Fire Department, have to rush to an incident.

"That way we wouldn't spend precious time trying to figure out where the problem is, as happened last Sunday," Constantine told me.

But Big West officials didn't like the cost and dragged their feet. Eventually Environmental Health gave up and slapped them with a \$20,000 fine, which they promptly paid.

The website idea is one now of Environmental Health's many proposed mitigation measures in the environmental impact report on the proposed expansion.

I'm glad Big West is proceeding with the website, but I wouldn't characterize it as "doing it on our own." More like, "rammed down our throats."

No wonder Constantine has such a jaded view of the refinery.

Big West's disregard for public communication is all the more galling when you learn that their parent company, Flying J Inc., has another refinery in Utah that operates under a host of public notification requirements, said Kern County Planner Lorelei Oviatt who's been working on Big West's environmental documents seeking the expansion.

"Why not here?" she asked. "This is not rocket science."

No, it's not. And I would also urge the Board of Supervisors to pass a countywide ordinance establishing public notification methods for the other 187 facilities in Kern that work with hazardous chemicals.

Oviatt used public notification requirements from the Utah operation and those she gleaned from refineries in places like Torrance and Contra Costa County to create a list of similar requirements for Big West in its upcoming EIR, which will be recirculated for public review likely by mid-June.

When I started researching this column, my goal was to find some empirical way to determine if Big West is a "good" or a "bad" operator. Where do they rank in comparison with other refineries?

I learned there's no industry standard and while a legion of agencies regulate refineries, there's no one agency that gathers all that info so it can watch for patterns or benchmark it.

In Torrance, the Fire Department has become that clearinghouse because of a lawsuit filed by the city against the ExxonMobil refinery in 1989. It resulted from a string of accidents and the company's use of hydrofluoric acid, or HF; it was settled in 1990 when the refinery agreed to use modified HF. The settlement also included a consent decree ordering the refinery to be more upfront with the city.

Now, ExxonMobil reports everything to the fire department. EVERYTHING.

"You name it, they call us," said Torrance Fire Operations Division Chief David Dumais. "Spills, leaks, releases. If someone breaks a leg or cuts their fingers, they call us. If the wind shifts and someone offsite smells something, they come out with their combustible gas meters. We have joint notification drills. Education programs. If they hear the chimes, the public knows to shelter in place." He went on and on about the ways the refinery now respects the community's needs and works to earn the public's trust.

Given how we've been treated so far by Big West, I'd say we need a whole lot more respect before we can trust them with this expansion.

Opinions expressed in this column are those of Lois Henry, not The Bakersfield Californian. Her column appears Wednesdays and Sundays. Call her at 395-7373 or e-mail lhenny@bakersfield.com

[Fresno Bee commentary, Sunday, May 25, 2008:](#)

DONALD A. NORMAN: Let's get bold with Fresno

It's quite a place, Fresno is. Not that any place is entirely unique, but we live in a city unlike most. We live in a city, or in its affiliated domains, that is at the same time both agrarian and urban. That is blessed with abundant natural wealth and is cursed with nasty air. Fresno's north and east represent growth and wealth, while its south and west are home to poverty and decay.

It is in this paradoxical place that I want to live, need to live but find it so frustrating to live. Not because of some inbred cynicism or desire to see our city fail, but rather, I'm frustrated because of hope and potential.

Unlike generations before, mine doesn't know Fresno isn't supposed to rival Los Angeles or San Francisco, we don't know farming communities aren't centers for innovation, art and culture.

Instead, we know that Fresno is a place for the young, talented people who flock to bigger markets, better job prospects and more established cultural centers. Fresno doesn't fail to offer

culture, art or innovation -- it fails to realize it already has it. And in so doing, it doesn't recognize those who desire qualities of life assumed to be lacking in our city.

As a young person recently out of college and now in the work force, it's easy to see the battles of old playing out anew. I see them in generational terms, young versus old and conservative versus liberal. I see the more conservative Fresno of the 1980s refusing to give way to the moderate Fresno of the 2000s. But I also see synergy in the midst of struggle. Creative Fresno, Fresno's Leading Young Professionals, Image

Fresno, the Downtown Task Force -- these groups and others (there are too many to list, which is a good thing) are bringing people to the table and are working to recognize the potential of our city.

The next mayor of our city will have a large role to play in this ongoing transition, especially on issues like downtown revitalization, public safety, clean energy, housing, cultural arts and business growth. So it is paramount that young people, people who have a vision for our city, people who care about Fresno, take this election seriously and vote. To riff from the phenom, we are the change we've been waiting for. This is the time to take the backroom conversations, the big ideas, the 100-year plans and put them all on the table. Let's reconsider the type of city we want to leave to our children's children (remember, I'm 22), and let's be bold.

I say to the current leaders of our city and to those in older generations, don't fear Fresno's young people and our sometimes clashing perspectives. I say to my generation and people younger: Respect the legitimacy and value of those older, their ideas and leadership.

Together, we can move our city forward. Together we can create an environment that attracts businesses, retains talent and creativity, expands intelligently and redevelops with vigor. Together, we can see the potential of what our city can become while honoring the deep history and tradition already established.

Donald A. Norman of Fresno is an editor.

[N.Y. Times commentary, Sunday, May 25, 2008:](#)

Where Breathing Is Deadly

By NICHOLAS D. KRISTOF

BADUI, China -- China's biggest health disaster isn't the terrible Sichuan earthquake this month. It's the air.

The quake killed at least 60,000 people, generating a response that has been heartwarming and inspiring, with even schoolchildren in China donating to the victims. Yet with little notice, somewhere between 300,000 and 400,000 Chinese die prematurely every year from the effects of outdoor air pollution, according to studies by Chinese and international agencies alike.

In short, roughly as many Chinese die every two months from the air as were killed in the earthquake. And the problem is becoming international: just as Californians can find Chinese-made shoes in their stores, they can now find Chinese-made haze in their skies.

This summer's Beijing Olympics will showcase the most remarkable economic explosion in history, and also some of the world's thickest pollution in both air and water. So I've returned to the Yellow River in western China's Gansu Province to an isolated village that has haunted me since I saw it a decade ago.

Badui is known locally as the "village of dunces." That's because of the large number of mentally retarded people here - as well as the profusion of birth defects, skin rashes and physical

deformities. Residents are sure that the problems result from a nearby fertilizer factory dumping effluent that taints their drinking water.

"Even if you're afraid, you have to drink," said Zhou Genger, the mother of a 15-year-old girl who is mentally retarded and has a hunchback. The girl, Kong Dongmei, mumbled unintelligibly, and Ms. Zhou said she had never been able to speak clearly.

Ms. Zhou pulled up the back of her daughter's shirt, revealing a twisted, disfiguring mass of bones.

A 10-year-old neighbor girl named Hong Xia watched, her eyes filled with wonder at my camera. The neighbors say she, too, is retarded.

None of this is surprising: rural China is full of "cancer villages" caused by pollution from factories. Beijing's air sometimes has a particulate concentration that is four times the level considered safe by the World Health Organization.

Scientists have tracked clouds of Chinese pollution as they drift over the Pacific and descend on America's West Coast. The impact on American health is uncertain.

In fairness, China has been better than most other countries in curbing pollution, paying attention to the environment at a much earlier stage of development than the United States, Europe or Japan. Most impressive, in 2004, China embraced tighter fuel economy standards than the Bush administration was willing to accept at the time.

The city of Shanghai charges up to \$7,000 for a license plate, thus reducing the number of new vehicles, and China has planted millions of trees and hugely expanded the use of natural gas to reduce emissions. If you look at what China's leaders are doing, you wish that President Bush were half as green.

But then you peer into the Chinese haze - and despair. The economic boom is raising living standards hugely in many ways, but the toll of the resulting pollution can be brutal. The filth is prompting public protests, but the government has tightly curbed the civil society organizations that could help monitor pollution and keep it in check.

An environmental activist named Wu Lihong warned for years that Lake Tai, China's third-largest freshwater lake, was endangered by chemical factories along its banks. Mr. Wu was proved right when the lake filled with toxins last summer - shortly after the authorities had sentenced him to three years in prison.

Here in Badui, the picture is as complex as China's development itself. The government has taken action since my previous visit: the factory supposedly is no longer dumping pollutants, and the villages have been supplied with water that, in theory, is pure. The villagers don't entirely believe this, but they acknowledge that their health problems have diminished.

Moreover, economic development has reached Badui. It is still poor, with a per-capita income of \$100 a year, but there is now a rough dirt road to the village. On my last visit, there was only a footpath.

The road has increased economic opportunities. Farmers have dug ponds to raise fish that are trucked to the markets, but the fish are raised in water taken from the Yellow River just below the fertilizer factory. When

I looked in one pond, the first thing I saw was a dead fish.

"We eat the fish ourselves," said the village leader, Li Yuntang. "We worry about the chemicals, but we have to eat." He said that as far as he knew, the fish had never been inspected for safety.

Now those fish from this dubious water are sold to unsuspecting residents in the city of Lanzhou. And the complexities and ambiguities about that progress offer a window into the shadings of China's economic boom.

[S.F. Chronicle editorial, Monday, May 26, 2008:](#)

A first in pollution fees

Impatient with the glacial pace of federal regulators on greenhouse gas emissions, the Bay Area air quality district voted last week to assess fees on about 2,500 polluting businesses that they regulate.

The fees aren't large - the majority of businesses will pay less than a dollar - and they will mostly fund the district's administrative costs related to climate change, such as doing an emissions inventory for the Bay Area. But the precedent is significant: The district is the first in the nation to impose fees. Its success or failure will be a model for both the state and the nation.

Jack Broadbent, the district's executive director explained that businesses had issued a list of complaints that sound pretty familiar by now: 1) that the district's decision could be duplicative of the state's forthcoming regulations for AB32, 2) that we should all wait for a federal program, and 3) that having to comply with a "patchwork" of regulations was expensive, frustrating and inefficient. The first of these is a valid concern (Broadbent said they will re-evaluate once the state comes out with its prescriptives in June), the second is spurious, and the third, fortunately, or unfortunately, is the way it's going to have to be until there's an administration in the White House that's willing to impose the second.

In the meantime, Broadbent said, "Businesses need to pay attention to the fact that they contribute to climate change and that they're going to have to pay for it." We couldn't agree more - it's hard to feel sympathy for the companies that aren't keen on the decision, like Western Petroleum - but we hope that when the state weighs in, its regulations share the burden between businesses, drivers, air passengers and polluters of all types. We all contribute to climate change. We all need to contribute to the solution.

[L.A. Times editorial, Friday, May 23, 2008:](#)

Job killers? Not guilty

Every year, the California Chamber of Commerce puts out a list of "job-killer" bills that would supposedly devastate the state's economy. And every year, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger takes this list far more seriously than it deserves; in 2007, he vetoed all 12 such bills that made it through the Legislature, and he has signed only three during his tenure. A repeat won't do any good for California.

This year's list, released Monday, contains 33 bills. To be sure, some are turkeys that deserve a gizzard full of buckshot. ...

And yet, for every flightless bird on the list, there is an idea soaring on the wings of angels. ...

The chamber is once again opposing SB 974 from Sen. Alan Lowenthal (D-Long Beach), which would impose a container fee at the ports and devote the money to expanding goods-movement infrastructure and replacing pollution-spewing trucks with cleaner models. This bill has struggled to overcome business opposition for years, even though it would increase construction and trade-

related jobs and lower healthcare expenses by cleaning the air; the fee, meanwhile, is so small that it would have a negligible effect on the retailers and shippers forced to pay it.

Also attracting the chamber's misguided ire are AB 1065 from Assemblywoman Sally Lieber (D-Mountain View) and AB 2447 from Assemblyman Dave Jones (D-Sacramento). Lieber's bill would toughen energy-efficiency standards for new buildings, an important weapon in the state's battle with global warming. The chamber complains that it would cost consumers money, not mentioning that it would ultimately more than make up the difference by lowering energy bills. Jones' bill would reduce the enormous taxpayer costs of fighting fires by making it harder to build homes in areas of extreme fire danger.

The chamber doesn't represent all business in the state, and its legislative agenda often seems dominated by development and energy interests. Consumers and corporations will benefit if the governor approaches its "job-killer" list with a more critical eye this year.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses due to air pollution, there are 24 thousand premature deaths annually in California. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Por contaminación del aire: 24 mil muertes prematuras anuales en California

Manuel Ocaño - Noticiero Latino
Radio Bilingüe, Thursday, May 22, 2008

Científicos de la Oficina de Recursos del Aire de California revelaron que la contaminación que respiramos ocasiona unas 24 mil muertes prematuras anuales en el estado, el doble de lo estimado hasta ahora.

También de acuerdo con los científicos y colegas de la Agencia de Protección Ambiental de California, la contaminación tiene un impacto en la salud humana que cuesta unos 70 mil millones de dólares anuales por hospitalizaciones y tratamientos médicos.

El mayor riesgo a la salud, lo representan las llamadas partículas, de dimensiones microscópicas, que afectan los sistemas respiratorio y cardiaco.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the beginning of multiple measures against air pollution in California.](#)

Inicia combinación de medidas contra contaminación del aire en California

Manuel Ocaño
Noticiero Latino
Radio Bilingüe, Monday, May 26, 2008

Autoridades ambientales de una de las regiones con el aire más contaminado en California aprobaron una combinación de medidas que por primera vez restringen todo tipo de emisiones que afectan la tierra y la salud humana.

La Oficina de Recursos del Aire de California y el Distrito de Control de la Contaminación en el Valle de San Joaquín aprobaron medidas como imponer a las empresas transporte colectivo a sus empleados y prohibir más días sin quema de leña con el fin de cumplir metas propuestas para los próximos seis años.

La serie de medidas podrían costar a industriales y agroindustriales unos 20 mil millones de dólares en los siguientes 15 años.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses San Francisco will begin to give fines for contaminating the air.](#)

San Francisco multará por contaminación Sancionará por emitir dióxido de carbono

WASHINGTON - San Francisco se convirtió la semana en la primera ciudad estadounidense que multará a las empresas por emitir dióxido de carbono a la atmósfera.

Una ley sin precedentes

Según recogen medios locales, el órgano ambiental de la Bahía de esta ciudad californiana aprobó esta ley sin precedentes en Estados Unidos -con 15 votos a favor y uno en contra-, que entrará en vigor el próximo 1 de julio.

El Distrito para la Gestión de la Calidad del Aire del Área de la Bahía (BAAQMD, por sus siglas en inglés) cobrará a las industrias 4.4 centavos de dólar por cada tonelada de dióxido de carbono u otro gas perjudicial para el medio ambiente.

La norma se aplicará a más de 2,500 empresas de un área que incluye la ciudad de San Francisco (765 mil habitantes) y Silicon Valley, sede de algunas de las principales firmas del sector tecnológico.

Alrededor de siete plantas de generación energética y refinerías tendrán que pagar más de \$50 mil dólares al año, aunque, según las estimaciones del distrito, la mayoría de los negocios abonarán menos de un dólar.

Según señala los expertos, "probablemente, la modesta multa no será suficiente para que las fábricas reduzcan sus emisiones, pero asienta un importante precedente en la lucha contra el cambio climático y puede servir como modelo a seguir en diferentes regiones".

Asimismo, la portavoz del distrito, Lisa Fasano, especificó que esta medida no se aplicará a los vehículos.

"Vemos una directa conexión entre el clima y la contaminación del aire", manifestó el director ejecutivo del distrito, Jack Broadbent, quien añadió que "por este motivo creemos que cambiar el clima requiere esfuerzos tanto de los niveles federales, estatales como locales".

Por su parte, un gran número de los negocios de esta área se han opuesto a la reciente ley, ya que, según ellos, interfiere con otros impuestos y medidas del Gobierno de California para luchar contra la contaminación.

Esta medida espera generar en su primer año de funcionamiento \$1.1 millones de dólares que irán destinados a programas para medir emisiones en la región así como para fomentar acciones para reducirlos.

Como ejemplo, un negocio como una gasolinera pagaría solo \$1 dólar al año, mientras que la refinería del grupo Shell situada en la zona tendría que desembolsar unos \$195,355 dólares anuales.