

[Fresno Bee commentary, Friday, June 19, 2009:](#)

Seyed Sadredin: Residents can do much to clean Valley air

This summer, let's build on the momentum of cleaner air. Let's commit to making one change in our daily routines for air-quality improvement.

During winter 2008-09, the Valley's air quality was among the cleanest in decades, and most of the credit goes to Valley residents for doing their part. In response to educational messages from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, residents from San Joaquin to Kern counties heeded calls from community leaders to cut back the use of residential fireplaces. Residential wood burning is a major source of harmful fine-particulate emissions, which have especially egregious health consequences, including increased risk for heart attacks and strokes.

But as a result of a significant decline in fireplace use, the number of days with "good" air quality increased dramatically and the number of "unhealthy" days dropped by 50%, Valley-wide. In fact, we had no "unhealthy" days in Fresno County. The bottom line in this improvement: better health for Valley residents, a more productive economy and an improved quality of life.

Let's keep the momentum going by choosing Healthy Air lifestyles this summer, which is ozone season. Can you make one change, such as riding a bike to work or car-pooling? How about using an electric lawn mower or making your home more energy efficient? Take your pick from a wide array of clean-air choices you can find at www.healthyairliving.com. In addition to these choices, we welcome your own innovations and would like to share them with your neighbors.

We the people can do much to clean our air. In fact, we cannot achieve our clean-air goals through business regulation alone. Valley businesses, including agriculture, are already subject to some of the toughest air regulations in the nation. A few changes in our daily routines can achieve a great deal of reductions in air pollution at little or no cost. In fact, much of what we can do as individuals will save us money and improve our health.

More than ever, in these tough economic times, we must use our resources wisely and strategically. Some question spending resources on public education and argue for more expensive regulations on businesses. We at the Air District contend that we must supplement effective regulations with a healthy dose of public education and participation. Despite a great potential for dividends, however, no one should underestimate the challenge that comes with asking the public to accept some responsibility. Asking people to use their cars and fireplaces less frequently triggers strong emotional reactions.

This year, the Air District plans to spend about 30 cents per person in the Valley to get the word out that better choices translate directly to cleaner air. We hope to do this through our year-round Healthy Air Living initiative, which replaced the old Spare the Air program. Reaching out to more than 3.5 million people in three different media markets is not an easy task. Aside from traditional media, we hope to engage the public through "new media" such as Twitter and Facebook (become a friend), face-to-face gatherings in community events such as Healthy Air Living Chats and many other public events throughout the Valley, and partnerships with businesses, teachers and students.

Help us get to cleaner air by getting the word out to friends and relatives. The Air District is providing a great opportunity with a series of free, informal, public meetings this summer in every county in the air basin.

We have events scheduled in Parlier on June 30; in Madera on July 9; in Porterville on July 14; and in Hanford on July 23. For a complete schedule and full details, visit www.healthyairliving.com.

We hope to see you there. Please join us in living a Healthy Air life. Together, we can clean up the air.

Seyed Sadredin is the executive director and air pollution control officer for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

[Bakersfield Californian, Commentary, Sunday, June 22, 2009:](#)

Our air is clean and getting cleaner

By Seyed Sadredin

This summer, let's build on the momentum of cleaner air. Let's commit to making one change in our daily routines for air-quality improvement.

During the winter of 2008-09, the Central Valley's air quality was among the cleanest in decades, and most of the credit goes to valley residents for doing their part. In response to educational messages from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, residents from San Joaquin to Kern counties heeded calls from community leaders to cut back the use of residential fireplaces.

As a result, the number of days with "good" air quality increased dramatically and the number of "unhealthy" days dropped by 50 percent, valleywide. In fact, we had no "unhealthy" days in Fresno County.

Let's keep the momentum going. Can you make one change, such as riding a bike to work or carpooling? How about using an electric lawn mower or making your home more energy efficient? Take your pick from a wide array of clean-air choices you can find at www.healthyairliving.com.

We the people can do much to clean our air. In fact, we cannot achieve our clean-air goals through business regulation alone. Valley businesses, including agriculture, are already subject to some of the toughest air regulations in the nation. A few changes in our daily routines can achieve a great deal of reductions in air pollution at little or no cost. In fact, much of what we can do as individuals will save us money and improve our health.

More than ever, in these tough economic times, we must use our resources wisely and strategically. Some question spending resources on public education and argue for more expensive regulations on businesses. We at the Air District contend that we must supplement effective regulations with a healthy dose of public education and participation. Despite a great potential for dividends, however, no one should underestimate the challenge that comes with asking the public to accept some responsibility.

Asking people to use their cars and fireplaces less frequently triggers strong emotional reactions.

This year, the Air District plans to spend about 30 cents per person in the Central Valley to get the word out. We hope to do this through our year-round Healthy Air Living initiative, which replaced the old Spare the Air program.

Reaching out to more than 3.5 million people in three different media markets is not an easy task. Aside from traditional media, we hope to engage the public through new media such as Twitter and Facebook (become a friend), face-to-face gatherings in community events such as Healthy Air Living chats and many other public events throughout the valley, as well as partnerships with businesses, teachers and students.

Help us get to cleaner air by getting the word out to friends and relatives. The Air District is providing a great opportunity with a series of free, informal, public meetings this summer in every county in the air basin, including in Kern County on June 23 (Bakersfield) and July 28 (Arvin). For a complete schedule, visit www.healthyairliving.com.

We hope to see you there. Together, we can clean up the air.

Sayed Sadredin is the executive director and air pollution control officer for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Air district member apologizes amid protest

BY LOIS HENRY, Californian columnist

Bakersfield Californian, Friday, June 19, 2009

About 100 protesters called for a member of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to step down for comments he made about tuning out speakers who he's found to be not credible.

Mike Nelson, a Merced County supervisor who's been on the board seven years, said at the May 21 meeting that everyone should listen to one another and work together. He pointed that statement at himself as well, acknowledging that he sometimes "tunes out" certain people who make false or misleading statements.

Nelson did not step down and apologized for offending some people.

In other news, the board put off amending a rule to regulate restaurants using under-fire charbroilers until its August meeting, according to district director Seyed Sadredin.

"There were a number of concerns raised by the restaurateurs," Sadredin said. "And I also pointed out that we didn't have enough restaurateurs participating in the public process.

"The handful we did have raised a lot of valid questions."

The amended rule would have increased the reach of the district's regulation from chain-driven charbroilers (the kind used by fast food places that move meat through a cooker) to include under-fire charbroilers at restaurants that cook 800 pounds of meat a week or more.

Chain-driven charbroilers have emission controls built in, but under-fire users would have to retrofit with equipment that even manufacturers couldn't agree would work. Costs were also questioned as the district hadn't factored in maintenance and upgrades.

And there were numerous questions on the goals of the emissions reductions and how the district would test for those goals.

Sadredin said the board also directed staff to come back with a grant program to help restaurant owners pay for retrofits.

He said charbroilers are considered the third largest source of particulate matter (tiny bits of soot and dust) pollution among all stationary sources, including refineries and power plants, in the valley.

SJ Valley air board member apologizes for remarks

The Associated Press

In the Modesto Bee, Merced Sun-Star, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Friday, June 19, 2009

FRESNO, Calif.—A member of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District says he's sorry for saying he "tunes out" environmentalists at air quality meetings.

Merced County supervisor Mike Nelson says he won't step down from the board, as about 100 air quality advocates picketing the board meeting Thursday demanded. Among those asking for his resignation was Dolores Huerta, co-founder of the United Farm Workers.

Nelson said he meant no offense and was trying to encourage people to work together.

Senate Majority Leader Dean Florez sent Nelson a letter earlier this month saying the remarks created an "unwarranted level of hostility."

Information from: The Fresno Bee, <http://www.fresnobee.com>

Marchers want Merced supervisor Mike Nelson to resign from air board

By Corinne Reilly

Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, June 18, 2009

More than 100 marchers gathered in Fresno and Bakersfield on Thursday to demand the resignation of Merced County Supervisor Mike Nelson from a local air quality board.

The demonstrators launched their campaign because of remarks Nelson made last month during a San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District governing board meeting. Nelson, who serves as Merced County's representative to the air board, said he sometimes "tunes out" when environmental activists speak before the board because he thinks they don't tell the truth.

In another public meeting last year, Nelson called his assignment to the air board "a sentence" that he was stuck with because no other county supervisor would take the position.

About 90 marchers gathered outside the air district's Fresno office Thursday morning, where governing board members met for a regularly scheduled meeting.

"Give Nelson the boot," they called out. They wore green and carried signs that read "public opinion counts." A few dozen people demonstrated at the same time outside the district's Bakersfield office, including Dolores Huerta, co-founder of the United Farm Workers.

Several of the marchers spoke before the air board during the meeting's public comment period. Daniela Simunovic, organizer for the legal watchdog Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment, said Nelson should be formally censured and removed for his remarks.

"Our democracy depends on our public officials listening to us," she said. "The legitimacy of the the air district and of the board are on the line here."

Two people spoke in support of Nelson, including Merced County Planning Commissioner Jack Mobley. Nelson said during the meeting that he did not mean to offend anyone but stopped short of apologizing to activists.

He said earlier this week that he has no plans to step down and that he stands by his argument that some environmental activists misstate facts when speaking before the air board.

Nelson also has said his comment was taken out of context; it was part of a larger statement about the importance of listening to all sides in the debate over how to best implement anti-pollution regulation, he told the Sun-Star on Monday.

According to transcripts from the May 21 meeting, Nelson said, "If we don't listen and work together, we won't get it. And that's good for me to remember, too. Because honestly when (some activists) get up here, I tend to tune out because ... I don't think they're telling the truth."

The air district's executive director, Seyed Sadredin, has defended Nelson. He said earlier this week that he doesn't believe Nelson should be removed.

That only further angered activists. Several marchers from Merced said Nelson should not be in any political office. Merced resident Melissa Kelly-Ortega, who helped organize Thursday's demonstration, said she and other activists already have taken their demand for Nelson's resignation to Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger. She said they also plan to take the matter up with the local Board of Supervisors.

"We won't stop until Mr. Nelson is removed," Kelly-Ortega said.

Senate Majority Leader Dean Florez, D-Shafter, has urged Nelson to consider leaving the air board and said in a recent letter to Nelson that his remarks have created "an unwarranted level of hostility."

Nelson was elected to his second four-year term on the Board of Supervisors in 2006. He's served as Merced County's representative to the air board since 2003.

Reporter Corinne Reilly can be reached at (209)385-2477 or creilly@mercedsun-star.com. Fresno Bee reporter Mark Grossi contributed to this story.

Reducing fire risk depends on communitywide efforts Issued precautions mean nothing if they're ignored

By Kristin Berquist

Sierra Star, Friday, June 19, 2009

Mountain communities are no strangers to the precautions and preventative measures recommended to lessen the fire risks that arrive with the hot summer months. But knowing and doing are two very different things.

That's why the Eastern Madera County Fire Safe Council Inc. is currently working on three fuel reduction projects with three upcoming projects pending for the fall. Council Executive Officer Bob Buckles and Outreach Coordinator Roger Maybee work to partner with individuals, land owners and various agencies like Cal Fire, U.S. Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Department of Fish and Game, Department of Water Resources and [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#).

Projects include clearing for fuel breaks on Roundhouse Road, Goat Mountain, Quartz Mountain, Crooks Mountain, Mudge Ranch Road and Cascadel Woods.

Maybee, who meets directly with the land owners, said the overall response is positive. Once people see the progress made by the council, land owners are usually willing to come on board to help in the efforts. Maybee, a fire safe consultant, facilitates community meetings with land owners and local emergency

response agencies and can also provide information and assistance for the homeowner to reduce fuel hazards around properties.

Retired District Ranger Larry Ballew is one of five members on the council's board of directors. The Fire Safe Council is working hard to make fire safe communities in Eastern Madera County, he said. Projects are mainly funded through grants and are planned to tie in with partnering agency's projects, Buckles said.

"We found a long time ago that government is good at planning things but implementation really takes the devotion of people and the land owners," Ballew said. "That is where our success has been. The local people, under local leadership can make these projects happen quickly and very effectively," Ballew said.

The Fire Safe Council recently built a fuel break along Road 620 that extends onto Sandy Brinley's 60-acre property. Brinley said she keeps her property fire-safe by clearing the property each year, weed-eating within 100 feet or more of all structures and has built a road along the front of the house to act as a fuel break.

"We're all concerned about it (fire)," Brinley said. "We live in an area that's real vulnerable."

Brinley said it's been a pleasure to work with Fire Safe Council, noting that the council did extra clearing on her property next to the fuel break. "They have experienced people that do a good job," she said.

Brian Curtis of the Cascade! Woods Property Owners Association said mountain-area homeowners are well aware of the fire risk. The association has tackled past projects such as thinning trees, clearing underbrush and trimming trees along the roads for fire truck access. Curtis said the association also mows the meadows each year to reduce fire hazards.

With 140 to 150 homes in the association, Curtis said providing information and education for the residents is crucial. The association averages three meetings during the annual fire season to discuss fire safety issues and what to do in case of a fire.

Karen Guillemain, fire prevention specialist with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, said Cal Fire transitioned into its summer preparedness levels for fire season on May 11, staffing fire stations and equipment on a 24-hour basis and hiring additional firefighters.

Cal Fire requires a "defensible space" of 100 feet around all structures to increase the protection of the home while providing a safe area for firefighters.

"This is something that is really important in the wild land area," Guillemain said. "It could be the difference between saving their homes if a fire were to come their way and not being able to."

The first 30 feet of clearance around a home or structure is referred to as the Lean, Clean and Green Zone, Guillemain said. This includes mowing down weeds and grass, removing any dead or dying bushes or shrubs and removing all flammable vegetation. Cal Fire suggests that this area be used for walkways and gravel paths, but will allow for low-growing, fire resistant plants.

Ray Laclergue and his wife Bonnie Bladen own Intermountain Nursery in Auberry. Bladen suggested using succulents such as Sedum and Portulaca that hold water in the leaves. Tight, low-growing ground covers that don't have a lot of oxygen space underneath are good for planting around the home.

In fire-prone areas Laclergue recommends using rock mulch or decomposed granite mulch next to the home instead of wood mulch. In a fire storm, wood mulch can blow up into the eaves and create a greater fire hazard, Laclergue explained. The Hen & Chicks succulent also goes well with rock mulch, Bladen added.

Native, drought-resistant plants that don't mind twice weekly watering are ideal landscaping choices for the first 30 feet surrounding a structure. Mounding Margerum, ornamental, native or fruit producing strawberries, and the Santa Barbara Daisy help add beauty to the defensible space.

In the first 30-foot zone of defensible space, tree limbs within 10 feet of a chimney or stovepipe must be removed and no dead or dying tree limbs can hang over the house or other structures. All needles must be cleared from the roof, rain gutters and eaves, Guillemain added.

The Fuel Reduction Zone in the remaining 70 feet is used to create vertical and horizontal spacing between plants. When masses of plants are grown closely together it creates a "fire ladder" that will burn quickly toward a home or structure, Guillemain said. Spacing between plants removes the ladder fuel and improves the chances of stopping a wildfire before it reaches the home.

Laclergue said plants such as the Coyote Bush are fire retardant but are often planted too close together, resulting in mounding and creating a fire hazard. Eucalyptus, Artemisia and any native Chaparral should be avoided altogether due to their flammable natures, Laclergue said.

Large trees do not need to be cut down as long as there is no undergrowth beneath them, Guillemain said. Branches must be trimmed at least 6 feet from the ground and any grass in the Fuel Reduction Zone must be no higher than four inches.

"I understand how much work it is. I have to do my own home," Guillemain said. "I understand it's a work in progress, it seems to never end. But I also understand that if we don't complete our hazard reduction then we're putting everyone who lives in this area at risk for a catastrophic fire because it won't be able to stop."

Cal Fire performs inspections throughout the summer months to ensure that residents have established the minimum clearance around their structures and to give helpful hints on how to create a defensible space. Inspections are done by the engine companies as well as Volunteers In Prevention, a fire prevention program that trains volunteers to assist station personnel in conducting the inspections. Cal Fire encourages those interested in joining to contact their local station, Guillemain said.

Dave Martin, district ranger at Bass Lake Ranger District in North Fork said the homeowner and Forest Service have a mutual interest in reducing fire risk on private property. Just as the homeowner doesn't want a wild fire to threaten their home, the Forest Service doesn't want a fire that starts on private property to spread out into the forest. Reducing fuel hazards by maintaining a defensible space around structures is the best defense, Martin said.

Ethanol pumps debut at Sacramento-area stations

By Tony Bizjak, Sacramento Bee

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Saturday, June 20, 2009

SACRAMENTO — Air quality officials have unveiled 23 ethanol fuel pumps at gas stations around the Sacramento region, giving the California capital the highest concentration of ethanol-blend pumps west of the Mississippi.

The new pumps are marked by a distinctive yellow nozzle to match yellow gas caps that come with vehicles equipped to run on ethanol. The blended fuel, E85, offers motorists a domestically produced and slightly "greener" alternative to regular gasoline.

The pumps, at stations stretching from Fairfield to Folsom, are usable by an estimated 23,000 "flex-fuel" vehicles in the region, local air quality officials said.

The fuel is a mixture of 85 percent ethanol, 15 percent gasoline. Flex-fuel vehicles can run on E85 or regular gasoline. E85 gets roughly 25 percent fewer miles per gallon than regular fuel, state officials said, but it was selling at \$2.26 a gallon Tuesday at one of the stations, Valero on Madison Avenue in North Highlands. Regular unleaded fuel there was selling for more than \$3 a gallon.

The installations were made possible by a \$3.5 million California Air Resources Board grant, administered by the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District.

Air Resources Board Chairwoman Mary Nichols described E85 as a transitional fuel that will help get Californians used to the idea of trying alternative fuels as the state moves forward in its efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. "We're in the early stages of the revolution," Nichols said.

Sasha Faught of Natomas, who owns a flex-fuel Chevy Tahoe, was among the first users. "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."

Motorcycle noise faces a legislative muffler

By Jim Guy, Fresno Bee

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Saturday, June 20, 2009

That rumble rolling up roads on warm summer evenings is sweet music to some — and a buzz-kill for others.

It's the roar of motorcycles, revving at stoplights and thundering up and down the street, bouncing shock waves off buildings like the soundtrack of a 1960s biker movie.

For some motorcyclists, the noise is as much a part of the riding experience as fresh air. Harley-Davidson even sought to patent the "potato-potato" sound of its engines a decade ago.

Some riders pump up the volume even more by removing stock catalytic converters and adding aftermarket pipes in search of better performance — and an earsplitting roar that can infuriate patio diners or sidewalk latte drinkers.

While some bikers revel in the sound, others justify it by saying it protects them from inattentive motorists.

"Loud pipes save lives," is their mantra.

Nonsense, says Fresno motorcycle Sgt. Eric Eide, who rides an ultraquiet BMW.

"Straight pipes are hugely offensive," he said. "It's a quality-of-life issue."

Noise "is one of those things that needs to be addressed."

That appears to be happening. A proposed law working its way through the state Legislature.

SB435 by state Sen. Fran Pavley, D-Agoura Hills, targets modified motorcycle exhausts that produce more air pollution. The bill also aims at the extra noise generated by after-market motorcycle exhausts.

Eide attributes the excessive noise to some motorcyclists trying to emulate the outlaw biker lifestyle through loud exhausts, faux-Nazi helmets and skull facial masks. He said officers currently use a vehicle code section to cite motorcyclists for excessive noise but generally only go after extreme cases.

And it isn't always easy for police to make noise violations stick. Mary Lynne Vellinga, a legislative consultant in Pavley's Sacramento office, said the standards in the current law are not clear and tickets may not stand up in court. She said her research shows that California Highway Patrol officers wrote just 14 citations in the past two years.

Pavley's office wants to strengthen the law and, after an initial setback, is still fine-tuning a bill that would do so, Vellinga said. A portion of the bill that would require semiannual smog checks for motorcycles appears dead for now, but Vellinga said her office still intends to use SB435 to target motorcyclists who remove catalytic converters.

Under the current law, a motorcyclist cited for removing a converter often can ride home, bolt the stock exhaust back on and have the citation cleared. That would be much more difficult if smog checks were required because many riders would need to have expensive engine modifications done to pass a tailpipe emissions test. Vellinga concedes getting a law through the Legislature has been a tough slog.

"Motorcycle folks are super-vocal," she said.

But industry officials are aware a backlash is looming. Harley-Davidson President Jim McCaslin, in a message on the company's Web site, told riders to pipe down, citing a 400 percent increase in negative news stories regarding motorcycle noise in the past 10 years. Dealers warn about it as well. At Harley-Davidson/Buell of Fresno, a sign urges bikers to ride away quietly.

"The noise issue is huge," said Peggy Day, sales manager. She said the American Motorcycle Association had to fight local officials near Carmel to win back the right for motorcyclists to ride down 17 Mile Drive. She said riders need to discipline themselves.

"Unless we're socially responsible," she said, "our right to ride is in jeopardy."

PG&E opposes two solar-power bills

Utility: Two Bills Hurt Its Other Customers

By Tracy Seipel, Mercury News

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Saturday, June 20, 2009

SAN JOSE — After casting itself as a champion of solar power, Pacific Gas & Electric has angered green-energy advocates by opposing two state bills that would ramp up the benefits for those who go solar.

Put simply, PG&E's objection is that the two measures would make solar too popular. The utility says that would be unfair to its nonsolar customers, who under existing law must subsidize rebates and credits paid to solar-power users.

But some supporters of the bills say PG&E's real worry is about its own financial burden, since it sells less electricity to solar-power users. "The big picture, unfortunately — and counter to their public image — is that PG&E doesn't like the idea of an unbridled solar market," said Bernadette Del Chiaro, director of clean energy programs at Environment California, a nonprofit statewide environmental group and sponsor of Assembly Bill 920. "Unfortunately, the business model doesn't yet allow for a market in which customers generate their own electricity."

For consumers who might be considering a solar system, the bills enhance one of the most attractive financial benefits of making such a move: the opportunity to sell excess power back to their electric utility.

Assembly Bill 560 would increase the cap on "net metering," which gives solar customers credit on their electric bill for surplus power they transfer to the utility. Currently, a utility is not obligated to sign net-metering contracts once solar power equals 2.5 percent of its peak electricity demand, a level PG&E is approaching. AB560 would quadruple that cap, to 10 percent.

The second bill, AB920, would change the way customers with solar installations are paid for surplus power. Utilities now give them full retail rate credit on their monthly bill that can be used to offset the customer's energy consumption at other times, like nighttime. But at the end of the year, leftover credits are zeroed out. AB920 would require utilities to pay for credits or any electricity left over at the end of the year, although at a lower rate, or allow them to be rolled over to the next year.

Dan Kammen, professor in the Energy and Resources Group at UC Berkeley, said the bills will help open up competitive markets that favor low-carbon and clean energy, and help the state meet the goals of its landmark climate-change legislation.

But PG&E and other opponents contend the bills would impose a financial burden on nonsolar customers, who pay for the state rebates for solar installations. And because solar customers buy less electricity from the utility, PG&E said they do not contribute as much to transmission and generation costs, increasing the burden of nonsolar customers. So far, about 30,000 of the utility's 6 million customers have solar systems.

"We are certainly a strong supporter of solar by our customers, and have been for quite some time," said David Rubin, PG&E's director of service analysis and chairman of the board of the Solar Electric Power Association, which represents 500 U.S. electric utilities, solar companies and other industry stakeholders nationwide. "But we want to be mindful of the cost of the solar program on the nonsolar customers who pay for it through their rates."

Sue Kateley, executive director of the California Solar Energy Industries Association, said PG&E's opposition may result from its lead over the state's other two investor-owned utilities, Southern California Edison and San Diego Gas & Electric, in the number of solar adopters. PG&E's success in solar adoption has "forced us to have a discussion about raising the cap earlier than we expected," she said.

Before it agrees to any further increases, PG&E wants to review a cost-benefit analysis of net metering being prepared by the state's Public Utilities Commission and due in January. However, it would support raising the net-metering cap to about 3 percent as a buffer should it reach the 2.5 percent cap before then.

PG&E said most solar customers currently are on a residential time-of-use rate schedule that includes retail rates ranging from 29.7 cents to 60.8 cents per kilowatt hour. At that rate, solar customers who produce more energy than they consume during the day, when rates are higher, get credits for surplus

electricity that are two or more times the cost of electricity they consume at night, when the rates are lower.

But supporters of AB560 say if the existing 2.5 percent cap is not raised, California's ability to achieve its goal of one million solar roofs by 2016 would be jeopardized.

Likewise, supporters say solar adoption will be slowed unless AB920 is passed to end an unfair subsidy to PG&E from its solar customers. But PG&E's Rubin says the price the utility would have to pay for the electricity from its solar customers is too high, further burdening the utilities nonsolar customers.

"Maximizing the number of people who go solar is a paramount policy — it affects air pollution consideration, climate change considerations and the development of green jobs," said Adam Browning, executive director and co-founder of Vote Solar Initiative, a San Francisco nonprofit seeking to bring solar energy into the mainstream. "So why are we talking about stamping on the brakes when we should be talking about pushing on the accelerator?"

State drops warming suit against carmakers

Bob Egelko, staff writer

S.F. Chronicle, Saturday, June 20, 2009

State Attorney General Jerry Brown agreed Friday to drop a global warming lawsuit that accused the six largest automakers of damaging California's resources by selling vehicles that emit large amounts of heat-trapping gases.

Brown's predecessor, Bill Lockyer, filed the suit in 2006 against General Motors, Ford, Chrysler, and the North American outlets of Toyota, Honda and Nissan. The suit alleged that the companies' cars were a significant cause of climate change and have already contributed to problems ranging from a decline in the Sierra snowpack to increased air pollution and wildlife hazards.

U.S. District Judge Martin Jenkins dismissed the suit in September 2007, saying it raised issues of interstate commerce and foreign policy that should be addressed by the president and Congress, not the courts.

He also noted that the cars were sold legally and that global warming has many causes.

Brown asked the Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco to reinstate the suit, but withdrew the appeal Friday. He said recent policy changes by the Obama administration were moving in the same direction, including its increase in federal fuel-economy standards and the Environmental Protection Agency's acknowledgement that greenhouse gases are a public health hazard.

The EPA has also agreed to reconsider California's request to set its own standards for emissions of carbon dioxide and other temperature-raising gases from cars and trucks, a proposal the agency vetoed under President George W. Bush.

"The EPA and the federal government are now on the side of reducing greenhouse gases," Brown said in a statement.

Study: Beijing's air worse than at past Olympics

By Tini Tran, Associated Press Writer

In the S.F. Chronicle, Washington Post, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Saturday, June 20, 2009

BEIJING, China (AP) -- Beijing's notoriously dirty air was cleaner during last summer's Olympic games, but pollution levels were still much worse than at recent Olympics, despite a massive Chinese cleanup campaign, a new report said.

Athletes in Beijing faced pollution levels that were up to 3.5 times higher than those in recent Olympic cities like Athens, Atlanta and Sydney, said the study published Friday in the journal Environmental Science and Technology. The pollution often exceeded what the World Health Organization considers safe.

The joint American-Chinese study — the first major one published on air pollution during the Olympics — also found that the weather, and not the Chinese government's strict controls imposed in the run-up to the games, played the largest role in clearing the air.

The government's plans to control air pollution for the event gave international researchers a unique opportunity to observe a large-scale experiment. Scientists from Oregon State University and Peking University looked at Beijing's worst air pollutant — tiny dust particles known as particulate matter — over an eight-week period before, during and after the games.

China poured some \$20 billion into "greening" the city after it won the bid in 2001, including doubling the number of subway lines, retrofitting factories with cleaner technology and building urban parks.

Government officials also imposed drastic cleanup measures just before the games in mid-July, including pulling half the city's 3.3 million vehicles off the roads, halting most construction and shutting down dozens of factories.

The study — funded by the National Science Foundation in the U.S. and the National Science Foundation in China — found that the level of particulate pollution in Beijing was twice as bad as in Athens, Greece; three times as bad as in Atlanta, Georgia; and 3.5 times as bad as in Sydney, Australia.

Researchers found that particulate air pollution did drop by about one-third during the two-week Olympic period. But coarser particulate matter, PM 10, exceeded levels the WHO considers safe about 81 percent of the time, while the smaller particulate pollution PM 2.5, which can cause more serious health consequences, exceeded WHO guidelines 100 percent of the time.

"It was a giant experiment and a noble effort. But in the end, the extra added measures didn't help reduce PM concentration as much as had been expected," said Staci Simonich, an associate professor of chemistry and toxicology at Oregon State University who worked on the study.

There has been no evidence so far of any health problems linked to the short-term exposure of athletes or spectators during the Olympics, researchers noted.

Further investigation suggested that weather conditions, such as rainfall and strong winds from the north and northwest, played a much larger factor in clearing the air than the pollution curbs.

Meteorological conditions accounted for 40 percent of the variation in concentrations of coarser particulate matter, while pollution control measures accounted for only 16 percent, the study said.

The findings also showed that the weather ushered some air pollution into Beijing from industrial regions south of the capital that had less severe pollution curbs, including Hebei, Shandong, and Shanxi. Those results indicated the difficulties in trying to control pollution at a local level when air masses tend to move regionally.

The findings don't invalidate the government's efforts, said Zhu Tong, professor at Peking University's College of Environmental Sciences and Engineering, and a co-researcher on the project.

"We learned a lot about how air pollution forms in a mega-city like Beijing, and how much pollution comes from which sources," Zhu said.

Scientists also noted that their pollution measurements were about 30 percent higher than official figures by the Beijing Environmental Protection Bureau, though they said that reflected a difference in methodology.

Pollution expert Fang Ming, now retired from Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, said the findings don't break new ground in terms of understanding how air pollution works.

"Having said that, it is useful to know the effectiveness of the huge 'green Olympic' effort to clean up the air in Beijing," he said in an e-mailed response.

Overall, the Olympic pollution control efforts were worthwhile because "it demonstrated to the Chinese government that they need to pay more attention to the environment and it is good for the country. It also says that this is doable and the people have to be a part of the effort," he said.

THE INFLUENCE GAME: Excuse me! Lobby wins on burps

By Dina Cappiello, Associated Press Writer

In the S.F. Chronicle, Washington Post, Modesto Bee and other papers, Sunday, June 21, 2009

WASHINGTON (AP) -- One contributor to global warming — bigger than coal mines, landfills and sewage treatment plants — is being left out of efforts by the Obama administration and House Democrats to limit greenhouse gas emissions.

Cow burps.

Belching from the nation's 170 million cattle, sheep and pigs produces about one-quarter of the methane released in the U.S. each year, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. That makes the hooved critters the largest source of the heat-trapping gas.

In part because of an adept farm lobby campaign that equates government regulation with a cow tax, the gas that farm animals pass is exempt from legislation being considered by Congress to limit greenhouse gas emissions.

The EPA under President Barack Obama has said it has no plans to regulate the gas, even though the agency recently included methane among six greenhouse gases it believes are endangering human health and welfare.

The message circulating in Internet chat rooms, the halls of Congress and farm co-ops had America's farms facing financial ruin if the EPA required them to purchase air-pollution permits like power plants and factories do. The cost of those permits amounted to a cow tax, farm groups argued.

"It really has taken on a life of its own," said Rick Krause, a lobbyist with the American Farm Bureau Federation, which coined the term cow tax and spread it to farmers across the country. "This is something that people understand. All that we have to say is that (cows) are the next step with these proposed permit fees. And people are still talking about it."

Administration officials and House Democratic leaders have tried to assure farm groups that they have no intention of regulating cows. That effort, however, has done little to ease the concern of farmers and their advocates in Congress about the toll that regulating greenhouse gases will have on agriculture.

Lawmakers and farm groups are now pressing for the climate legislation to guarantee that farmers will be compensated for taking steps to reduce greenhouse gases. That could lead to farmers getting paid if their cows pass less gas.

Research has shown that changing cattle diet and boosting efficiency — such as producing the same amount of milk and beef from a smaller herd — can result in less gas, according to Frank M. Mitloehner, an associate professor at the University of California at Davis, who has studied livestock gas for 15 years.

"I don't think livestock should be ignored. Every industry has to play their role," Mitloehner said. But laws designed to reduce emissions from smokestacks and tailpipes won't work with cattle, which can't be fitted with pollution control devices, Mitloehner said.

"The belching is very hard to collect," he said. "You cannot capture these gases."

The climate bill specifically excludes enteric fermentation — the fancy term for the gas created by digestion and expelled largely by burping — from the limit it would place on greenhouse gas emissions. The legislation directs the EPA not to include it among the various sources that could be subject to new performance standards.

EPA administrator Lisa Jackson has called rumors of the cow tax "ridiculous notions" and a "distraction."

House aides and EPA officials say that controlling such emissions is unworkable. Cow burps make up about 2 percent of all the climate-altering pollution in the U.S.

But allies of farmers in Congress say the reluctance to step in the cow tax debate has a lot to do with the outcry from the agriculture industry and moderate Democrats from rural states whose votes are needed to pass the bill.

"I think they realized that if you are a Democrat in an agricultural state, a red state, that this is radioactive and I think that is why they have tried scrupulously to reaffirm that they don't have any intention of doing this," said Sen. John Thune, R-S.D. He is sponsoring a bill that would bar the EPA from requiring farmers to get permits for cattle burps.

Thune, whose state is home to a half-million cattle, first heard about the cow tax at a South Dakota Cattlemen Association's conference in early December. Within weeks he introduced his bill and recruited support from New York Democratic Sen. Chuck Schumer, whose state boasts three times more cows.

The origins of the cow tax can be traced to last July, when President George W. Bush's EPA released documents outlining how the Clean Air Act could regulate greenhouse gases.

Even though the Bush administration had no intention of using the law, farm groups seized on a single paragraph deep in the comments from various federal agencies. The Agriculture Department warned that if EPA decided to regulate agricultural sources of greenhouse gases, numerous farms would face costly and time-consuming process to acquire permits for barnyard burping.

The Farm Bureau quickly did the math and figured farms would have to pay about \$175 for each dairy cow, \$87.50 per head of beef cattle and \$20 for each hog to purchase permits for emissions.

The cow tax was born.

Vt. farmers cut cows' emissions by altering diets

By Lisa Rathke - Associated Press Writer
In the Modesto Bee, Sunday, June 21, 2009

COVENTRY, Vt. -- Vermont dairy farmers Tim Maikshilo and Kristen Dellert, mindful of shrinking their carbon footprint, have changed their cows' diet to reduce the amount of gas the animals burp - dairy cows' contribution to global warming.

Coventry Valley Farm is one of 15 Vermont farms working with Stonyfield Farm Inc., whose yogurt is made with their organic milk, to reduce the cows' intestinal methane by feeding them flaxseed, alfalfa, and grasses high in Omega 3 fatty acids. The gas cows belch is the dairy industry's biggest greenhouse gas contributor, research shows, most of it emitted from the front and not the back end of the cow.

"I just figured a cow was a cow and they were going to do whatever they were going to do in terms of cow things for gas," said Dellert. "It was pretty shocking to me that just being organic wasn't enough, actually. I really thought that here we're organic, we're doing what we need to do for the planet, we're doing the stuff for the soil and I really thought that was enough."

She learned it wasn't. The dairy industry contributes about 2 percent to the country's total greenhouse gas production, said Rick Naczi, a vice president at Dairy Management Inc., which funds research and promotes dairy products. Most of it comes from the cow, the rest from growing feed crops for the cattle to processing and transporting the milk.

To satisfy consumers' demands for sustainable production, the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy in Rosemont, Ill., is looking at everything from growing feed crops to trucking milk to reduce the industry's greenhouse gas emissions by 25 percent by 2020. That would be the equivalent of removing about 1.25 million cars from U.S. roads every year, said Naczi, who manages the program.

One way is by feeding cows alfalfa, flax and grasses, all high in Omega 3s, instead of corn or soy, said Nancy Hirschberg, head of Stonyfield's Greener Cow Project. The feed rebalances the cows' rumen, the first stomach of ruminants, and cuts down on gas, she said. Another way is to change the bacteria in a cow's rumen, Naczi said.

When Stonyfield first analyzed its contribution to global warming in the late 1990s, the company thought its factory in Londonderry, N.H., produced the most greenhouse gases.

"And when we got the report and our number one impact on climate change was the milk production, we were completely stunned," she said.

A study showed that the single biggest source was the cow's enteric emissions: gas.

The company funded energy audits on farms and research on small manure digesters so farmers could produce energy from methane gas.

But Hirschberg said she had no idea what to do about enteric emissions. Then she learned what Group Danone of France, majority owner of Stonyfield and best known in the U.S. for its Dannon products, was doing about its methane.

By feeding their cows alfalfa, flax and grasses, they were cutting down on the gas passed.

The milk is tested at a lab at the University of Vermont to determine its fat content, a process patented by French nutrition company Valorex SAS, through which the enteric emissions are calculated.

Since January, Coventry Valley Farm has reduced its cows' belches by 13 percent. At another farm, they've gone down 18 percent.

Maikshilo and Dellert have also noticed a difference in Hester, Rosebud, Pristine and their other cows. The coats of the black and white Holsteins and brown Jerseys are shinier and they've had fewer foot problems and no stomach ailments, they say.

So far, it hasn't cost them any more for their custom-made grain, which the cows only get in the winter. Now they're out grazing on grass in the pasture, getting as many Omega 3s. And the farm's vet bills have gone down.

It's a win-win for farmers, said Naczi.

"It's just the right thing to do," he said.

Santa Susana Field Lab pollution hazards endure

By Susan Abram, Staff Writer

L.A. Daily News, Monday, June 22, 2009

CHATSWORTH - Before they learned words like dioxin and perchlorate, mothers let sons and daughters play near streams that trickled down from hills that hid some of the government's biggest secrets.

Families who settled in neighborhoods blooming in Chatsworth, West Hills and Simi Valley led idyllic lives, even when their bedroom and kitchen windows rattled from the roar of rocket engines being tested at the Santa Susana Field Laboratory in the Simi Hills.

But in May 1989, surveys from the Department of Energy - reported exclusively in the Daily News - revealed that radioactive and toxic contamination from decades of nuclear experiments and rocket tests had leaked into soil, groundwater and bedrock at the hilltop site.

Now, 20 years after the 210-page report became public, a full-scale, government-ordered cleanup has yet to start. Community activists worry that if the cleanup doesn't begin soon under the land's current ownership, part of the property may be sold, leading to an inadequate cleanup under new owners and possibly clearing the way for construction of an undesirable prison or Indian casino.

"The story that has evolved in 20 years is from coverup to a dribble of information about the real situation there," said former state Sen. Sheila Kuehl, who authored a 2007 law that prohibits the sale or transfer of the site until the state certifies it has been properly decontaminated.

"There was a realization among residents around the site that their health may have been seriously compromised by both emissions of air and groundwater and the fact that there was no serious intention by the government to clean the site," Kuehl said. "It started a consciousness but there has been nothing but roadblocks all the way."

Mystery has long shrouded the Santa Susana Field Lab, located on 2,900 acres at the top of the Simi Hills in Ventura County.

Founded in the mid-1940s at what was then a remote location, the lab developed and tested nearly a dozen nuclear reactors for the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission, which later became the Department of Energy. It also tested and developed powerful rockets - like the Delta II, and the systems that powered

the Apollo and space shuttle missions - under contracts with the Department of Defense and with NASA, which still owns 452 acres of the property.

Kept secret from the public was the partial meltdown of one of the reactors in 1959, an accident that released radiation into the air. Five decades later, the full scope of the release and its impact on workers and residents remains unknown.

In fact, few details about any of the health or environmental effects of decades of nuclear experiments and rocket testing were known until the 1989 report, which revealed radioactive and toxic contamination in more than a dozen sites.

The DOE survey also found poor monitoring of test procedures and protocols, substandard seals in the water wells on the site, and deficiencies in monitoring groundwater flow and soil contamination.

In addition, regulators found that workers employed alarming practices at the sodium burn pit, an open-air fire pit used to dispose of sodium-contaminated components.

Workers regularly used firearms to open containers of volatile chemicals so they could "stay a safe distance from the sodium burn pit, where the highest level of radioactive contamination was found near the western fringe of the facility, the report found.

Daily News broke story

The findings were first reported in the Daily News, triggering an outcry by community activists and politicians for additional studies to determine the long-term impacts of the contamination on current and former workers and residents.

"When I heard about it, my stomach sunk," said Barbara Johnson, a breast cancer survivor who has since become an activist and still lives in the Knolls, a neighborhood in east Simi Valley. "I realized we were in for a long battle."

The battle included raising awareness about cancer cases among those who worked at the lab and who lived nearby.

"The Daily News breaking of the study was a revelation in the community, and it activated them and the elected officials to push for a shutdown of the site, and after years of work, they succeeded," said Dan Hirsch, a leader in the watchdog group, Committee to Bridge the Gap.

The 1989 report was the first of many revelations about the long-ago activities at the lab, which was owned by Rocketdyne and Rockwell International before being acquired in 1996 by The Boeing Co.

In 2006, Boeing disclosed its own findings - that the former owners had destroyed napalm, dioxin and other highly toxic materials in the lab's open-air burn pits.

"At the time, the chemicals that were used here were part of standard practices for any company of the time," said Boeing spokeswoman Kamara Sams. "But it's an unfortunate legacy it left at the site.

"Boeing is committed to the property, to protecting human health, and returning the space to the public."

The cleanup process itself has become tangled in radiological surveys and environmental reports, as well as varying standards set by regulatory agencies that oversee soil and groundwater.

"It's extremely complex because the site is broken out to different issues of cleaning and each of those programs are under a different regulatory agency," Sams said.

Deadline for cleanup set

Boeing, the Department of Energy and NASA have set 2017 as a target date for completing cleanup of the lab site, where all of the nuclear operations and most of the rocket tests have ceased.

And Boeing last year reached agreement with Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and will pay to clean its contaminated land to the highest standards, then donate it to the state for open space.

The company also agreed to pay the state \$22.5 million a year for 30 years to maintain the property.

The deal only applies to the portion of the land owned by the company, not the piece owned by NASA which still generates high concern among community activists.

Officials with the state Department of Toxic Substances Control, which falls under the California Environmental Protection Agency, remain unsatisfied with the slow progress of the overall cleanup efforts.

"It's a story of us as regulators trying to work with the community to develop a plan to meet everyone's goals," said DTSC acting director Maziar Movassaghi. "We have several limitations," he said. "You're talking about a complicated technical process. Records have been spotty."

Meanwhile, longtime lab watchdogs remain concerned about a declaration by NASA that the agency's land at the hilltop site is "excess."

This sets up a process by which the federal General Services Administration can offer the land to other federal agencies for use.

If no agency steps forward, the parcel would be offered to the state, nonprofit organizations, schools and municipalities. If there are still no takers, it would be put out for bids - which Hirsch and others say could open it up to development as a gaming casino.

Activists have appealed to state and local leaders to denounce the action, fearing it would delay cleanups.

However, NASA officials said last week they yet to formally submit their "Report of Excess" to the General Services Administration.

"We want to clarify that NASA retains all of its responsibilities to clean up the Santa Susana Field Laboratory site," NASA spokeswoman Merrilee Fellows said.

Center spotlights hazards

Just a mile below the lab stands the Aerospace Cancer Museum of Education, Los Angeles, a center opened a year ago that focuses on the health hazards and environmental cleanup of the lab and other polluted Cold War-era sites. It contains thousands of photographs, news clippings, government reports and even old worker manuals.

On Thursday, the center will host a mixer called "Santa Susana 101."

Christina Walsh, founder of CleanUpRocketdyne.org, and William Preston Bowling, founder of ACMELA.org, created the center with a \$25,000 grant from the Annenberg Foundation.

"What's changed in the last 20 years is our legislators were more comfortable with becoming environmentalists," Bowling said.

Under House energy bill, coal won't be going away

A proposal to limit greenhouse gas emissions makes concessions to the industry in effort to attract support from congressional Democrats who represent coal-dependent areas.

By Jim Tankersley, staff writer

L.A. Times, Monday, June 22, 2009

Reporting from Washington -- Coal-fired power plants are the largest source of heat-trapping gases that cause global warming, but President Obama's plan to fight climate change would result in the nation burning more coal a decade from now than it does today.

The administration's plan, the centerpiece of a 700-page legislative package, proposes strict limits on emissions of greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide.

But to attract vital support from congressional Democrats representing heavily coal-dependent areas, authors of the legislation, including Rep. Henry A. Waxman (D-Beverly Hills), have made a series of concessions that substantially soften its effect on coal -- at least over the next decade or so.

As a result, the Environmental Protection Agency projects that even if the emissions limits go into effect, the U.S. would use more carbon-dioxide-heavy coal in 2020 than it did in 2005.

That's because the bill gives utilities a financial incentive to keep burning coal by joining the cap-and-trade system -- a kind of marketplace where polluters could reduce their emissions on paper by buying pollution reductions created by others. These so-called offsets, for example, could be created and sold by farmers who planted trees, which filter carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

Environmental groups also say the bill could set off a boom in the construction of new coal plants because of provisions that would restrict legal efforts to block such projects.

Leading Democrats -- and some major conservation groups, such as the Natural Resources Defense Council -- say the moves have helped attract coal-district Democrats to support the bill without undermining the plan's environmental goals.

"We've ensured a role for coal" in the nation's energy future, said Rep. Rick Boucher (D-Va.), one of the leading coal champions in the House.

But some environmentalists remain skeptical that offsets can reduce greenhouse gases to avoid catastrophic warming of the atmosphere.

"This is greens making a deal with the devil," said Ted Nordhaus, chairman of the Breakthrough Institute, an environmentalist think tank that recently completed a detailed critique of the bill's coal provisions.

Obama and House leaders "gave the coal guys everything they wanted," said Michael Shellenberger, the institute's president. "The result is legislation that, when all is said and done, will increase coal generation and make it harder to move away from it."

The EPA projects Obama's plan would slow the growth in coal over what would have occurred in the absence of emission limits. Emissions from coal would grow at roughly the same rate as overall coal use, until "clean coal" technology becomes commercially viable.

Under the plan, the EPA projects that after 2020, conventional coal use would begin to fall quickly. That prediction rests on a still-uncertain assumption that new nuclear power plants would begin to come on line.

The analysis also assumes scientists will master advanced technologies that could make coal more attractive from an emissions standpoint. As of now, no one has on a commercial scale.

Obama's Energy Department announced this month that it would spend more than \$1 billion to restart a carbon-capture demonstration plant in Mattoon, Ill.

The focus on coal in climate legislation is directly linked to its abundance. Coal has been burned for heat since the time of cavemen. It stoked the smokestacks of the Industrial Revolution and powered the first steam engines. It remains the source of half of the electric power in the United States and is the nation's most abundant fossil fuel.

"Whatever the ideal vision of the future," said David G. Hawkins, director of climate programs for the NRDC, "coal will be there for decades at least."

The coal industry spent \$38 million in the 2008 presidential campaign to push its message, and it has succeeded in changing the nature of the debate.

"In the past, there was a drive to use climate policy as a wedge to take coal out of the energy mix," said Joe Lucas, senior vice president of communications for the industry-funded American Coalition for Clean Coal Electricity. "There's just been a fundamental shift."

Several of the most coal-dependent utilities have endorsed the House bill, but the coal coalition has not -- it wants caps on the price of emission permits, among other amendments. But Lucas said the bill was "closer" than it had ever been to industry acceptance.

Still, most Republicans, particularly those from coal-heavy regions, say the bill is still not a good deal for coal consumers, who include many of the poorest Americans.

"Why is it that the wealthy parts of our country continue to attack the lifestyles of the rural poor?" Rep. John Shimkus (R-Ill.), a longtime coal champion, asked at a hearing on the energy bill last month. "If

you're going to put a price on carbon emissions now, later or in the future, those that rely on [coal] are going to be harmed

Ask Vanessa: Diesel by any other name

Mother Nature Network (mnn.com)

In the Modesto Bee, Monday, June 22, 2009

Dear Vanessa,

Do you have to modify a diesel engine in order to run it on vegetable oil, and is that the same thing as biodiesel?

- Randy Berinhout

Dear Randy,

Greetings from the base of Tungurahua volcano, nestled between the Andes and the Amazon.

Great question! You're certainly not alone in asking for clarification. I've spent many hours in parking lots explaining the vanity plate on my '84 diesel ("BIODSEL"), and the differences in the various fuels that can be used to power a diesel engine.

When Rudolph Diesel introduced his engine in 1900, at the World's Fair in Paris, it was running on peanut oil. Shortly after, the petroleum industry began cashing in on Diesel's design by using a byproduct of petroleum distillation to power the engine. They called it diesel fuel.

My car can run on diesel (the fossil fuel variety), straight vegetable oil (SVO), and biodiesel (SVO that has been modified), or any combination of the three. That isn't unusual: anything with a diesel engine - plane, boat, motorcycle - can run on diesel, SVO or biodiesel. SVO is a broad term, and covers a range of materials beyond vegetable oil including animal fats (chicken, tallow, lard and byproducts of omega-3 fatty acid from fish oil) and algae. SVO can be from virgin feedstock, meaning crops grown specifically as a fuel source, or recycled from other uses, such as used cooking oils (WVO for waste vegetable oil).

Here's the catch: SVO will burn in a diesel engine but only if its viscosity (the thickness of a liquid) is brought down to a level similar to petro-diesel. Think about the leftovers in your fridge: the grease coagulates fairly quickly and doesn't liquefy again unless it is heated. Running on SVO without making some modification can lead to some very sticky problems, literally.

There are two basic choices for dealing with the viscosity of SVOs: add a heating mechanism to the fuel line or tank, or process the oils. I do both. I use SVO - always in the form of local WVOs in a second fuel tank in the trunk of the car where the SVO is heated by a coil running from the radiator. The second option, modifying the oil, means using biodiesel. Biodiesel is made through a process called transesterification, a fairly simple process that uses lye to remove the coagulating properties of the oils. The byproduct of biodiesel processing is simple glycerine, used in soaps and other products.

The biodiesel I use is produced from WVOs recycled from local restaurants and university cafeterias. Of course, biodiesel can also be made from virgin oil feedstock. Soybean crops account for about 90 percent of U.S. fuel stocks.

That's the basics: diesel engine originally designed to run on vegetable oil; no modification needed to run a diesel engine on biodiesel; heating mechanism needs to be added to run engine on SVO.

Now for the not-so basics. SVO and biodiesel have many advantages over petrodiesel:

- They are, theoretically carbon-neutral (they do not emit more carbon than they've absorbed).
- Their emissions are cleaner (including less asthma causing particulates).
- In the case of WVO, they can be locally recycled and produced and keep potential waste out of sewers and landfills.
- They are derived from renewable sources.

Thing is, renewable energy isn't always sustainable.

Here is a quick rundown on the negative impacts of biofuels. Too often, rain forests are burned to plant crops for fuel. Factoring in the carbon usage of agriculture, production and transportation, biofuels can no longer be considered carbon-neutral. The destructive and often poisonous environmental impacts of agriculture are overwhelming the planet. And growing crops for fuel has already led to rising food prices, and will only continue to create dangerous competition between fuel and food.

Hope that clarifies more than it confuses!

Vanessa

Find more of Vanessa's advice on Mother Nature Network at <http://www.mnn.com/lifestyle/ask-vanessa>.

[Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Monday, June 22, 2009:](#)

Clean-air sarcasm alert

Shame on the charbroiler food industry for emitting toxins into the air and trying to ruin our environment -- and our lives as we know them. Those restaurants that release that deadly PM 2.5 are killing us. It's about time these criminals are exposed and the real truth comes out.

In order to mitigate the issue I propose an excise tax of 62 cents per burger (\$1 for a double) to pay for clean-up, research, and children's health care. A very special thanks to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District for their exhaustive investigation in order to avoid a potentially catastrophic event. Maybe their efforts will lead someone to do something about the foul smell of your neighbor's BBQ steak as well.

DOUG WARREN, Bakersfield

[Letter to the S.F. Chronicle, Saturday, June 20, 2009:](#)

Letters to the Editor

The Chronicle says so-called "smart" housing relieves air pollution, thick traffic and housing sprawl ("Room to grow, smartly," Editorial, June 16). Regrettably, "smart" can also mean kids aren't a good fit. Higher density and higher rise can be barriers for families with preschool and school-age offspring. Younger ones need full-time eyeball care; dwelling units need outdoor access. "Smart" housing I've seen suits adults, not kids.

Its trademark is nearness to mass transit, often busy rails that lure trespassers of all ages. Housing "down by the tracks" was once less desirable and priced accordingly. Now it arguably creates sprawl - young families looking farther afield for more, safer, healthier space, dirt that kids can dig in.

Let's redefine "smart." Deter sprawl while keeping kids in mind. Infill housing can incorporate child safety, avoid hazardous rails and feature terraces with trees, gardens and, yes, dirt for digging. In Vienna, artist-designer Friedensreich Hundertwasser turned a drab apartment block into a showpiece of multicolored facades and sheltered terraces where "green" is more than a word.

James Kelly, San Bruno

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses Greenpeace urges Mexico to develop an environmental policy. Over 20% of polluting emissions in Mexico come from deforestation. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Greenpeace urge a México desarrollar su política ambiental

Notimex

El Diario, 21 Junio 2009

Ciudad de México— La organización ecologista Greenpeace aseguró que la propuesta del gobierno mexicano sobre la creación de un Fondo Verde tiene muchos aspectos positivos, aunque consideró urgente que la política ambiental de México sea más consistente.

Al presentar su postura sobre el foro de las economías más grandes del mundo que se celebrará en Morelos el lunes y el martes, Greenpeace México exhortó a mejorar el programa de reforestación, así como luchar contra la deforestación y el uso de energías fósiles.

En conferencia de prensa, la coordinadora de la campaña de Clima y Energía de esa organización no gubernamental, María José Cárdenas, consideró que hay inconsistencias en la política ambiental de México.

Mientras que a nivel internacional se promueven iniciativas con muchos aspectos rescatables, como el Fondo Verde, en el país hay problemas serios como la pérdida 600 mil hectáreas de bosques y selvas al año.

Otros problemas son que se siguen promoviendo las energías fósiles y la reforestación avanza de una manera poco consistente, comentó la activista.

El representante de Greenpeace Internacional, Gustavo Ampugnani, advirtió a su vez que el problema de reforestación impulsado por el gobierno federal debe tener ajustes porque no está funcionando de manera adecuada.

Recordó que en México 20 por ciento de las emisiones contaminantes provienen de la deforestación, por lo que es importante reformar las políticas públicas que promueven el cambio de uso de suelo para evitar ese fenómeno, al tiempo que se protejan bosques y selvas.

Los representantes de Greenpeace recordaron que mañana comenzará en Cuernavaca el tercer encuentro del Foro de las Grandes Economías (MEF, por sus siglas en inglés) , entre ellas las que componen el Grupo de los Ocho (G-8) países más desarrollados el mundo.

Por ello confiaron en que los ministros que esta semana se reunirán acuerden tomar medidas concretas para la reducción drástica de las emisiones de gases de efecto invernadero y que la población en general empuje al gobierno a tomar decisiones en este sentido.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses clean energy will create more jobs.](#)

La energía limpia crea más empleos

EFE

La Opinión, Sunday, June 21, 2009

MIAMI (EFE).- La inversión en energía renovable puede generar "prosperidad verde" en EEUU con la creación de más empleos y el incremento de los beneficios para las familias de bajos ingresos al reducir los costos de energía y transporte, según un informe divulgado en Miami.

Miami y Tampa, dos de las ciudades con gran presencia hispana en el estado de Florida, se beneficiarían con la creación de 25,119 trabajos y 11,613 empleos respectivamente, de acuerdo con el reporte elaborado por el Political Economy Research Institute de la Universidad de Massachusetts (PERI).

El informe se titula "Prosperidad Verde: ¿Cómo las políticas de energía limpia pueden combatir la pobreza y elevar los niveles de vida en los Estados Unidos" y se realizó junto con el Centro para el Progreso Americano (CAP), Verde para Todos (Green for All), y el Consejo para la Defensa de Recursos Naturales (NRDC).

En el estudio se explica cómo la ley Americana de Recuperación y Reinmersión (ARRA) y el Acta de Energía Limpia y Seguridad (ACES) podrían servir como base para traer inversiones de energía limpia a EEUU de aproximadamente 150 mil millones de dólares por año.

Esas inversiones "producirían una ganancia neta de 1,7 millones de nuevos puestos de trabajo" a nivel nacional.

De esos nuevos empleos, unos 870 mil empleos estarán a la disposición de trabajadores con estudios secundarios, mientras que el nivel de desempleo se reduciría en aproximadamente el uno por ciento.

"En general encontramos que las inversiones en energía limpia crean más oportunidades de empleo que las inversiones en combustibles fósiles. Los mayores beneficios los sentirán los trabajadores con un nivel educativo relativamente bajo", según el informe.

En el caso de Miami, con una inversión de 2,500 millones de dólares se crearían 25,119 empleos.

"Podemos crear puestos de trabajos al tiempo que reducimos el calentamiento global y reducimos nuestra dependencia del petróleo extranjero", dijo Adrianna Quintero, directora de La Onda Verde de NRDC, en la conferencia de prensa donde se dio a conocer el estudio.

En el área de Tampa-San Petersburg con una inversión de 1,200 millones de dólares se crearían 11,613 empleos.

"Está más claro que nunca que la inversión en una economía de energía limpia crea vías para la prosperidad de millones de estadounidenses, sobre todo en las comunidades de bajos ingresos", dijo Mildred Real de Common Ground for Conservation.

"Cambiar a la energía limpia puede ser un motor para el crecimiento económico y la protección del medio ambiente", aseveró.

Además de crear nuevas oportunidades económicas, las inversiones contribuirán "significativamente a la mejora de la eficiencia energética en edificios y viviendas, la reducción global de los costos de la energía para los consumidores y en especial en beneficio de los hogares de bajos ingresos".

Cambiar a la energía limpia también mejora el transporte público, especialmente en las zonas urbanas, lo que podría conducir a una reducción media del costo de la vida del 1 al 4 por ciento por familia, de acuerdo con el informe.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses pollution created by traffic on roadways are trapped in a mile and a half radius affecting communities residing along major transit roads.](#)

La contaminación en las carreteras queda atrapada en un radio de milla y media

Manuel Ocaño

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Friday, June 19, 2009

La contaminación del aire que genera el tráfico vehicular en una carretera, en horas pico de mayor tránsito matutino, puede permanecer atrapada en un radio de aproximadamente milla y media. Esto lo reveló un estudio conjunto de las universidades de California en Los Ángeles y del Sur de California para la Oficina de Recursos del Aire estatal; destacó que inclusive cuando hace escaso viento, el manto concentrado de contaminación permanece apegado al tránsito de vehículos. El análisis se aplicó principalmente a la carretera interestatal 10, en un tramo del área de Santa Mónica entre las 4 y las 7 de la mañana. Los resultados indicaron que en la madrugada se reúne más la contaminación de partículas finas, asociadas con el asma; con otras enfermedades pulmonares y cardiovasculares, y con la mortalidad prematura.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses 25 ethanol plants are inaugurated in various gas stations throughout Sacramento.](#)

Inauguran autoridades ambientales en Sacramento 25 bombas de etanol en diversas gasolineras

Manuel Ocaño

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Thursday, June 18, 2009

Autoridades ambientales en Sacramento, California inauguraron 23 nuevas bombas expendedoras de etanol en diversas gasolineras comerciales del área. La Administración Distrital Metropolitana de Calidad del Aire en Sacramento informó que su siguiente paso será abrir dos expendios exclusivos para la venta del etanol al público. Mary Nichols, directora de la Oficina de Recursos del Aire de California dijo que el despliegue de nuevos expendios de etanol servirá como un proyecto piloto para medir la demanda de ese combustible anticontaminante en el estado. Para empezar, en Sacramento hay unos 23 mil

vehículos que pueden consumir etanol. Nichols agregó que el plan representa "los primeros pasos de una revolución en el mercado de combustibles en California".

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses large air pollution contributors are fined in Mexico.](#)

Grandes contaminadores citados en México

Buscan acuerdos contra cambio climático

AFP

CIUDAD DE MÉXICO - Las principales economías mundiales y los principales países emisores de CO2 se reúnen el lunes y martes en México para acercar posturas a menos de seis meses de la crucial cumbre de Copenhague, de la que debe surgir el nuevo pacto mundial contra el cambio climático.

Suman el 80% de las emisiones

En el Foro de Grandes Economías sobre Energía y Clima (MEF) se sentarán los países del G8, los grandes emergentes (China, India, Brasil, Sudáfrica y México) así como Corea del Sur, Indonesia, Australia, República Checa, Suecia, Dinamarca y la Unión Europea. Estos países concentran el 80% de las emisiones de gas de efecto invernadero (GEI) del planeta.

La ronda de Jiutepec (en el centro de México) será la tercera del MEF, tras las de Washington (abril) y París (mayo), y la última a nivel ministerial antes de que los Jefes de Estado y de Gobierno se reúnan en julio en L'Aquila (Italia) con el objetivo de dar el esperado impulso a las negociaciones.

En este foro, los países más contaminantes cuentan con un espacio más amplio y privado -las reuniones son a puertas cerradas- para acercar posiciones en el marco de la Convención de Naciones Unidas sobre el Cambio Climático, en la que tienen voz 192 países.

Con la vista en Copenhague

La Convención es la que debe alumbrar, a más tardar en diciembre en Copenhague, el nuevo gran acuerdo mundial que reemplace al Protocolo de Kioto en 2012 y que no parece viable sin que las grandes potencias asuman compromisos más importantes.

"Después de las reuniones de Bonn (Alemania) en las que no hubo ambición por parte de los países industrializados, poco podemos esperar" de la cumbre mexicana del MEF, dijo Gustavo Ampugnani, coordinador político para América Latina de Greenpeace Internacional.

Los 12 días de conversaciones de Bonn a principios junio, auspiciadas por la ONU, finalizaron con un texto de 250 páginas que no cuenta con avances decisivos. Están programadas tres nuevas rondas antes de Copenhague.

"Las negociaciones que se han ido dando durante el año han sido muy fallidas, tanto dentro como fuera del marco de Naciones Unidas", lamentó María Cardenas, responsable de la campaña de Clima y Energía de Greenpeace México.

EU no acepta grandes recortes

Los países en desarrollo reclaman a los industrializados una reducción de al menos el 40% de sus emisiones para 2050 respecto a los niveles de 1990 -los científicos piden un 80% para limitar el calentamiento de forma razonable- pero las potencias no parecen dispuestas a un esfuerzo de esa magnitud.

El recorte que acepta Japón para 2020 es del 8%, el de la Unión Europea del 20% (30% en caso de acuerdo internacional) mientras que Estados Unidos, el primer contaminador mundial, no acepta pasar del 4% a pesar de la mayor implicación del presidente Barack Obama respecto a su sucesor, George W. Bush, quien no ratificó Kioto.

En México, los países del MEF discutirán principalmente sobre la transferencia de tecnología para reducir las emisiones y sobre financiamiento.

En este último punto podría haber un acuerdo respecto a la propuesta del país anfitrión conocida como "Fondo Mundial Verde", que fue bien valorada en la última cita de París.

El Fondo Verde consiste en que cada país contribuya económicamente en función de sus emisiones de GEI en el pasado, de las actuales y de su PIB para financiar el combate contra el calentamiento climático y la adaptación a sus efectos.