

Ethanol fuel arrives in Sacramento area

By Tony Bizjak, staff writer

Modesto Bee and Sacramento Bee, Thursday, June 18, 2009

Sacramento is now a revolutionary outpost in the fight for cleaner fuels.

With the arrival of 25 bright-green and yellow ethanol fuel pumps at gas stations regionwide in recent weeks, Sacramento lays official claim to being the nation's ethanol epicenter, at least west of the Mississippi, air quality officials said.

California Air Resources Board Chairwoman Mary Nichols, who unveiled one of the pumps at a Madison Avenue Valero station Tuesday, acknowledged the fuel known as E85 isn't as green as state officials would like. But, she said, it's a sign of things to come.

"This is a test market for the state," Nichols said. "We're in the early stages of the revolution. Consumers will see a lot of new fuels coming onto the market."

The fuel – a mix of 85 percent ethanol, mainly from corn, and 15 percent gasoline – isn't for every car.

In fact, air officials estimate there are only about 23,000 vehicles in the Sacramento region with flex-fuel capability, allowing them to use E85 or regular gasoline.

Many owners don't even know their vehicles are flex-fuel capable, said Matt Horton of Propel, a Sacramento-based alternative fuels company providing E85 fuel for stations in several cities including Rocklin, Citrus Heights and Elk Grove.

The telltale sign of a flex-fuel vehicle is a bright-yellow gas cap. Some vehicles also have a flex-fuel insignia.

An early question looms for retailers, though. How many flex-fuel vehicle owners will search out one of the 25 stations?

State air resource board officials say pricing will be key. Ethanol gets anywhere from 20 percent to 30 percent less miles to the gallon than gasoline but is cheaper.

Tuesday, at the Valero station on Madison Avenue, high-octane E85 was going for \$2.26 a gallon, while regular unleaded gas was \$2.92, unleaded plus \$3.04, and super unleaded \$3.14.

Alan Barker of Carmichael showed up in his flex-fuel 2009 Ford Suburban – "I'm a truck guy and I have four kids" – for his first ethanol fill-up.

But Barker said there are other stations with regular gasoline closer to his house he might still use. "Convenience is a major factor. I don't want to drive out of my way in traffic."

He researched E85 online and concluded he'd probably buy it when it's 20 percent cheaper than regular gas.

Sasha Faught of Natomas, who owns a flex-fuel Chevy Tahoe, has been using E85.

"I want to be green," she said. "Let's face it, we're using up our resources. It's smart to get on with it."

The area's new E85 pumps, stretching from Fairfield to Folsom, were financed mainly by a \$3.5 million California Air Resources Board grant, administered by the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District.

Critics have derided corn-based ethanol as a poor choice for government investment because it creates only marginally less carbon than regular gasoline production.

Air quality officials, however, lauded the fuel Tuesday, while acknowledging its current limitations.

Air Resources Board Chairwoman Nichols described E85 as a transitional fuel that will help get Californians used to the idea of trying alternative fuels.

CARB recently set rules requiring reduction of greenhouse gas emissions involved in the production, distribution and use of fuels.

Nichols said corn-based ethanol will either have to improve on its greenhouse gas emissions or give way to other fuels, including other ethanols.

"We are not taking a pro- or anti-corn stance," she said. "Corn is what's out there now. It will change."

She encouraged motorists who buy flex-fuel vehicles to try E85. "You are part of the transformation."

Chris Nobles of Nella Oil Co., which provides E85 fuel at two Valero stations – on Madison Avenue and Arden Way – said ethanol likely will account for only a tiny percentage of sales but represents a step forward in the marketplace.

"We wouldn't have done this without the (state) grant," she said, "but things are changing. We can't guarantee that gasoline will continue to be the main market source."

Big beef over dairy cow gas

Manteca leaders side with ag industry

By Dennis Wyatt, Managing Editor

Manteca's elected leaders are having a cow over a Stockton City Council member nominated to serve on the San Joaquin Air Pollution Control District.

Believing that Stockton Councilmember Susan Talamantes Eggman is unsympathetic to the plight of the dairy industry, the City Council voted unanimously Tuesday to reject her nomination.

The council's concern centers around a movement within the air pollution control district to force dairy farmers to reduce methane gas which is essentially cow flatulence.

Manteca Mayor Willie Weatherford started the ball rolling by saying the city shouldn't be voting for a representative who is likely to deal a severe blow to dairies that top the San Joaquin County's annual farm production of \$2 billion at \$446 million.

"If in fact dairies are required to reduce methane gas, (because they are the No. 1 source) what does that mean for humans who I suspect produce the second largest amount of methane gas?" Weatherford asked rhetorically as he kicked off a discussion defending agriculture against regulations many believe will be a death knell.

Dairy farms are being pummeled by the global recession that has triggered a massive drop in demand for milk and other dairy products. As a result, it now costs California dairy farmers \$1.50 a gallon to produce milk while they are receiving right around \$1 a gallon.

"We need to be sensitive to the needs of agriculture in California," The mayor said, noting a possible methane reduction requirement on top of the drop-off in prices could result in the

massive collapse of dairies.

Weatherford said if the air pollution control district succeeds by getting the votes on the governing board to impose the methane reduction requirement, it would be a matter of time before "all of our milk comes from Mexico."

Dairies have been the leader in ag production in San Joaquin County since 2001. Farm-related jobs including processing and trucking are by far the largest segment of employment in San Joaquin County.

The district has focused on methane releases from the San Joaquin Valley's two million dairy cows as being a major factor in poor air quality.

Studies have shown that an average dairy cow produces 12.8 pounds of volatile organic compounds (VOC) a year. That would mean 700 cows produce as much VOCs as 60,000 cars.

One solution would involve a million dollar investment per dairy of methane digesters that cover a dairy's lagoon. Such a digester would trap pollutants and create electricity. There is a major debate whether they would be cost effective for the typical dairy.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Quality Control District - the people who made dairy cattle public enemy No. 1 for cutting a bit too much cheese and creating methane gas - are also going after steakhouses and fast food joints that charbroil meat. That dripping grease ends up sizzling and sparking a flame that spews smoke containing dangerous pollutants that escape into the atmosphere.

Throughout the San Joaquin Valley, the air quality folks estimate 2.6 tons of particles are released into the air each day from charbroiling. Altogether, 527 tons of pollutants that are considered lethal are released daily into the skies of the San Joaquin Valley.

The air quality people have a simple solution – technology. Of course, that means money. The proposed new rule – could cost between \$2,000 and \$100,000 a year per restaurant.

If enough other cities in the northern region of the air pollution control district agree, the Stockton City Council would have to select someone else besides Eggman to serve on the air pollution control district's governing board. The nominee needs to come from Stockton this year under air pollution control district procedures.

Port of Oakland bans trucks that burn dirty fuel

Associated Press

In the S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Wednesday, June 17, 2009

PART OF OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) -- A new ban on trucks that burn dirty diesel fuel is expected to help clean the air around the Port of Oakland.

The Port Commission approved the plan Tuesday to restrict truck models older than 1994, as well as models from 1994 to 2006 not equipped with soot filters, at the Port of Oakland.

Environmental activists who filled the port's meeting room in Jack London Square hailed the new regulations, saying they will reduce air pollution that affects both residents and truck drivers.

The California Air Resources Board has ruled that dirty trucks will be illegal at the port starting next year, but the Port of Oakland is responsible for enforcing the ruling on the estimated 2,000 trucks that pass through daily.

Fixit: Ozone air cleaner is hazardous to lungs

By Karen Youso, Star Tribune (Minneapolis)
In the Modesto Bee, Thursday, June 18, 2009

Q: What's wrong with having an ozone air cleaner in our home? We have one and visitors told us it's dangerous. Is it?

A: Yes. Health experts do not recommend the use of ozone air cleaners in homes. Ozone is a known irritant to the lungs and respiratory system.

Federal and state health and safety experts are concerned about the use of ozone because when inhaled alone or mixed with other chemicals, it can damage the lungs. Even relatively small amounts can cause chest pain, coughing, shortness of breath and throat irritation, according to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). It also can worsen chronic conditions such as asthma and compromise the body's ability to fight respiratory infections.

Where ozone is located is what determines if it's more helpful or harmful to humans. In the stratosphere, ozone filters out radiation and is considered beneficial. However, close to the ground, where people live and breathe, ozone is a pollutant and harmful to the respiratory system. That's why large cities post ozone alerts on smoggy days, advising people with compromised health to stay indoors.

Ozone can be safely used to purify water and can be used with care in unoccupied dwellings as a way to mitigate certain chemical or biological contaminants. But no person or pet is allowed into those buildings during the treatment and for a specified time afterward.

To clean indoor air, the EPA recommends that consumers eliminate sources of odors and contamination and increase household ventilation by using fans to bring in fresh air to dilute contaminants or to get rid of them by exhausting them outdoors. If further air purification is desired, look to air-cleaning devices such as air filters and electronic particle air cleaners.

EPA declares emergency over asbestos illnesses in Montana

The federal government will grant \$6 million for healthcare for residents of two towns where for decades mine workers were unknowingly poisoning themselves.

Washington Post
June 18, 2009

Washington -- The Environmental Protection Agency on Wednesday declared its first public health emergency, saying the federal government would funnel \$6 million to provide medical care for people sickened by asbestos from a mine in Montana.

The declaration applies to the towns of Libby and Troy, where for decades workers dug for vermiculite, a mineral used in insulation. They were unknowingly poisoning themselves: The vermiculite was contaminated with a toxic form of asbestos, which workers carried home on their clothes.

The Department of Health and Human Services estimates that there are 500 people with asbestos-related illnesses such as lung cancer and asbestosis in the two towns, whose populations total about 3,900.

A spokeswoman for the department said 50 cases were diagnosed every year, including in workers' children and other relatives.

The department announced that it would grant \$6 million to the health authority in Lincoln County, Mont., where the towns are located. The money is intended to be spent on residents' healthcare,

officials said, paying for what insurance won't and covering the full medical tab for those without insurance.

"For way too long, many here in Washington have turned a blind eye to the needs of the residents in Libby," said Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius. "Those days are over."

The EPA has had the power to declare a public health emergency since 1980. But agency officials said the law included no specific criteria about what constituted an emergency.

NYC billboard monitors rising greenhouse gases

The Associated Press

In the Washington Post, Tri-Valley Herald & other papers Thursday, June 18, 2009

NEW YORK -- New Yorkers have long been able to keep tabs on the national debt, but they now have a highly visible counter to track greenhouse gas emissions.

A 70-foot-high billboard outside Madison Square Garden and Pennsylvania Station, not far from the Empire State Building, features a carbon counter. Digital numbers help viewers track the amount of greenhouse gases in Earth's atmosphere. As of Thursday morning, it stood at more than 3.6 trillion metric tons.

The sign uses low-energy lights, offset by carbon credits.

The carbon counter is sponsored by Deutsche Bank. It is a few blocks from the National Debt Clock, which keeps track of the U.S. government's debt.

[Fresno Bee Earth Blog, Thursday, June 18, 2009:](#)

UC studies nitrogen on farms

By Mark Grossi

The University of California, Davis, has begun a \$2.8 million study of agricultural-based nitrogen, a key part of modern farming. Nitrogen has become a concern as a contaminant in the air and water. It is also a greenhouse gas.

"This is one of the most important and least publicized environmental issues we face: Escaped nitrogen from agricultural production affects the quality of our air, water, and soil and has huge potential to contribute to climate change," said Tom Tomich, director of the Agricultural Sustainability Institute at UC Davis.

Nitrogen comes from soils, seeps into groundwater and runs off into rivers and lakes. Nitrogen comes from many farm sources, including the waste of cattle, chickens and other livestock.

Farm machines burning oil, gasoline and diesel release nitrogen to the air.

What is nitrogen?

It is a chemical element, occurring naturally in the air, water and soil. It is essential to life, and it cycles through all plants, animals and people.

Nitrogen-based fertilizers help California farmers produce more than 400 agricultural commodities -- vegetables, fruits, meats and dairy products worth \$36 billion a year.

[Modesto Bee guest editorial, Thursday, June 18, 2009:](#)

"Room for Bay Area to grow, smartly"

One of this region's most daunting challenges is to figure out how to accommodate the addition of an estimated 2 million residents by 2035. The discussion of such growth often turns to doom and gloom: more traffic, more pollution, a lower quality of life.

But a new analysis by Greenbelt Alliance, a group with a long history in the region's wars over sprawl, contains a refreshingly upbeat view of the future.

The alliance, building on research of potentially developable sites by UC Berkeley, has come up with what could become a blueprint for planners to guide new housing. It suggests that the region of 7 million people could handle its expected population growth, if it is steered to the right places. The study-recommended sites include shuttered strip malls, vast swaths of parking and vacant lots.

"A lot of people call the Bay Area 'built out' - we wanted to debunk that," said Elizabeth Stampe, a spokeswoman for Greenbelt Alliance. "Has anyone called Paris built out? Cities exist for a long time and are built and rebuilt and change to meet the needs of new generations."

The group identified seen "smart spots" along mass-transit corridors that could accommodate about four-fifths of the growth. The largest concentration of in-fill opportunities was in northeast Santa Clara County, which would handle 26 percent of the new growth, partly by redeveloping old office parks along San Jose's North First Street and downtown.

Another major "smart growth" zone would be the inner East Bay, with its 13 BART stations and abundance of AC Transit bus routes.

While "smart growth" has been a mantra of regional leaders for many years, the reality has been that new subdivisions continued to pop up on converted farmland on the eastern edges of the Bay Area, where land was cheap, political resistance was light - and the impact on roadways, water and air quality was most severe.

Still, local governments and developers rationalized, car-oriented subdivisions with big lots and spacious homes were what consumers desired.

However, the unsustainability of the exurban dream has been thoroughly exposed in this downturn. As Stampe noted, an overlay of the map of areas with the highest foreclosure rates would show a direct correlation with these subdivisions built far from city centers.

The good news is that the analysis presents persuasive evidence that the Bay Area has room to grow while enhancing the region's quality of life - if it's managed wisely.

This editorial first appeared in the S.F. Chronicle.

[Hanford Sentinel guest editorial, Wed., June 17, 2009:](#)

Another View: Can Congress avoid a renewable-energy boondoggle?

Advocates of the energy bill making its way through the House say that it will help America make the transition to a new, green economy. But first it must get past the powerful agriculture bloc. Among many other things, the bill -- known as Waxman-Markey after its champions, Reps. Henry A. Waxman, D-Calif. and Edward J. Markey, D-Mass. -- requires that utilities derive 15 percent of their electricity from "renewable" sources by 2020. Most people think of wind or solar power, but under the bill a big source of renewable energy would be "biomass" -- everything from wood chips to algae that can be burned to produce electricity. Carbon is still emitted in the process, but, given the right measures, burning biomass is better than burning coal, since biomass gets regrown, a process that removes carbon from the atmosphere.

But it might not do much good, environmentalists warn, if biomass suppliers clear, say, carbon-gobbling forest land in order to grow their product. So Waxman-Markey contains provisions aiming to prevent materials harvested on sensitive lands from qualifying as renewable. The particulars chafe legislators from farm districts, who want a more liberal policy to open up lands for biomass cultivation so their constituents can take advantage of the new renewable electricity mandate. They also want to change rules on biofuels such as ethanol, which are governed by a separate mandate contained in the 2007 energy bill.

The first thing this fight highlights is how difficult it is for those who draft these laws to get regulation right, given the complexity of the issues and the parochial politics of Congress. An attraction of a well-designed carbon tax or cap-and-trade system is that it should keep rough-hewn regulation and its associated distortions to a minimum.

Nevertheless, Congress must ensure that it does not give biomass suppliers incentives to produce a fuel that is barely better -- or that is perhaps worse -- than fossil fuels. Sensitive lands should remain protected. The best way to do that is to require that qualifying biomass meet a fair, minimum carbon pollution standard that is calculated over the full life cycle of the fuel -- from clearing the land to burning the biomass -- instead of battling over precisely which classes of marginal land need to be protected to accomplish the same goal.

The editorial first appeared in The Washington Post.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Thursday, June 18, 2009:](#)
Bike riders scare him

I'm always reading, "Save the air, ride a bicycle." I'm afraid of bicycle riders. Most of them seem to think that when they're in the saddle, traffic laws cease to exist.

They must realize that they are on vehicles on public streets and must obey traffic laws. I see them daily break every traffic law. Ticket them just like drivers. Are they anointed because they're saving the air?

And here's another gripe of mine: "Fog causes massive pile-up." It's the stupid drivers, not the fog!

Joseph F. Hryni, Fresno