

State program to rid Valley of polluting cars is off to a fast start

By Scott Jason

Merced Sun-Star, Friday, July 10, 2009

The phones at Fresno's Pick-A-Part have been so busy this week that office manager Tonya Wells has had a tough time finding a free line to make outgoing calls.

Since Monday, when the state's vehicle trade-in program was announced, the shop has been flooded with calls from people looking to apply. Two people in Atwater have been preapproved and a Merced resident's application still needs to be processed, she said.

"We were not expecting the multitude of phone calls," she said, estimating that about 500 people have inquired so far.

The Valley Air District has \$2 million available to get dirty cars off the road, part of the effort to improve the air quality. The money comes from a fee collected when people renew their driver's license and could take between 400 and 2,000 cars off the road.

People in Valley counties can get either \$1,000 cash for their car or a \$5,000 credit to put toward a newer one, air specialist Kevin Wing said Thursday. The credit will only be given for the worst polluters. The cars will be crushed so they're off the road for good.

To be eligible, cars must have passed the most-recent smog check, be drivable and registered for 24 months in the air basin -- San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings and Tulare counties.

People buying a car must get one made in 2006 or later. If they can prove they're low-income, they can purchase a car from 2003 or later. The cars must be bought from a dealer.

Besides helping to clean the air, the program will give a small boost to Valley dealers.

Perry Robinson, general sales manager at Merced Volkswagen-Kia, said the state's credit could be paired with rebates that he's already offering to defray the cost of a new car.

The clean-diesel Jetta can get up to 44 miles to the gallon while most of the Kias are in the high-30s, he said.

"It's a pretty good program," he said. "We're pretty sure it's going to generate a lot of interest."

If he's right, it will be the dealer's phones that are ringing and ringing.

San Joaquin Valley

AIR DISTRICT OFFERS CASH FOR CARS

Modesto Bee, Friday, July 10, 2009

Info: Money is available to residents of the San Joaquin Valley to retire their older, polluting cars. Through the PASS (Polluting Automobile Scrap and Salvage) program, owners of older, polluting cars can receive \$1,000 in cash or \$5,000 toward the purchase of a newer, cleaner car. The program has \$2 million and applications will be taken until funds run out. To be considered for the program, cars must:

Have been continuously registered in the air basin for at least 24 months (the air basin is San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and a portion of Kern counties)

Be in drivable condition

Have passed the most recent smog check

Participating cars will be scrapped for \$1,000 in cash or some vehicles may be eligible for a \$5,000 credit toward the purchase of a newer, cleaner car. Pick Your Part is the San Joaquin Valley Air District's administrator of the PASS program. To find out if a car is eligible for the program, call 877-900-5865. Information also is available at www.valleyair.org/PASS.htm.

Central Valley gets funds to retrofit diesels

Central Valley Business Times, Friday, July 10, 2009

A total of \$6 million in federal stimulus money is flowing into the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to pay for diesel retrofits on school buses and agricultural equipment, says U.S. Rep. Jim Costa, D-Fresno.

"Diesel has undergone major changes in the past few years, and retrofitting clean diesel technologies for older diesel vehicles and equipment is one of the most cost-effective strategies for achieving tangible and immediate air quality benefits," says Mr. Costa.

"While not the silver bullet, adding diesel retrofit projects to our Valley's air quality tool box is just another positive step forward to help keep our air clean," he says.

The San Joaquin Valley APCD was selected for \$4 million in funding to install 190 diesel particulate filters on 2001 model year and newer diesel school buses. Through diesel emission reductions, the project is expected to protect the health of children who ride these buses daily.

The district was also selected for \$2 million in funding to re-power 30 agricultural off-road equipment vehicles with new engines that meet or exceed EPA's Tier 3 emission standards for non-road diesel engines.

Green group warns of Kettleman City 'health emergency'

By Eiji Yamashita

Hanford Sentinel, Thursday, July 9, 2009

A coalition of green groups released figures showing a high incident of birth defects and infant deaths in Kettleman City during a press conference in Hanford on Wednesday, and called on the government to investigate the cause and extent of what they say is a "health emergency."

The groups also called for a moratorium on all permitting processes for proposed polluting projects until an investigation is done.

According to the advocates, five babies were born with birth defects in Kettleman City during a 14-month period starting September 2007, and three of them have died. They say an estimated 17 to 20 children were born there during that time period. These numbers, they say, are based on a recent door-to-door survey of residents.

The county health department says, however, that official statistics show birth defects and deaths are much lower.

"We're here to demand the county, state and federal agencies declare a health emergency in Kettleman City," said Maricela Mares-Alatorre, a Kettleman City resident leading a group El Pueblo Para Aire y Agua Limpio. "We don't know what's happening. We don't know why. But we do know that these things could be caused by environmental factors, and we're begging the agencies to protect our town."

To make a point, a group of parents showed up to the press conference holding photographs of their children with cleft palates and holding up signs bearing slogans such as "Save the children" and "No more birth defects."

The press conference at the Kings County Government Center comes amid the time when residents of Kettleman City and Avenal face a series of projects being proposed near their communities.

Waste Management is trying to expand its hazardous landfills and renew a permit to continue storing and burying waste contaminated with a cancer-causing chemical known as PCBs.

In response to a call for a moratorium, officials with Waste Management said they have no intention of stopping any of their projects.

"We think it would be irresponsible to delay getting the permit, because this is essentially the last available place for hazardous waste in California," said Kit Cole, spokeswoman for Waste Management.

Concerns raised Wednesday are nothing new for Kings County.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency previously found no evidence that the community's public health is adversely affected by the landfills.

But opponents simply don't buy it. For years, residents have complained of higher rates of asthma and cancer rates as well as cases of cleft palate among newborns.

Health concerns were last debated at a February meeting held by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency because of the company's proposal to continue storing and burying waste contaminated with a cancer-causing chemical known as PCBs.

Tension is also flaring up because Waste Management is trying to expand its hazardous landfills and a new power plant is being proposed in Avenal, and sludge farm operations are being proposed nearby. Residents say these projects would add to the cumulative effect of pollution they are already experiencing.

"We're not here today to point a finger at any one company or any one pollution source," said Bradley Angel, executive director of San Francisco-based Greenaction. "We don't know. What we do know for sure is that the last thing Kettleman City needs is more toxic poisons dumped in their community and in the air and water."

Parents who were affected by cleft palate babies and infant deaths appeared at the press conference to provide testimonies.

Maria Saucedo and her husband, Alejandro Alvarez of Avenal, were among them.

Their daughter, Ashely Alvarez, was born with a cleft palate and a congenital heart defect in March 2008 and died 11 months later. Alvarez said they lived in Kettleman City at that time.

Saucedo, seven-months pregnant, said she is concerned for her new baby.

"I miss my baby, but she's not with us anymore. And right now I'm concerned with our new baby," she said. Alvarez added, "We don't know what's going to happen. I think it's a big problem. We live in fear in Avenal and Kettleman City."

Magdalena Romero of Kettleman City, who also lost her baby to birth defects last year, said "I'm here to ask for justice for my daughter, America Romero, who passed away," she said through a Spanish translation.

Their testimonies conflict with official disease data.

According to state statistics, 2.97 cases of birth defects per 1,000 live births were reported from Kettleman City between 1998 and 2005 -- a number far lower when compared with 13.7 for Kings County and 12.27 for the entire Valley.

Angel accused Kings County health officials of inaction on the issue. The officials responded saying they were never made aware of the problem.

"They've never provided us with any information about those cases. The concern we have is that if there are cases we don't know about, then they may not be receiving the services that we can make available to them," said Keith Winkler, director of the Kings County Department of Public Health.

Currently, two children from Kettleman City are enrolled in the county's California Children Services, which provides care for children with birth defects, Winkler said. He urged environmental justice groups to refer cases to the county.

Meanwhile, Waste Management officials stood by their health and safety record.

"The health and safety of the local community is of the utmost importance to Waste Management. Waste Management is ... committed to the safe and secure handling of waste," said Bob Henry, senior district manager of the company's Kettleman Hills Facility. "The facility is one of the most highly regulated sites in California and uses state-of-the-art technology to protect the local environment."

As part of the landfill expansion, Waste Management has agreed to pay \$100,000 to fund a Kettleman City health study to be conducted by Kings County Public Health Department.

Leery of the company's involvement, environmental watchdog groups called for a no-strings-attached health study by an independent party.

State work group delays recommendations on sports and pollution

By James Bruggers

Louisville Courier-Journal, Friday, July 10, 2009

A statewide sports safety work group on Thursday delayed for at least a month making recommendations on whether high school coaches should cancel or modify outdoor sports practices on days of elevated pollution.

Several members of the work group, established by the General Assembly earlier this year, said they needed more information about air pollution and how schools could use the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Air Quality Index to make decisions about outdoor practices.

The delay means there likely won't be any statewide recommendations on air quality and outdoor practices by July 15, when summer workouts are scheduled to resume, said Eldon May, spokesman for the Kentucky High School Athletic Association, which he said was looking to the safety group and the Kentucky Medical Association for advice on what to tell its 279 member schools.

July and August are the peak of the summer air pollution season in Kentucky.

Louisville environmental attorney Tom FitzGerald, director of the Kentucky Resources Council, has been pressing for the athletic association to issue statewide recommendations for almost a year, saying schools should take EPA health warnings during periods of elevated pollution seriously. This week, Jefferson County Public Schools said it would begin, starting July 15, to pass along air pollution alerts to coaches with recommendations on how they should modify their practices.

At the meeting, a Kentucky Medical Association official encouraged his fellow work group members to recommend something similar to the athletic association's board.

"We need to go ahead with this gentleman's recommendations and we need to move on it pretty quickly," said Dr. James Bowles, who chairs the state medical association's committee on sports safety.

But some work group members urged a slower pace.

"I'd have to know more about it, and whether this is an issue for athletes," said member Dorie Combs, a member of the Kentucky Board of Education.

Dale Brown, superintendent of Warren County Public Schools, and Mark Peach, football coach at Anderson County High School, also asked for more information about the issue. The work group next meets on Aug. 10

Brigid DeVries, commissioner of the Kentucky High School Athletic Association, said she would update the association's board on the issue when it next meets in two weeks.

FitzGerald expressed disappointment with the delay, saying schools are now "on notice" if student athletes suffer respiratory distress while practicing sports outside on days with poor air quality.

The work group was created by the Kentucky General Assembly to look into issues of sports safety and report back to legislators by next year, May said. The athletic association issues practice and play guidelines and is weighing whether to add recommendations dealing with air pollution.

On Monday, Jerry Wyman, athletic director for the 98,000-student Jefferson County school district, said a system to get air pollution warnings to school athletic directors and coaches would be in place by July 15, when summer practices for fall sports are scheduled to begin.

"We are going to be highly sensitive about these issues," he said.

The Environmental Protection Agency urges young people and anyone with lung problems such as asthma to limit strenuous exercise on days when air has been made unhealthy by ozone or fine particle pollution. The EPA says ozone can irritate respiratory systems, decrease lung function, aggravate asthma and damage cells that line lungs. Exposure to fine particles can cause asthma attacks or acute bronchitis, and might increase susceptibility to respiratory infections.

Young people are considered among the most susceptible because their bodies are still developing and they often breathe faster and deeper than others, said Cathy Milbourn, an EPA spokeswoman. The EPA sends out pollution advisories by e-mail for communities across the country the day before an unhealthy air day, Milbourn said.

In Kentucky, people can view the EPA's Air Quality Index for several regions known for air quality problems, including Ashland, Bowling Green, Lexington, Northern Kentucky, Owensboro, Paducah and Pikeville, on the Kentucky Division for Air Quality's Web site, said John Lyons, director of the agency.

The Louisville Air Pollution Control District provides the same information, as well as e-mailed forecasts, through its Web site.

"It's certainly something that schools should be looking at," said Janice Nolen, assistant vice president of the American Lung Association.

In California, the lung association has worked with regional air pollution control agencies and local schools to get color-coded flags corresponding to the colors of the EPA's Air Quality Index flown at schools. The flags are intended to underscore air quality concerns for students, teachers and parents, said [Anthony Presto, spokesman for the eight-county San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#).

It's up to schools to decide what to do with the information, he said, adding that some have begun programs to reschedule sports practices when air quality is considered unhealthy.

The Houston Independent School District in Texas uses air pollution alerts to decide how and when teams should practice, said district spokeswoman Lisa Kinney.

"They take it pretty seriously," she said.

Feds provide \$2 million for cleaner trucks at Oakland port

By Denis Cuff

In the Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald, Friday, July 10, 2009

OAKLAND — The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has awarded \$2 million in economic stimulus funds to reduce pollution from diesel trucks hauling freight in and out of the Port of Oakland.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District will use the money for grants to truckers to install fine particle filters on 81 diesel trucks, and to replace 21 old diesel truckers with cleaner models, the EPA said in a release this week.

The money is in addition to \$10 million in grants that the air quality district and the port have funded — \$5 million from each agency — for truck filters or replacements trucks, said Lisa Fasano an air district spokeswoman.

The \$2 million from the EPA was part of an \$25 million award of competitive stimulus fund grants announced this week to reduce pollution from diesel vehicles and equipment in California. Other grants went to projects in metropolitan Los Angeles, the Ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles, and San Diego and the San Joaquin Valley.

Refinery construction halt costs city of Richmond

By Katherine Tam, West County Times

In the Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald, Friday, July 10, 2009

Richmond is taking another look at its budget after a court ruling stopped construction at the Chevron Richmond refinery and put the brakes on a related deal in which the oil company was to give the city millions.

City officials expected to receive \$4 million from a community benefits agreement when they adopted a budget for this fiscal year. Losing \$4 million will have an impact, said city finance director Jim Goins, and officials are reviewing the budget now.

Under the \$61 million community benefits agreement signed last summer, Chevron was to provide funding spread out over 10 years for city police, job training, nonprofit groups and other programs, as well as pay for air quality improvements at its plant. The agreement is contingent on the refinery's construction permits, which the court has set aside.

The city already received \$4 million in January under the agreement, of which \$1 million each was spent on police overtime, job training and employment programs and health services, Goins said. The Office of Neighborhood Safety received \$775,000, and the fire department spent \$100,000 on equipment.

Chevron won't ask for that money back, refinery spokesman Brent Tippen said.

"We have already funded our first round of commitments ... and have no plans to request a refund," Tippen said.

Torm Nompraseurt, senior organizer with the Asian Pacific Environmental Network's Laotian Organizing Project in Richmond, said Chevron should keep funding what it promised in the community benefits agreement.

"If they are going to agree to give the community benefits on a voluntary basis, they should stick with their word, and they should honor the statement they made," Nompraseurt said.

Last week, Contra Costa Superior Court halted construction on Chevron's project to replace its hydrogen plant, power plant and reformer to refine a wider range of crude with more sulfur. Judge Barbara Zuniga ruled that the project's environmental impact report was vague on whether the new equipment enables processing of heavier crude that can increase pollution, a question at the crux of heated public debates. Zuniga suspended permits for the project until the environmental report is fixed.

The West County Toxics Coalition, Communities for a Better Environment and Asian Pacific Environmental Network, which filed the lawsuit last fall, argue the project could increase pollution in a community with already high asthma rates and the environmental report failed to disclose all information to the public.

Chevron states its project is about making the refinery safer and more efficient and not about heavier crude. Chevron plans to file an appeal in state court, Tippen said; no appeal had been filed as of Thursday.

The city of Richmond, which also is named in the lawsuit, has 60 days to file an appeal. The city has not made a decision, City Attorney Randy Riddle said.

The parties have begun meeting to discuss a possible settlement.

Meanwhile, Chevron has 60 days to demobilize at the construction site and said it will mean more than 1,000 workers will lose their jobs. All but 100 will be released by Friday or early next week, Tippen said. The project was to employ about 2,000 at the peak of its two-year construction.

Greg Feere, head of the Contra Costa Labor Council, hopes the parties can reach a compromise so construction can continue.

"There are no jobs to send people to, not in this economic disaster," Feere said. "Some people are going to lose their house, their cars."

The environmentalists have suggested that Chevron pay the workers while the environmental impact report is fixed. It wasn't the workers' fault that the EIR was not complete, said Greg Karras, a scientist with Communities for a Better Environment.

Ride-Sharing Office Goes Beyond Daily Commute

By Brigid Schulte, Staff Writer

Washington Post, Thursday, July 9, 2009

After 25 years of helping commuters find others going their way and creating carpools to ease the area's clogged roads Monday through Friday, a ride-sharing agency is helping do the same for those heading to ballgames, fireworks, parades and concerts on weekends and evenings.

Commuter Connections, the ride-sharing agency of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, is offering an online ride-matching service to events. The system enables a commuter to enter a home address and find an interactive map with others nearby who are willing to carpool to the event.

"This is a really new area for us. We've been really focused on the commute and people getting to and from work," said Nick Ramfos, director of Commuter Connections. "But the whole reasoning behind this new effort is to lessen traffic before and after special events, so people can get in and out in a less stressful manner."

The idea came from other cities, including San Francisco, he said. "If you're waiting to get in to an event, wondering if you're going to be on time to see the kickoff or the beginning of the concert, that's stressful. You want to go and have a good time, not wait to exit the facility and then get stuck in traffic."

The agency's Web site, <http://www.mwcog.org/commuter2>, features such events as the Fourth of July fireworks on the Mall, the National Independence Day Parade, a concert in Baltimore, an Elton John-Billy Joel concert at Nationals Park and every Nationals home game. Ramfos said he plans to add venues and events to the list.

"Some of these venues are going to have good transit services, and that would probably be the best way to go," Ramfos said. "But if that's not an option, this is a good way of meeting up with neighbors and, instead of having four vehicles on the road, having just one."

Getting cars off the road has been the primary aim of Commuter Connections since its inception in 1974 when it began promoting carpools, vanpools, teleworking, public transit, biking and walking. The idea is not only to reduce congestion but also to improve air quality.

The ride-matching service has evolved from a cumbersome process of paper forms and anonymous workers matching commuters and delivering potential carpools in the mail to an instant online interactive map experience. Nearly 30,000 commuters use the program, Ramfos said.

The Washington area has one of the largest "commutersheds" of any urban area, with workers coming into the urban core from as far away as Pennsylvania and West Virginia, Ramfos said. Every day, about 3.6 million people commute into the area, and about 71 percent drive in alone, Ramfos said. That contributes to making the area among the most congested in the nation (third by some accounts), with commuters sitting in traffic an average of 69 hours a year.

Ramfos said the problem would be worse without Commuter Connections' efforts. About 18 percent of commuters use public transit, he said, the second-highest transit use in the country, behind New York. And 8 percent carpool and vanpool, which is the third-highest carpooling rate in the nation, after Los Angeles and Chicago. About 3 percent bike and walk. Additionally, nearly 20 percent of the workforce teleworks at least one day a week, Ramfos said.

"You're talking a pretty sizable number of people doing something differently," he said. "Because of these programs, we're able to reduce about 113,000 vehicles trips per day, which translates into 2.3 million vehicle miles of travel each day. That's a big impact."

Commuter Connections also offers commuters a guaranteed ride home if they miss their carpool in an emergency. And beginning this fall, it will pay commuters on the most congested roads \$2 a day to carpool. The Web site also serves as a clearinghouse for the latest information on traffic cameras and road work. Last week, after the worst accident in Metro's history, Commuter Connections sent out messages for commuters to consider carpooling while the investigation was underway.

Commuter Connections also recognizes businesses that work to reduce the number of cars on the road, and three Northern Virginia businesses and their programs were honored last week for "going above and beyond," Ramfos said.

The Consumer Electronics Association in Crystal City not only promotes telework and encourages carpooling, but one year ago, it began offering its 135 employees \$25,000 loans to buy homes in Arlington County, closer to the office. The loans are forgiven after three years, said spokeswoman Meghan Henning. So far, nine employees have taken the company up on the offer. Henning said she is looking for a home in Arlington to do so.

The association promotes teleworking one day a week, with the company reimbursing 50 percent of Internet costs, and 50 employees take advantage of that. The company gives carpoolers free parking. And it offers \$120 a month to employees who take transit. The company also provides a gym and showers for those who bike to work. All together, the efforts save about 500,000 vehicle miles a year and 25,000 gallons of gas, Ramfos said.

"The association has really come up with innovative ways to deal with commuting, the environment and work-life balance," Henning said. Many of the ideas came from confidential employee surveys, she said.

When Tysons Corner Center implemented ride matching, trip tracking, a commuter calculator and trip planning services for its 5,500 employees, it had a 10 percent increase in employees who use public transit and carpools, saving 610,000 vehicle miles each year. And at Noblis, a company in Falls Church, 22 percent of the 658 employees telework part time and 26 employees telework full time.

Ramfos said he lives in Loudoun County. To get to work in the District, he drives his hybrid car to Herndon, catches the Fairfax Connector bus to Metro's West Falls Church Station and takes the Orange Line to Union Station. From there, he walks two blocks to his office. On a typical day, he commutes about an hour 15 minutes each way. On days he has to drive, he said, he always stops to pick up a "slug," a single commuter, to carpool with. "I wouldn't feel like I would be doing my civic duty if I didn't have someone sitting next to me in the HOV lane," he said.

State: Air pollutants reduced in Southeast Texas

The Associated Press

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Friday, July 10, 2009

AUSTIN, Texas—State environmental regulators say air quality continues to improve in the Southeast Texas petrochemical complex.

The Air Pollutant Watch List kept by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality consists of Texas areas where levels of certain pollutants reached levels of concern.

A statement issued Thursday by the agency states that one air pollutant, 1,3-butadiene, has been removed from two areas of concern in Houston and the Beaumont suburb of Port Neches. The statement says levels of the chemical have fallen 75 percent in Port Neches since 1996 and in Houston since 2004.

The agency statement also states that hydrogen sulfide has been removed from a third area of concern in Beaumont after its levels remained below state standards since 2005.

CDC, NM Web site link contaminants, health effects

The Associated Press

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Friday, July 10, 2009

SANTA FE, N.M.—New Mexicans have a new Web site to learn about how environmental contaminants might affect their health.

State Health Secretary Alfredo Vigil announced the launch of the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Environmental Public Health Tracking Network on Thursday. The site provides health and environmental information in one place.

The Health Department says the network allows scientists, health professionals and the public to track environmental exposures and some noninfectious health conditions.

For example, it lets people know about possible health risks from contaminants such as air pollution and the relationship to asthma.

The Health Department is developing a similar network specific to New Mexico and expects it to be available in the fall.

[Fresno Bee column, Wed., July 8, 2009:](#)

Fresno gets respect for growth strategies

By Bill McEwen

Three candidates vie for two Clovis City Council seats

Voting for two seats on the Clovis City Council is under way now that the Fresno County Elections Office has mailed absentee ballots.

The city election is on March 3, but more than 70% of the votes are expected to come from absentee ballots as they have for the past two council elections.

Voters will choose from among two incumbents and one challenger to fill two council seats.

It must be some kind of joke, right?

Fresno -- nearly always portrayed by outsiders as hot, desolate and the refuge of last resort -- is judged by a team of UC Davis professors to be best prepared of Central Valley cities to handle the onslaught of growth headed this way.

But it's not a joke. The pros even ranked us ahead of Sacramento.

Obscured by the Running Horse, Granite Park and Metropolitan Museum fiascoes, a quiet revolution has been taking place at City Hall.

Elected officials and city employees are thinking green. More importantly, they've implemented strategies and policies that could make Fresno more prosperous, vibrant and livable.

Here's the most dramatic example of what our leaders are aiming for: "The Sierra Nevada mountain range will be clearly visible to all Valley residents by 2025. Public health will be improved by having cleaner air, enhanced public transportation and additional opportunities for walking and cycling," says one of the five Fresno Green Visions statements.

Imagine the boost to our pride that would come with seeing the Sierra most of the year instead of the few days that rain scours the brown haze.

Imagine the economic boost from better health: fewer employees calling in sick, more students in class. And imagine how much better off we'd be attracting people and businesses because Fresno is nice, not merely a cheap place to live.

The transformation of Fresno from a city with notoriously bad planning and indifference to unhealthy air began with activists championing for something better.

It picked up steamed in the late 1990s when the first strong mayor, Jim Patterson, touted the benefits of curbing sprawl and the City Council began converting municipal vehicles to clean fuels.

His successor, Alan Autry, was a strong advocate for sustainable growth. He teamed with the City Council -- particularly Henry T. Perea -- to make the city a leader in solar energy and waste diversion.

First-year Mayor Ashley Swearengin, with the City Council, is continuing to emphasize the importance of supporting development that meets the "triple bottom line" of environmental, economic and social benefits.

The short-term thinkers -- primarily developers who want to build fast and cheap -- aren't going away. There's always the chance that they'll be embraced by a City Hall that finds it difficult to balance budgets without quick dollars from new growth.

But, finally, we've got smart plans befitting a real city instead of a frontier backwater. And the experts who study these things are taking notice. Good for us.

[L.A. Times editorial, Friday, July 10, 2009:](#)

Global warming: The heat is on the U.S.

A climate-change bill in the Senate is a test of this country's commitment to deal with the problem.

This week's Group of 8 summit has pretty much lived down to the low expectations it generated from the outset, yet it did produce a long-overdue agreement to fight climate change.

The club of industrialized nations agreed to cut greenhouse gas emissions 80% by 2050. It was less than President Obama had hoped for -- he had aimed to get developing countries such as China and India to sign on as well -- but it represents the first time the United States has taken the international lead on climate change since the 1990s, and demonstrates to recalcitrant nations that the industrialized world is willing to take responsibility for its outsized contribution to the problem.

Such international pacts are usually meaningless without the backing of Congress; President Clinton, after all, signed the Kyoto Protocol to fight global warming in 1998, but it was never ratified by the Senate. That chamber once again finds itself in a position to overrule the president as it considers a sweeping climate-change bill that was narrowly approved last month in the House. It would fulfill Obama's G-8 promise by meeting the 2050 goal.

The clamor from global-warming deniers has heated up as the nation gets closer to taking action, yet their comprehension of climate science hasn't improved. A particularly common obfuscation from right-wing pundits is the "revelation" that global temperatures have been declining since 1998, even as carbon emissions during the intervening 11 years have risen. This hardly debunks the climate change theory. The cyclical El Niño phenomenon and heavy greenhouse gas concentrations combined to make 1998 the hottest year in recorded history. Such statistical blips are properly ignored by most climatologists, who look at average temperatures over time rather than year-to-year data. And the last decade was on average the hottest ever recorded.

Conservatives are trotting out other long-discredited hypotheses, such as the notion that solar activity rather than greenhouse gases is responsible for rising global temperatures, but the climate bill's fate in the Senate will depend less on crackpot theories than on hardheaded horse-trading. Its effectiveness was undermined in the House by special interests seeking to maximize

profits at the expense of the environment, and the same is happening in the Senate as the bill makes its way through various committees.

With his leadership on climate change at the G-8, Obama posited that the United States would no longer ignore a pressing global threat that is largely of its making. If the Senate proves him wrong, it would harm more than our international standing. Those who advocate inaction are gambling with the future of everyone on Earth, and those stakes are too high.

[Letter to the Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, June 8, 2009:](#)

Speak up, Americans

The recent letter, "Treason at meeting," accusing folks of treason at a recent air district meeting, was disturbing. The letter writer was obviously upset because people spoke out against air district board member Mike Nelson. I don't think that the writer understands that the right to assemble and petition one's government and the right to freedom of speech are enumerated rights in our Constitution.

People were outraged because Mike Nelson had stated at an earlier air board meeting that he (Nelson) often "tuned out" some community members who testify in front of the air board, and he justified tuning them out because he didn't think they told the truth. The community people need to be listened to and believed by governmental agencies that make decisions on regulations that will impact our communities. It is also important to understand that it is our right and responsibility to practice our constitutional rights to protect our democracy.

The writer also said that Nelson apologized profusely for his statements. No, Nelson only apologized for the time the outrage to his remarks was taking.

I'm a member of the advisory board for The Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment. CRPE is the organization that helped assemble the people at the air district meeting. The letter writer called the act of speaking out "treason." But I believe with help from CRPE those who spoke out have become what could be defined as great Americans: People who understand and actively participate in their government.

Linda MacKay, Lebec