

Bill wants to ban some agriculture burning

By Seth Nidever, Lee News Service
Kingsburg Recorder Wed., May 27, 2009

A Dean Florez bill that cleared the Senate recently seeks to ban agricultural burning on days when fireplace burn bans are in effect.

But local agricultural sources said the air district already has rules in effect to accomplish the same thing.

The bill, which cleared the Senate Thursday on a 23-14 vote, would prohibit any agricultural burning from taking place on days when the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District puts the kibosh on fireplace burning.

The fireplace restrictions kick in every winter and are designed to reduce the small particle pollution that bedevils Valley air.

The ban days multiplied last year, and there were some days when fireplace burning was banned but agricultural burning took place, said Seyed Sadredin, district executive officer. Sadredin said the Florez bill codifies changes the district made in January to close the loophole.

"We think it's a good idea," he said.

Agricultural burning has been coming under tighter regulation in the last five years.

Farmers must apply for permission to burn, and they must demonstrate economic hardship or disease issues.

In most cases, the waste is ground up and sent to electricity generation plants or returned to field to be used as mulch.

Most kinds of agricultural burning will be prohibited by 2010.

Local growers are looking forward to the completion of a sewage composting facility near Kettleman City that will take agricultural and other green waste, mix it with treated sewage from Los Angeles and spread it on nearby farmland.

There aren't enough power plants in the Valley to take the waste, said Manuel Cunha, president of the Fresno-based Nisei Farmers League.

The plant, now under construction, is expected to start up in 2011.

Bakersfield gets to check out fuel-cell vehicles

By Sarah Reinecke, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, May 28, 2009

Fuel cell vehicles powered by hydrogen look like any other car. They perform the same, just more quietly, but produce zero emissions.

Although not yet for sale -- only for lease -- they are the future of transportation and set to be on showroom floors in 2015.

Eleven from seven different auto manufacturers were on display in Bakersfield Wednesday for people to learn about, see refueled and test drive as part of a Hydrogen Road Tour.

The nine-day tour that started in Chula Vista will cover 1,700 miles, stop in 28 cities and end June 3 in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Fuel cell vehicles have hydrogen tanks and fuel cells that make electricity by using hydrogen and oxygen, said Patrick Serfass, vice president of the National Hydrogen Association.

Serfass said fuel cell vehicles are two to three times more efficient than gasoline vehicles and can drive 350 to 450 miles on six kilograms of hydrogen, which is equivalent to six gallons of gas.

He said half of the 320 vehicles on American roads are in California. The hydrogen tanks are filled through an air-tight pump, essentially the same way gasoline tanks are, Serfass said.

He said there are 26 filling stations in California and 62 stations nationwide.

"A lot of people don't know how real these vehicles are," Serfass said. "These are pre-production vehicles, not yet for sale in showrooms, but at the mature stage just before that."

Before seeing the vehicles, Robert Do of Bakersfield expected them to look futuristic.

"I think most people would think of space age, kind of weird, with fins on it, or bullet shaped," Do said.

He was pleased to see they look like any other vehicle. Do liked the fact there are many sizes available, from compact to SUVs, and plans to buy one as soon as they are available.

Honda leases the vehicles for \$600 a month, which includes insurance, maintenance and roadside assistance. Elmer Hardy, Honda senior manager of alternative fuel vehicles, said the company has leased seven so far, all in the Los Angeles area. During the next three years, it plans to lease 200 more.

Right now, fuel cell vehicles can cost more than \$1 million, said Owen Thunes, senior project engineer, electric and fuel cell vehicles, for Nissan. By 2015, manufacturers expect the price to be comparable to those of other vehicles.

"Over time we'll improve the costs," Thunes said.

Do sees the vehicles as money-saving and good for the environment.

"This is something of the future," Do said.

Bakersfield tops "bad skin" list

Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, May 28, 2009

Surprise, surprise, we've topped another "bad" list.

Totalbeauty.com says Bakersfield is the worst city for skin in the United States due to our particulate pollution and dry, stagnant weather. We're followed by Houston, Pittsburgh, Las Vegas and Phoenix on the tally of 13 cities total.

Here's the Web site's take on us: "(The pollution and air) combined with Bakersfield's record-high sunshine and heat makes this Cali locale a combat zone for your skin.

"...the actual particle pollution obviously isn't good for skin, but what's even more damaging is when the pollution depletes the ozone layer and allows stronger, more damaging UV rays to reach us (Bakersfield is the second most ozone-polluted city)."

It listed the top five best cities for skin as Anchorage, Bismarck, N.D., Honolulu, Flagstaff, Ariz., and Billings, Mont.

But Dr. Marvin Campos, a local family practitioner who dedicates about 25 percent of his practice to dermatology, said he's not sure he buys the "worst" ranking. Orange County has just as many skin cancer cases as Bakersfield and much better air, he said.

He's never seen a study showing Bakersfield has more skin cancer than any other place where people get a lot of sun, Campos said.

"All of Southern California gets a lot of skin cancer cases," he said.

Your best antidote: wearing sunscreen with an SPF of 35 or better.

At least we didn't make Totalbeauty's list of the 13 worst cities for hair. Fresno did, though, at No. 7. It's apparently "the 7th sunniest city in the nation and is in the top ten for most polluted cities, which means a nightmare for your hair."

Local students win air contest

By Judy Finney

Advance Reporter

Lemoore Advance Thurs., May 21, 2009

Students in two Lemoore-area schools came out winners in the San Joaquin Air District's "Kids for Clean Air" contest. Students in Michael Hall's fifth-grade class at Akers Elementary School and in Deborah Weaver's fourth-grade class at Meadow Lane Elementary School gathered enough pledges from their communities to win iPod Shuffles for themselves and \$250 for the teacher to use to improve the classroom.

"The contest was part of our Healthy Air Living Program," said Jaime Holt, chief communications officer at the air district. "The program is a way to help every person understand they create air pollution and learn how they can find solutions to our air problems."

Students in Weaver's classroom gathered 185 pledges. They also learned ways that air pollution harms people.

"We need better air quality because some people have asthma and if they keep getting asthma attacks they might die," said 10-year-old Bryce Aguilar.

Classmate Christopher Works, 9, agreed. "Some people have lung disease and smog gets into their lungs and they might die," Christopher said.

Edith Tafolla, 10, added, "Save the environment by helping our world be cleaner and air not have any pollution in it."

Areiana Gutierrez, 10, said one way to stop air pollution was to not burn trash because it makes smoke, while Garrett Bily, 9, explained that dirty air includes dangerous bacteria that can cause diseases that could send a person to the hospital.

Imanol Colin, 10, was also concerned with people dying from lungs infected from polluted air.

At Akers School, students gathered almost 300 pledges.

"Too often students that are affected by unhealthy air are restricted to playing board games in the cafeteria during recess due to the unacceptable air conditions outside," Hall said. "By taking the pledge, people have agreed to take action to improve the air quality in the San Joaquin Valley."

Some of the ways Akers students suggested for helping clear the air included riding bikes to work, planting shade trees, adjusting thermostats to lower temperatures in the winter and higher temperatures in the summer and replacing light bulbs with fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs).

Holt said the district awarded the iPod Shuffles and classroom monetary donation to each classroom that achieved an average of two and one-half pledge cards per student.

Hanford's Frontier Elementary School's fifth grade class, under the leadership of Tara Hall, wife of Michael Hall, also received the award.

Key senator calls for 100 new reactors in 20 years

By Duncan Mansfield - Associated Press Writer
In the Modesto Bee, Wednesday, May 27, 2009

OAK RIDGE, Tenn. -- Tennessee Sen. Lamar Alexander called Wednesday for doubling the number of nuclear reactors nationwide, a potentially \$700 billion proposal that calls for building 100 more over 20 years.

"It is an aggressive goal, but with presidential leadership it could happen," the third-ranking Senate Republican told an economic and technology conference at the Y-12 nuclear weapons plant in Oak Ridge.

"I am convinced it should happen because conservation and nuclear power are the only real alternatives we have today to produce enough low-cost, reliable, clean energy to clean the air, deal with climate change and keep good jobs from going overseas."

Alexander said he would deliver that message next week speaking on the floor of the Senate, where he said all 40 Republicans and many Democrats support nuclear energy. He said he hopes President Barack Obama's administration would embrace his call under efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Obama's administration is considering a cap-and-trade program designed to reduce greenhouse gases and to require larger quantities of carbon-free energy production.

The country's 104 commercial nuclear reactors produce 20 percent of the nation's electricity, while most of its energy comes from carbon-producing coal. The last reactor to come online was the Tennessee Valley Authority's Watts Bar Unit 1 reactor in Spring City, Tenn., in 1996.

Steve Smith, director of the Southern Alliance for Clean Energy, called Alexander's proposal "reckless."

"Nuclear power is a problem, not a solution," Smith said. "New nuclear reactors are expensive, create significant water use and thermal pollution risks to our communities and produce radioactive waste that after 50 years we still have no long-term solution for."

Smith urged conservation and efficiency improvements instead, but Alexander said they would not be enough to blunt growing energy demand.

Alexander said he also backs renewable energy sources, notably solar power and biomass fuels, yet called those still too expensive and inefficient.

"Today there is a huge energy gap between the renewable electricity we would like to have and the reliable, low-cost electricity we must have," he said.

The Tennessee Valley Authority is spending \$2.5 billion to complete a second reactor in Spring City by 2013. Meanwhile, there are 17 proposals for 26 new reactors pending before the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

Knoxville-based TVA has two reactors among the proposed projects and is considering completing two others in north Alabama.

Alexander said he would increase federal loan guarantees now being offered for the first four reactors to as many as 12 to "jump start" the nuclear revival.

China Is Said to Plan Strict Gas Mileage Rules

By Keith Bradsher, staff writer
N.Y. Times, Wed., May 27, 2009

HONG KONG — Worried about heavy reliance on imported oil, Chinese officials have drafted automotive fuel economy standards that are even more stringent than those outlined by President Obama last week, Chinese experts with a detailed knowledge of the plans said on Wednesday.

The new plan would require automakers in China to improve fuel economy by an additional 18 percent by 2015, said An Feng, a leading architect of China's existing fuel economy regulations who is now the president of the Innovation Center for Energy and Transportation, a nonprofit group in Beijing.

The plan is going through the interagency approval process, with comments sought from automakers, and is scheduled for release early next year, he said.

The Chinese government tends to make few changes in automotive regulations once the interagency review process has started.

The average fuel economy of family vehicles in China is already higher than in the United States, mainly because cars in China tend to be considerably smaller than those in the United States — and are getting even smaller because of recent tax changes.

Cars with small fuel-sipping engines are now subject to a 1 percent sales tax, while sports cars and sport utility vehicles with the largest engines are subject to a 40 percent sales tax. Stricter fuel economy standards have won support from four interest groups within the Chinese government, said a Chinese government official who spoke on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss the issue.

Many in the government see a strategic and geopolitical need to reduce China's reliance on oil imports, the official said. China was self-sufficient in oil until 1995, but soaring demand means that China now imports nearly three-fifths of its oil, much of it from potentially unstable countries along sea lanes controlled by the United States Navy. Others in the government are concerned about limiting toxic air pollution and see reductions in the total combustion of gasoline as one way to achieve this. Still other officials are worried about the potential for international efforts to limit China's emissions of global warming gases, or view greater fuel economy as a way to increase the competitiveness of Chinese car exports.

"Different stakeholders have different views," the official said.

China uses a different system from the United States to regulate fuel economy. China sets minimum standards for each of 16 weight categories and tests only urban fuel economy, not highway driving.

Adjusting for these differences is difficult and controversial. Mr. An estimated that the average new car, minivan or sport utility vehicle in China already gets the equivalent of 35.8 miles a gallon this year based on the American measurement system of corporate averages and will be required to get 42.2 miles a gallon in 2015.

By comparison, President Obama announced last week that each automaker will be required to reach a corporate average of 35.5 miles per gallon by 2016.

The details of China's new fuel economy standards may favor domestic automakers at the expense of multinationals, several auto industry officials said. That is because the new rules call for the steepest increases in fuel economy — as much as 26 percent — for midsize and compact cars, market segments where multinationals are strong. Subcompacts, a market where domestic automakers are stronger, will be required to increase their gas mileage by as little as 9 percent compared with the existing standards, which took effect on Jan. 1.

Large cars, minivans and sport utility vehicles will face percentage increases between those extremes. The Chinese government had already cracked down on these vehicles by setting very high gas mileage benchmarks for them as part of the existing rules.

When told late Wednesday of China's gas mileage plans, Michael Dunne, the managing director for China at J. D. Power & Associates, the consulting firm, said that Japanese, Korean and German automakers had models of very small cars that they might start building in China if they have trouble meeting the new standards for larger models.

"The short-term impact is it would favor the Chinese, no doubt about it," he said. "Global automakers care so deeply about this market that they'll do whatever it takes, and adjust."

Automakers were cautious in their responses to the Chinese initiative.

"Ford China is pleased to be part of the industry consultation process on fuel efficiency," said Whitney Small, a Ford spokeswoman. "Given our role in the process, it would not be appropriate for us to comment prematurely on an ongoing discussion."

Several auto industry officials said that while a substantial increase in fuel economy standards is inevitable, two other issues have not yet been resolved.

One issue is how China treats imports. The current fuel-economy standards ban the production of any vehicle in China that does not meet the minimum requirement for its vehicle weight range. But imports are exempt, so practically all of the sport cars and large sport utility vehicles sold in China are imported.

One possibility is to tax imported or domestically produced vehicles that fall short of the standard instead of banning them. The United States does this. But new taxes are bureaucratically complex to impose in China. Imports made up only 1.9 percent of China's car market in the first four months of this year because of heavy import taxes.

The other unresolved issue is whether China will impose corporate average fuel economy standards in addition to minimum standards for each vehicle weight range, auto industry officials said. This would make it harder for companies to specialize in larger vehicles that may consume more fuel but may also be more profitable.

[Merced Sun-Star, Letter to the Editor, Thursday, May 28, 2009](#)

Letter: Read the fine print on new auto rules

Editor: Last week, the Sun-Star ran an Associated Press article, "Obama's new emission rules will transform U.S. autos."

The rules will take effect in 2012. The goal is to achieve an average 35 miles per gallon. That sounds great doesn't it? Not so fast.

The automakers say they need "stable, relatively high gas prices to create a market for electric vehicles."

The government is going to help the automakers "create a market?"

We are being blackmailed, folks. The feds are becoming the new mafia, strong arming us to buy vehicles of their choice.

Some analysts predict gas prices up to \$7 a gallon by the end of this year and this is at the same time oil prices per barrel have gone down.

We are all interested in clean air and keeping pollutants down, but at what price and whose sacrifice?

With the regulations and restriction in line at this current time by our current administration we are all going to be hostages in our own country. Do your homework. Read the fine print. Ask some questions. We all need to be informed, educated with the facts and involved in the solutions.

The goal seems to be to transform America into a European replica. Don't forget that we fought a war (Revolutionary) to separate ourselves from the European mentality.

Write to your representatives and senators as to how the goals set forth by the Obama administration are to be achieved.

JUDY EVANS, Merced

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses Assemblyman Jerry Hill's Assembly Bill 431. This bill would require the Port of Oakland to take pollution-reductions similar to those taken by the Long Beach and Los Angeles ports. For more information, contact Maricela Velásquez \(559\) 230-5849.](#)

Tratan de adaptar a Oakland restricciones a contaminación de puertos de Los Ángeles y Long Beach

Manuel Ocaño, Noticiero Latino
Radio Bilingüe, Wednesday, May 27, 2009

La legislatura de California analiza una propuesta que impondría al puerto marítimo de Oakland restricciones similares a las que el año pasado adoptaron las terminales de Los Ángeles y Long Beach, las mayores en el país.

El legislador, Jerry Hill propone que Oakland cobre cuotas a los camiones de carga que consumen diesel y el dinero que se reúna se use precisamente para combatir la contaminación.

Dos estudios atribuyeron el año pasado a la contaminación en el puerto de Oakland cientos de muertes prematuras y enfermedades respiratorias entre residentes el área.

Algunas instituciones han cuestionado que el plan de cuotas carece de un límite tope para la contaminación.