

Spotlight on Savings

Homes that add energy-efficient products up for rebates, credits

By J.N. Sbranti

Modesto Bee, Sunday, March 22, 2009

Slipped inside last month's massive federal stimulus legislation were goodies for homeowners: hefty tax credits for those who make their homes more energy-efficient.

News about the cash is starting to circulate as businesses discover how it can help their customers and boost sales.

Here's the scoop: Homeowners can get tax credits of up to \$1,500 for replacing some or all of their windows, exterior doors, water heaters, air conditioners and furnaces with more energy-efficient models, or for adding insulation.

They also can get unlimited tax credits for installing electricity-generating solar panels or solar water heaters. The federal deal will cover 30 percent of the solar project's cost, no matter how much a homeowner spends.

Atop those savings, homeowners can collect assorted rebates from their energy providers, such as the Modesto Irrigation District, the Turlock Irrigation District and Pacific Gas & Electric Co.

"This is a brilliant program," said Mitch Bailey, owner of Bailey's Heating & Air in Modesto. Bailey said combining federal tax credits, MID rebates and manufacturer incentives can save homeowners up to \$3,550 on a high-efficiency heating and air-conditioning system.

"It's a no-brainer now for customers to buy the energy-efficient models," said Bailey. High-end heating and air-conditioning systems typically cost \$8,000 to \$12,000, which is about \$2,000 more than regular models.

"With all these rebates and the money saved by lowering energy bills, these energy-efficient systems will pay for themselves within 15 years," he said.

Thanks to the federal rebates, other energy-saving upgrades will pay off even faster.

Electricity-producing solar panels, for instance, can pay for themselves in seven to 10 years, according to Acro Electric of Oakdale.

"About 50 percent of the solar panel costs now are covered by these incentives," said Terri Loftus of Acro. She said the panels produce much more energy than they used to, and their prices have dropped recently. "That makes now the best time to buy."

That's just what Ernest Waggoner did a few weeks ago.

Waggoner spent about \$100,000 to equip his Oakdale ranch home with a large photovoltaic solar power system. He'll get 30 percent of that refunded in federal tax credits, and an additional \$18,000 back from PG&E.

"It's going to take seven or eight years for me to recoup the money I spent," said Waggoner, 84, whose electric bills used to hit \$600 a month. "And if PG&E has the audacity to raise its electric prices in the future, I'll probably be paid back in four to five years."

Such big investments aren't required to take advantage of the federal tax credits.

Blowing insulation into an attic costs about \$500 per 1,000 square feet, and the tax credits can cover 30 percent of that up to \$1,500. The MID also offers additional rebates for attic insulation.

"A lot of people can get back what they spend on insulation within one year because of lower energy bills," said Sean Archuleta, manager for the Modesto branch of Gold Star Insulation. He said well-insulated homes also are more comfortable to live in. "Homeowners notice the difference right away, especially during the summer."

Improve comfort level

Energy-efficient windows, skylights and glass doors also can keep homes cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter. They, too, qualify for 30 percent tax credits up to \$1,500, plus additional MID rebates.

"They absolutely change the comfort level in a home," said Steve Mort, chief executive officer for Don's Mobile Glass.

Mort said energy-efficient glass costs about 10 percent more than regular glass. A high-quality 3-by-5-foot window, he estimated, would cost \$400 to \$500 installed.

"These tax credits only can help," Mort said.

Not every new product, of course, qualifies for federal tax credits or energy company rebates. The incentives usually require homeowners to purchase high-energy-efficient models of whatever they're buying. There are specific standards that must be met, so homeowners should confirm they're buying the right product.

WAYS TO SAVE

Various federal income tax credits, plus rebates from energy providers, are being offered to homeowners who install energy-efficient products in their homes.

Program rules vary, and not all home improvement products will qualify. So homeowners should confirm that what they're buying will qualify.

Here's a summary of residential products eligible for federal tax credits of 30 percent of their cost:

- Insulation*
- Windows and skylights*
- Photovoltaic solar systems to produce electricity
- Gas, oil or propane water heater*
- Exterior doors*
- Storm windows*
- Central heating and air-conditioning systems, air source heat pumps, natural gas, propane or oil furnace, gas, propane or oil hot water boiler, advanced main air circulating fan*
- Metal and asphalt roofs*
- Gas tankless water heater*
- Biomass stove*
- Solar water heater (for homes, not swimming pools or hot tubs)
- Electric heat pump water heater*
- Residential fuel cell and microturbine system*
- Geothermal heat pump
- Small wind energy systems

* 30% of cost, up to \$1,500

For more details, go to www.EnergyStar.gov.

Smog: Britz-Simplot fined for diesel violations

By Mark Grossi, Fresno Bee.com, Tuesday, March 24, 2009

The state has fined Britz-Simplot Grower Solutions \$16,500 for diesel violations throughout this region.

In the 1990s, government officials had a tough time nailing down emissions standards and such enforcement actions. Strong lobbying, engine tampering and lawsuits prevented diesel trucks from being as tightly controlled as cars.

That has changed. Now the smog cops are regularly looking at diesel truckers.

In the case mentioned above, investigators for the California Air Resources Board found that Britz-Simplot failed to inspect its diesel truck fleet in 2007 and 2008 at facilities in Hanford, Hollister, Terra Bella, Traver, Five Points and Stockton facilities.

Diesel emissions contain more than 40 known carcinogenic compounds.

AP source: EPA closer to global warming warning

By H. Josef Hebert, Associated Press Writer

In the Modesto Bee, S.F. Chronicle, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Tuesday, March 24, 2009

WASHINGTON (AP) -- The Environmental Protection Agency has taken the first step on the long road to regulating greenhouse gases under the Clean Air Act.

Politicians and the public, business and industry will have to weigh in along the way, but for now a proposed finding by the EPA that global warming is a threat to public health and welfare is under White House review.

The threat declaration would be the first step to regulating carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases under the Clean Air Act and could have broad economic and environmental ramifications. It also would probably spur action by Congress to address climate change more broadly.

The White House acknowledged Monday that the EPA had transmitted its proposed finding on global warming to the Office of Management and Budget, but provided no details. It also cautioned that the Obama administration, which sees responding to climate change a top priority, nevertheless is ready to move cautiously when it comes to actually regulating greenhouse gases, preferring to have Congress act on the matter.

The Supreme Court two years ago directed the EPA to decide whether greenhouse gases, especially carbon dioxide from burning fossil fuels, pose a threat to public health and welfare because they are warming the earth. If such a finding is made, these emissions are required to be regulated under the Clean Air Act, the court said.

"I think this is just the step in that process," said White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs, noting the Supreme Court ruling. Another White House official, speaking anonymously in deference to Gibbs, predicted "a long process" before any rules would be expected to be issued on heat-trapping emissions.

But several congressional officials, also speaking on condition of anonymity because the draft declaration had not been made public — said the transmission makes clear the EPA is moving to declare carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases a danger to public health and welfare and views them as ripe for regulation under the Clean Air Act.

Such a finding "will officially end the era of denial on global warming," said Rep. Ed Markey, D-Mass., whose Energy and Commerce subcommittee is crafting global warming legislation. He said such an endangerment finding is long overdue because of the Bush administration's refusal to address the issue.

The EPA action "signals that the days of ignoring this pressing issue are over," said Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., whose Senate committee is working on a climate bill.

Many business leaders argue — as did President George W. Bush — that the Clean Air Act is ill-suited to deal with climate change and that regulating carbon dioxide would hamstring economic growth.

"It will require a huge cascade of (new clean air) permits" and halt a wide array of projects, from building coal plants to highway construction, including many at the heart of President Barack Obama's economic recovery plan, said Bill Kovacs, a vice president for environmental and technology issues at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

Abigail Dillen, an attorney for the environmental advocacy group Earthjustice, which is involved in a number of lawsuits challenging permits for new coal plants, dismissed the dire economic warnings from business groups about carbon dioxide regulation.

"It's to their interest to say the sky is falling, but it's not," she said. "The truth is we've never had to sacrifice air quality to maintain a healthy economy. The EPA has discretion to do this in a reasonable way."

An internal EPA planning document that surfaced recently suggests the agency would like to have a final endangerment finding by mid-April. But officials have made clear actual regulations are unlikely to come immediately and would involve a lengthy process with public comment.

Gibbs, when asked about the EPA document Monday, emphasized that "the president has made quite clear" that he prefers to have the climate issue addressed by Congress as part of a broad, mandatory limit on heat-trapping emissions.

But environmentalists said the significance of moving forward with the long-delayed endangerment issue should not be understated.

"This is historic news," said Frank O'Donnell, who heads Clean Air Watch, an advocacy group. "It will set the stage for the first-ever national limits on global warming pollution and is likely to help light a fire under Congress to get moving."

EPA Presses Obama to Regulate Warming Under Clean Air Act

By Juliet Eilperin

Washington Post, Tuesday, March 24, 2009; A01

The Environmental Protection Agency's new leadership, in a step toward confronting global warming, submitted a finding that will force the White House to decide whether to limit greenhouse gas emissions under the nearly 40-year-old Clean Air Act.

Under that law, EPA's conclusion -- that such emissions are pollutants that endanger the public's health and welfare -- could trigger a broad regulatory process affecting much of the U.S. economy as well as the nation's future environmental trajectory. The agency's finding, which was sent to the White House Office of Management and Budget without fanfare on Friday, also reversed one of the Bush administration's landmark decisions on climate change, and it indicated anew that President Obama's appointees will push to address the issue of warming despite the potential political costs.

In 2007, the Supreme Court instructed the Bush administration to determine whether greenhouse gases should be regulated under the Clean Air Act, but last July, then-EPA Administrator Stephen L. Johnson announced that the agency would instead seek months of public comment on the threat posed by global-warming pollution.

Interest groups and experts across the ideological spectrum described the EPA's proposal yesterday as groundbreaking. But while environmentalists called it overdue and essential to curbing dangerous climate change, business representatives warned that it could hobble the nation's economic recovery.

"This is historic news," said Frank O'Donnell, who heads the environmental watchdog group Clean Air Watch. "It will set the stage for the first-ever national limits on global-warming pollution. And it is likely to help light a fire under Congress to get moving."

But William L. Kovacs, vice president of environment, technology and regulatory affairs at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, said an effort to regulate greenhouse gases based on the EPA's scientific finding "will be devastating to the economy."

"By moving forward with the endangerment finding on greenhouse gases, EPA is putting in motion a set of decisions that may have far-reaching unintended consequences," he said. "Specifically, once the finding is made, no matter how limited, some environmental groups will sue to make sure it is applied to all aspects of the Clean Air Act."

The White House emphasized that the administration is simply fulfilling its legal obligations and will still press for a legislative solution to the question of curbing carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.

"The president has made clear that to combat climate change, his strong preference is for Congress to pass energy security legislation that includes a cap on greenhouse gas emissions," said White House spokesman Ben LaBolt. "The Supreme Court ruled that the EPA must review whether greenhouse gas

emissions pose a threat to public health or welfare, and this is simply the next step in what will be a long process that engages stakeholders and the public."

OMB spokesman Kenneth Baer did not give a specific timeline for when the White House will decide on how to proceed.

Johnson's action came in rejection of his scientific and technical staff's recommendation. In December 2007, the EPA staff wrote the White House to urge that the agency be allowed to make the finding that global warming threatens human health and welfare, but senior White House officials rejected that proposal on the grounds that the Clean Air Act was not the best way to deal with climate-change issues.

Since then, however, federal officials have provided additional rationales for such a finding. Last month, Howard Frumkin, who directs the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Environmental Health, testified before a Senate committee that the CDC "considers climate change a serious public health concern" that could accelerate illnesses and deaths stemming from heat waves, air pollution, and food- and water-borne illnesses.

But even those who support cutting greenhouse gases warn that doing so under the Clean Air Act could be complicated. "This would be a regulatory maze far exceeding anything we've seen before," said David Schoenbrod, a professor of environmental law at the New York Law School.

While the EPA's finding is not final, experts steeped in the Clean Air Act began debating yesterday what it would mean for utilities, vehicles, manufacturing plants and consumers. Kovacs predicted it could halt many of the projects funded under the just-passed economic recovery package. "This will mean that all infrastructure projects, including those under the president's stimulus initiative, will be subject to environmental review for greenhouse gases," he said.

EPA spokeswoman Adora Andy said in a statement that if the administration goes ahead with the proposal, it will be subject to public hearings and comment before becoming final, adding that it "does not propose any requirements on any sources of greenhouse-gas emissions" and "does not impose any new regulatory burdens on any projects, let alone those funded" under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Daniel J. Weiss, a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress, a liberal think tank, said the EPA's proposal would allow the administration to tackle climate change if Congress does not limit carbon emissions through legislation. He added that even if the EPA were forced to regulate greenhouse gases, it would target emissions from coal-fired power plants and then vehicles -- which combined account for about half of the nation's global-warming pollution -- before requiring smaller operations to apply for new emissions permits.

"The way I see it, it's, in case of legislative gridlock, break open the Clean Air Act," Weiss said. "It's a backup option, not ideal, but it's a way to make progress on emissions reductions."

EPA reverses Bush, says warming imperils public

By Juliet Eilperin, Washington Post

In the S.F. Chronicle, L.A. Times and other papers, Tuesday, March 24, 2009

Washington -- The Environmental Protection Agency has sent a proposal to the White House finding that global warming is endangering the public's health and welfare, according to several sources, a move that could have far-reaching implications for the nation's economy and environment.

The proposal - which comes in response to a 2007 Supreme Court decision ordering the EPA to consider whether carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases should be regulated under the Clean Air Act -- could lay the groundwork for nationwide measures to limit such emissions. It reverses one of the Bush administration's landmark environmental decisions: In July 2008 then-EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson rejected his scientific and technical staff's recommendation and announced the agency would seek months of further public comment on the threat posed by global warming pollution.

"This is historic news," said Frank O'Donnell, who heads the public watchdog group Clean Air Watch. "It will set the stage for the first-ever national limits on global warming pollution. And it is likely to help light a fire under Congress to get moving."

But business groups decried the move as an economic disaster.

"By moving forward with the endangerment finding on greenhouse gases, EPA is putting in motion a set of decisions that may have far-reaching unintended consequences," said Bill Kovacs, vice president of environment, technology and regulatory affairs at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. "Specifically, once the finding is made, no matter how limited, some environmental groups will sue to make sure it is applied to all aspects of the Clean Air Act."

"This will mean that all infrastructure projects, including those under the president's stimulus initiative, will be subject to environmental review for greenhouse gases. Since not one of the projects has been subjected to that review, it is possible that the projects under the stimulus initiative will cease. This will be devastating to the economy."

In December 2007, EPA submitted a written recommendation to the White House urging the Bush administration to allow the EPA to state officially that global warming is a threat to human welfare. But senior White House officials refused to open the document and urged Johnson to reconsider, saying such a finding would bring sweeping regulatory requirements under the 45-year-old Clean Air Act. An EPA analysis had found the move would cost utilities, automakers and others billions of dollars while also bringing benefits to other economic sectors.

Several congressional Democrats had urged EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson to move ahead with an endangerment finding on the grounds that it was scientifically warranted and would help push Congress to enact a national cap on greenhouse gases. Unlike former President George W. Bush, President Obama backs such mandatory limits.

The EPA action "signals that the days of ignoring this pressing issue are over," said Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., whose Senate committee is working on a climate bill.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

High-speed rail project moving along

By Eiji Yamashita

Hanford Sentinel, Monday, March 23, 2009

Could bullet trains be flying through Hanford or Visalia or somewhere in between?

Where could a South Valley high-speed rail station be located? How will high-speed trains benefit Valley residents? These are some of the many questions to be answered at upcoming public scoping meetings scheduled to take place throughout the Valley this week.

The public is invited to learn about and comment on the proposed high-speed rail system, which would connect San Francisco and Los Angeles in two hours and 40 minutes through the Central Valley.

An overall environmental study, which determined the routes and the technology for the system, has been recently completed. The project is now awaiting an intensive environmental review process that would nail down details, such as where exactly the tracks would be laid between Merced and Bakersfield and, most importantly for Kings County residents, where a South Valley station should be built.

The California High Speed Rail Authority will hold a meeting Tuesday in Visalia at the Visalia Convention Center, one in Fresno Wednesday and another in Bakersfield Thursday, kicking off the efforts to take the project a step closer to construction.

"These scoping meetings are the commencement of the project-level (environmental impact report), which is really going to start getting more into greater detail in each of the communities along the possible corridors in the Central Valley," said Bryn Forhan, regional spokeswoman for the authority.

Among key issues to be discussed at the Visalia meeting will be potential locations for a high-speed rail station that would serve the Visalia-Hanford area.

Locating it at the intersection of highways 198 and 43 or the interchange of highways 99 and 198 are two possibilities. Officials are also looking at Goshen and the Visalia Airport as well as downtown Tulare.

"It would be part of the environmental review process in terms of potential locations for the station," Forhan said. "They'll review that thoroughly during this particular phase."

Despite the recession and state budget crisis, proposals for bullet trains that could travel up to 220 mph and whisk passengers between the Bay Area and Southern California in less than three hours are making progress as a way to ease highway congestion and reduce pollution -- and boost the economy.

Officials say the Valley would be the "backbone" of the system because its flat geography allows the trains to achieve their top speed.

In fact, the Valley may become the first region in the system to see the tracks built for testing and certification.

"There is a very good possibility that would occur, to be able to make sure that the system works because of the high rate of speed you would experience with the system in the Valley," Forhan said.

The \$36 billion project won't be ready to break ground for another few years.

In November, California voters passed a \$9 billion bond, with \$950 million going to improving transit systems that would feed into the high-speed rail system. Another \$7 billion-\$8 billion is expected to be brought in through the public-private partnership. The authority is also lobbying hard to secure money from the recently signed federal stimulus bill to get the project moving.

The authority projects the environmental review process to be complete by 2012, while stressing that they are on a "fast track" to move the project along.

The high-speed rail, if realized, would pump \$48 billion into the Valley economy every year, according to a 2008 analysis prepared by University of California, Merced, economics professor Shawn Kantor.

Other economic benefits for the Valley highlighted by the study:

- \$48 million saving in pollution abatement
- \$2.2 billion saving in freeway congestion
- Direct expenditure of \$6 billion to \$16 billion within the Valley to build the system
- \$2.2 billion in new state tax revenues
- \$333 million in new sales and use tax and \$46 million flowing to counties and cities.

Public input is being sought for the \$36 billion project that would connect San Francisco and Los Angeles via the Valley

Scoping meetings:

Visalia, March 24, 3-7 p.m., Visalia Convention Center, 303 E. Acequia Ave.

Fresno, March 25, 3-7 p.m., Fresno Convention Center, 848 M St.

Bakersfield, March 26, 3-7 p.m., Rabobank Theater, 1001 Truxton Ave.

Utah agency sees less money for pollution problems

By Mike Stark, Associated Press Writer
USA TODAY, Tuesday, March 24, 2009

SALT LAKE CITY — As federal pressure mounts for Utah to curb urban pollution, the state agency in charge of air quality is facing deep budget cuts.

State lawmakers have trimmed 22 percent of the Department of Environmental Quality's budget over the current and upcoming fiscal years, according to Craig Silotti, director of the agency's support services.

The reductions will mean 19 DEQ positions are being eliminated and some new equipment also won't be purchased.

The cuts come as Utah -- which on some winter days has some of the worst air in the country -- confronts directives from the Environmental Protection Agency to reduce two kinds of pollution along the Wasatch Front associated with emissions from tail pipes, smoke stacks and other sources.

Bryce Bird, branch manager of the Division of Air Quality, said the state will focus on meeting those federal reductions but probably won't be able to monitor for air problems in other parts of the state.

"It limits our ability to do special studies like we've done in the past," Bird said.

That has included tracking wintertime pollution near Park City, checking for dangerous chemicals during the closure of an explosives business near Spanish Fork and monitoring potentially unhealthy air near several industrial gravel pits around the state.

The budget reductions are part of statewide belt-tightening because of the economic downturn and a decline in Utah's once-booming construction business.

The DEQ's budget gets about 25 percent of its money from the state's general fund. The state's portion of the current budget was trimmed by 4.1 percent in the fall and another 8.6 percent earlier this year. The budget for the upcoming year saw a 9.5 cut percent as lawmakers wrapped up the legislative session earlier this month, Silotti said.

Bill Sinclair, the agency's acting executive director, said in a statement the reductions, which total about \$3 million, are the largest in the 29 years he's worked at the department.

Layoffs aren't expected but 19 vacant jobs are being eliminated and staff may be shuffled. Travel and other expenses are also being trimmed.

Aside from the DEQ's air quality division, the cuts will affect divisions dealing with drinking water, solid and hazardous waste, contaminated sites and radiation control.

DEQ officials are hoping to see some of those losses reversed with federal money and increased fees.

Three of the 19 unfilled positions will likely be at the Division of Air Quality.

Bird said that will mean employees will have to focus on tasks that are required to meet federal standards.

The EPA has said certain parts of Utah don't meet new, stricter health standards for summertime ozone and certain particulate pollution.

In the coming years, the state will have to develop comprehensive plans for reducing those pollutants.

"That will be our priority," Bird said.

Continuing to violate federal pollution standards could lead to penalties down the road, including loss of federal highway funding.

Cherise Udell, founder of Utah Moms for Clean Air, said now isn't the time to be cutting money to monitor and clean up the state's air. Air quality is already bad in some places and the links between pollution and health problems have only gotten stronger, she said.

If anything, she said, Utah should be increasing funds for air quality.

"One of the primary roles of government is to protect public health. It doesn't make sense to me where we know lives are being shortened," Udell said.

With the reduced budget, state officials also won't be reinstating year-round air monitoring in the Uinta Basin, where energy development has increased dramatically in recent years.

The Division of Air Quality installed an air monitoring station in Vernal in December 2006, noting that natural gas production in the basin had ramped up.

The equipment picked up several instances where fine particulates -- tiny flecks of airborne pollution -- exceeded federal health standards. Those unhealthy spikes came only during winter weather inversions that trapped air in low-lying areas around Vernal.

The monitoring shut down in December 2007 as state officials focused funding and equipment on the Wasatch Front. Environmentalists asked that year-round monitoring continue.

Members of the oil and gas industry, though, are paying for a third-party study to model pollution in the basin, according to Kathleen Sgamma, government affairs director for the Denver-based Independent Petroleum Association of Mountain States.

The work, combined with air monitors in the area, will provide important details about emissions in the basins, she said. Some of the initial results are expected to be made public next month.

NEWS ANALYSIS

The Fight Plan for Clean Air

By Kate Galbraith and Felicity Barringer
N.Y. Times, Monday, March 23, 2009

The Environmental Protection Agency, about to declare heat-trapping gases to be dangerous pollutants, has embarked on one of the most ambitious regulatory challenges in history.

The move is likely to have a profound effect across the economic spectrum, affecting transportation, power plants, oil refineries, cement plants and other manufacturers.

It sets the agency on a collision course with carmakers, coal plants and other businesses that rely on fossil fuels, which fear that the finding will impose complex and costly rules.

But it may also help the Obama administration's efforts to push through a federal law to curb carbon dioxide emissions by drawing industry support for legislation, which many companies see as less restrictive and more flexible than being monitored by a regulatory agency. And it will lay a basis for the United States in the negotiations leading up to a global climate treaty to be signed in Copenhagen in December.

Once made final, the agency's finding will pave the way for federal regulation of carbon dioxide, methane and other heat-trapping gases linked to global warming.

In practical terms, the finding would allow quick federal regulation of motor vehicle emissions of heat-trapping gases and, if further actions are taken by the E.P.A., it could open the doors for regulatory controls on power plants, oil refineries, cement plants and other factories.

On Friday, the E.P.A. sent its finding to the Office of Management and Budget for review, according to a Web site that lists pending federal rules. Once the budget office clears the finding, it can be signed by the

E.P.A.'s administrator, Lisa P. Jackson. There is also likely to be a public comment period on the proposed finding, but there is wide expectation that it will be put in place.

Some policy makers greeted the agency's action as the first step in a new approach to climate change.

"This finding will officially end the era of denial on global warming," Representative Edward J. Markey, a Massachusetts Democrat who leads a select committee on global warming, said in a statement.

But Bill Kovacs, a specialist on global warming issues with the United States Chamber of Commerce, said that an endangerment finding would automatically provoke a tangle of regulatory requirements for businesses large and small.

If finalized, the finding by the agency could lead to a vast extension of its reach. Much is unknown about the details of what the E.P.A. is proposing, including how stringently the agency would regulate the emissions and how it would go about doing so.

But in February, Ms. Jackson indicated she was aware the agency could be stepping into a minefield by issuing such a finding. "We are poised to be specific on what we regulate and on what schedule," she said at the time. "We don't want people to spin that into a doomsday scenario."

Experts said Monday that the E.P.A.'s action would put pressure on Congress to pass federal legislation that could supplant the agency's plan or guide how it was carried out. A federal bill is preferred by many environmentalists and policy makers, as well as by industry.

John D. Walke, a senior lawyer at the Natural Resources Defense Council, said he welcomed the agency's decision but hoped it would ultimately lead to federal legislation.

"For some period we may have parallel efforts of Environmental Protection Agency pursuing or even adopting regulation while the eventual main show will be in Congress," Mr. Walke said.

Still, many doubt that legislation to cap emissions can pass this year, in the midst of a recession and at a time when carbon dioxide emissions are down because production is lower.

The E.P.A.'s move is the latest in a flurry of proposals that signal its determination to break from the Bush administration, which infuriated environmentalists by sidestepping the issue of regulating heat-trapping gases.

Earlier this month, the agency proposed creating a greenhouse-gas emissions registry, which would require industries — including oil refineries and cement makers, as well as utilities and pulp and paper manufacturers — to report how much pollution they were emitting.

The endangerment proposal is another step. In 2007, the Supreme Court ordered the E.P.A. to determine whether carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases qualified as pollutants under the Clean Air Act. Ms. Jackson, the agency's administrator, suggested to The New York Times in February that she hoped to act on emissions of heat-trapping gases by early April, before the second anniversary of the court's ruling.

The Bush administration had stalled in complying with the court order, opting for more study of the issue, although there was wide consensus among E.P.A. experts that a determination that carbon dioxide was a danger to the public was supported by scientific research.

Asked about the E.P.A.'s move, the White House press secretary, Robert Gibbs, emphasized the importance of going through Congress. "The way to deal with greenhouse gases," Mr. Gibbs said, "is to work with Congress in order to put together a plan that deals with this and creates a market for renewable energy."

There are several reasons that there is a widespread preference for a legislative "cap-and-trade" approach to regulating carbon dioxide emissions, as opposed to E.P.A. regulation.

A central reason, said Paul Bledsoe of the National Commission on Energy Policy, is that Congressional action is less subject to litigation and could not be easily overturned by a new administration.

But a deeper concern among the industry is that regulation by the E.P.A. is a blunt tool. The agency's regulatory powers have previously been applied mainly to pollutants that do damage on a regional level, like nitrogen oxide and hydrocarbons.

By contrast, carbon dioxide, methane and other heat-trapping gases that the E.P.A. proposes to regulate do harm on a global scale.

"The act does not deal well with an emission that's virtually ubiquitous and travels through the atmosphere," said Carol Raulston, a spokesman for the National Mining Association, a coal industry group.

Ultracheap Nano to hit India's streets in July

By ERIKA KINETZ - AP Business Writer
Modesto Bee, Tuesday, March 24, 2009

MUMBAI, India -- The world's cheapest car will retail for just over \$2,000 and can be yours -- if you live in India and are very lucky -- by July, Tata Motors said Monday.

The Nano, a pint-sized vehicle designed to make car ownership accessible to millions of the world's poor, finally goes on sale in India next month. Whether it will revolutionize the global auto industry -- or turn around its manufacturer's fortunes -- has yet to be seen, and other automakers will be watching closely to see how consumers respond to the car. So will environmentalists.

"We can do what most countries felt could not be done," Ratan Tata, chairman of the sprawling Tata group of companies, said at a launch ceremony Monday, as the swelling strains of the theme song to "2001: A Space Odyssey" died away in the warm night.

"Nothing is really impossible if you set your mind to it," he said. "What we have done is given the country an affordable car."

And, he pledged to go to Europe and America soon, with safer, cleaner but still ultra-cheap Nanos for the developed world.

The Nano was initially targeted at impoverished first-time car buyers in Asia and Africa, but the global economic meltdown has amplified Ratan Tata's export ambitions.

Tata Motors unveiled the Nano Europa, a slightly more robust version of the Indian model, at the Geneva Motor Show this month, with a planned launch of 2011.

The company is now designing a version of the Nano that meets U.S. safety and emissions standards and should be ready for launch in about three years, Tata said.

"A year ago, I would have said the United States is not on our radar screen," Tata said at a lunch with reporters Monday. Now, he added, "We see an opportunity for a low-cost car. In this economic situation we can see perhaps there is a place for it."

The Nano, with a starting retail price of 112,735 rupees (\$2,233) is a stripped-down car for stripped-down times: It is 10.2 feet (3.1 meters) long, has one windshield wiper, and a 623cc rear engine.

The four-seater can travel up to 65 miles an hour (105 kilometers an hour) and gets 55.5 miles to the gallon (23.6 kilometers per liter). The Nano does not have air bags or antilock brakes - neither of which is required in India - and if you want air conditioning or power windows, you'll have to pay extra.

Tata said the car emits less carbon dioxide than most motorbikes.

Priced like a gadget or a piece of jewelry, the Nano will be sold not just at Tata car dealerships across India, but also online and at electronics and clothing shops owned by the Tata group of companies.

People flocked to the Nanos on display Monday night like moths to light, thwacking the doors shut, testing the seats, tooting the horns, and tugging on the flexible plastic bumpers.

"It is a proper car," said Hormazd Sorabjee, editor of Autocar India, a trade magazine. He said the designers made clever compromises to keep costs down, scrimping on the plushness of the seats, but offering a comfy suspension and ample interior space.

The Nano should make global automakers stop loading their cars with costly gadgets people don't really want, he added.

"Finally, it's going to make people realize they should be building cars that people need," he said. "This is where multinationals have failed."

Some automakers have already started following suit. Bajaj Auto, Renault and Nissan teamed up last year to make a car that wholesales for \$2,500 in India by 2011.

Production of the Nano has been scaled back from initial targets -- and the rollout has been delayed six months -- because Tata Motors had to move its Nano factory from West Bengal to the business-friendly state of Gujarat. Violent protests by farmers and opposition political party leaders over land at the initial site forced the company to change plans.

[Merced Sun-Star, Letter to the Editor, Tuesday, March 24, 2009](#)

Letter: Ease state mandate

Editor: On April 1, nearly a third of the state's gas stations could be forced to shut off their pumps. An estimated 3,400 stations cannot afford to comply with a new state mandate -- the Enhanced Vapor Recover Phase II system -- that requires them to purchase new equipment.

This means that more people will be out of jobs, and commuters will have to drive further to fill up.

But this disaster can be prevented.

The 11 members of the California Air Resources Board, a committee in charge of regulating the state's air issues, can act within their power to provide flexibility for these gas stations, their employees and their customers.

CARB is stubbornly sticking to its ruling that gas stations must install new expensive gas-dispensing nozzles to capture 98 percent of the vapor emissions instead of the current 95 percent.

Due to our nation's banking and economic troubles, these gas stations -- many are small business owners -- cannot afford to finance up to \$80,000 to install these new nozzles.

Gas stations owned by major oil corporations have complied and they should be applauded for their efforts.

Independent gas stations, however, have had a very difficult time. They need some flexibility in the state's regulation to survive this recession.

The goal to achieve cleaner air for California is one that we can all support. But this should not be done at the expense of workers whose families depend on their paychecks.

CARB members should show compassion by delaying the regulations until the economy recovers.

SEN. DAVE COX, R-Fair Oaks

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses tactics against global warming. It is recommended to turn off the lights during "Earth Hour" in order to send the message against climate change. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at (559) 230-5851.

Tácticas contra el calentamiento global

Recomiendan apagar la luz para enviar un mensaje contra el cambio climático

Por Leticia Espinosa

Hoy, Tuesday, March 24, 2009

Litzully Falcón, de 10 años y estudiante de cuarto de primaria, tiene varias ideas para "salvar al planeta" del calentamiento global, y piensa explicarlas a sus padres para ponerlas en práctica en casa.

La niña participó ayer en el programa "Tu, yo y la ecología", patrocinado por el primer McDonald's Verde de la corporación; en vísperas de la celebración de "La hora de la Tierra", una iniciativa de la organización mundial de conservación World Wildlife Fund (WWF).

Según WWF, durante los últimos años se ha detectado un calentamiento acelerado en la Tierra o cambio climático, relacionado al aumento de las emisiones de gases, principalmente de dióxido de carbono, consecuencia de la quema de combustibles fósiles (carbón, petróleo y gas) utilizados para la producción de energía y el transporte, principalmente.

Frenar el cambio climático puede hacerse de dos maneras: Utilizando mejor la energía (eficiencia energética) y produciéndola más limpia con energía renovable que no libere dióxido de carbono a la atmósfera.

Justo lo que se hace en el McDonalds Verde, 4158 S. Ashland Ave., en el barrio de Las Empacadoras. Julio Bojórquez, gerente de la sucursal, explicó que en ahí se aprovecha el agua de la lluvia para mantener un techo verde cubierto de pasto y plantas, se aprovecha la energía solar para iluminar el interior; "las mesas, sillas y techo están construidos con material reciclado, en su mayoría botellas de plástico". En ese restaurante, el jabón que se usa es biodegradable y el sistema de agua en los baños ahorra hasta 40 por ciento del consumo normal, entre otras características.

Durante el programa a cargo de Ronald McDonald y Mr. Verde, los estudiantes de cuarto grado de la academia Lara, aprendieron la importancia de las 3 "R": reducir (uso de energía); reciclar y reusar.

Oscar Uriel, de 9 años, comentó que apagará las luces en casa cuando nadie esté ocupándolas. Su compañero, Alejandro Esquivel, de 10 años, comentó que desconectará los aparatos eléctricos que nadie esté usando. En tanto, Litzully dijo que explicará a sus padres la importancia de reciclar la basura y reusar productos como las bolsas de plástico del supermercado.

El 31 de marzo de 2007, la ciudad de Sydney quiso demostrar su preocupación sobre la situación y lo hizo apagando sus luces por una hora. En 2008, la hora del planeta llegó a cientos de hogares, empresas y comunidades, que apagaron las luces en 35 países y más de 400 ciudades, entre ellas Chicago.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses President Obama will address the nation with focus on efforts to reach clean energy.

Enfocará Obama su discurso a la nación en los esfuerzos por alcanzar una energía limpia

Manuel Ocaño

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Monday, March 23, 2009

El gobierno del presidente, Barack Obama promueve a partir de esta mañana ante el Congreso un presupuesto que busca independizar a los estadunidenses del consumo de combustible proveniente de otros países, y sentar las bases para un nuevo sistema de energía renovable, entre otros rubros. El mandatario dijo este fin de semana en un discurso en cadena nacional que un nuevo presupuesto para el país debe partir de cambiar los hábitos de consumo de energía:

"Espero un presupuesto que cubra cuatro principios. Primero, debe reducir nuestra dependencia al peligroso petróleo extranjero, que finalmente ubique a este país hacia un futuro de energía limpia", dijo el presidente. Agregó que sin duda la industria del mañana consumirá energía de fuentes renovables. La única cuestión dijo, es saber si Estados Unidos está listo para encabezar ese futuro.

Los otros principios que el presidente busca esta semana en el presupuesto son mejorar la educación, reformar el sistema de salud y reducir el déficit presupuestal de la nación, uno de los mayores en el mundo.