

Air expert offers tips for Lodi Rotary to breathe easy

By Jordan Guinn, News-Sentinel Staff Writer
Lodi News Sentinel, Friday, Dec. 4, 2009

One local expert said San Joaquin Valley's air quality could be better, and it's up to individuals and businesses to make it that way.

The improvement in the area's air quality, as well as the hurdles it still faces, was discussed by Anthony Presto of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District at Thursday's Rotary meeting.

"Everyone knows someone who has asthma," said Presto, who has been with the district for the last six years. "We need to make air quality a priority in all business and individual decisions."

He said the San Joaquin Valley has some of the worst air quality in the nation, and only Los Angeles is worse. There are numerous reasons for this phenomenon, Presto said. The region's geographic location, rising population hot summers and dry winters all contribute. To illustrate his point of how the area's geography works against it, he showed a satellite photo of California's Valley blanketed in fog during the winter. He said pollutants hang in the air in the same way.

He handed out clickers, enabling the audience to answer multiple-choice questions and have their statistics tracked in real time. Presto's questions to audience covered topics such as their lifestyle habits, how much they drive and how important air quality was to them and why. He tied their results into the campaigns the organization runs to inform the audience about what they could do for themselves and the environment. The district has incentive programs for farmers to help them replace aging agricultural pumps, as well as the Clean Green Yard Machine program, which allows residents to trade their gasoline-powered lawnmowers for less expensive electric ones. He handed out insulated lunch bags and encouraged people to bring their lunches from home so they wouldn't have to drive during their break.

He also urged residents to replace their wood-burning fireplaces with natural gas inserts.

"Nothing burns cleaner than natural gas," said Presto.

He said residential wood burning was the largest contributor to particulate matter, or pollutants of concern, during the winter. He said when wood is burned in residential fireplaces, particles are released into the air that are so fine they can penetrate a person's cell walls and enter the bloodstream. He said it can increase the risk of heart attacks.

Janet Hamilton attended the Rotary meeting and said she is now considering an alternative fireplace. She said she uses her wood-burning fireplace about three times a week during the winter because she likes the ambiance it creates in her home.

Presto offered reasons to be optimistic as well. He said air pollution from stationary sources, such as factories, have improved by 80 percent since the 1980s, but more work needs to be done because poor air quality negatively affects the local economy.

He cited a University of California, Fullerton study that attributed higher health costs to poor air quality. People missing school and work due to air quality-related illnesses, drained \$6.3 billion from the economy, according to the study.

Pamela Colby recently moved from Portland, Oregon to work in Amy Bader's medical practice and was at the meeting. She said she saw patterns with the area's air problems during her visits prior to her move because she would see people with asthma and allergies.

Colby said she the presentation was informative and positive.

"I see more can be done to improve the quality of life and decrease the amount we spend on health care," she said.

Update: Air quality forecast and woodburning rules

By Sun-Star Staff

Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, Dec. 3, 2009

MERCED

AQI Forecast for 12/3/2009: 83 Moderate (PM2.5)

AQI Forecast for 12/4/2009: 89 Moderate (PM2.5) School Flag color for 12/4/2009: Yellow

Fireplace/Wood Stove Burning Status for 12/3/2009: Wood burning prohibited

Fireplace/Wood Stove Burning Status for 12/4/2009: Wood burning prohibited

San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District

Daily Air Quality Forecast

More information about the Daily Air Quality Forecast can be found at:

<http://www.valleyair.org/aqinfo/forecast.htm>.

More information about the Fireplace/Wood Stove Burning Status can be found at:

<http://www.valleyair.org/aqinfo/WoodBurnPage.htm>.

Dairies may benefit from clean air rules

By John Cox, staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Sunday, Dec. 6, 2009

Kern dairies could be among the early winners in a proposed "cap and trade" system now under consideration statewide as a way of reducing California's greenhouse gas emissions.

Using different manure-management technologies, more than a few local dairymen stand to make money by selling clean air credits to companies that produce more pollution than would be allowed under pending state regulations.

Some dairy farmers may see new revenue even before the credits-trading system takes effect in 2012. People who deal in the credits, also known as carbon offsets, say interest has been strong among investors such as hedge funds and companies that want to present an environmentally friendly face.

The dairies' recent focus on offsets comes at an otherwise difficult time for an industry clobbered by high costs and low prices. Any revenue they generate could take some local sting off an ambitious set of air pollution regulations that has caused anxiety among oil producers, fuel refiners and other kinds of businesses that emit greenhouse gases.

In some ways dairies are ideally suited to produce carbon offsets: Some invested years ago in equipment to treat manure, which if left exposed puts out a greenhouse gas -- methane -- that is 21 times more potent than carbon dioxide.

Unknowns await

It remains to be seen how much dairies might profit from California's proposed cap and trade system. An early draft of the program unveiled late last month lacked key details, such as how the state would distribute pollution allowances to industry. Also, dairies use different technologies to reduce manure-based methane, and not all of these have been shown to meet California's proposed standards.

"The devil's going to be in the details, of course, but (the cap and trade system) could represent an opportunity for us," said Michael Marsh, CEO of Western United Dairymen, a Modesto trade group.

The idea behind cap and trade systems, or emissions trading, is to give companies a financial incentive to reduce the amount of pollution they create. Those that produce less greenhouse gases than allowed by government, for example, could sell credits to companies that emit more than the regulatory limit.

Dairies are not alone as potential beneficiaries under California cap and trade. Forestry is also considered a strong source of carbon credits earned by planting new trees and maintaining existing woodlands.

Growing demand?

People in the dairy offsets industry say demand for their credits will likely increase in coming years as governments work to establish systems that would make mandatory what are now mostly voluntary efforts to reduce air pollution. There exist multi-state carbon offset trading partnerships, and Congress is considering a nationwide cap and trade system.

Yves Legault, vice president of L2i, a Montreal financial firm that has been working with a group of 28 Central Valley dairies, including five in Kern, said that about 70 percent of the group's combined offsets have been allotted to investors, though no sales have been finalized.

He said some of the investors, particularly hedge funds, hope that any credits they buy now will be worth more money once the carbon-based cap and trade system becomes a reality.

Indeed, local dairy businessman David Albers said he gets calls "all the time" from companies that want to buy offsets before implementation of The Global Warming Solutions Act, the 2006 law better known as AB 32, which is intended to cut greenhouse gases pollution by 15 percent by 2020. Albers is CEO of BioEnergy Solutions, a Bakersfield company that has linked several Shafter-area dairies with pipelines carrying cow manure-generated methane for sale to Pacific Gas and Electric Co.

"There are certainly companies in California that are trying to bank credits because of AB 32," he said, "so it's sort of pre-compliance banking knowing that they're going to be regulated on these issues."

Waiting to see

Revenues can't come soon enough for an industry that has suffered from rising feed costs and falling exports. Milk producers have been losing money on every gallon they produce since February 2008, according to data from Western United Dairyman.

So far, Bakersfield-area dairyman Rich Tillema said he has seen no money from his involvement with Legault's group.

"The future looks good, but that doesn't really mean nothing because it's the future," he said. Even so, Tillema continues, as he has for about 10 years now, to filter his cows' manure to remove and recycle the solids that if left untreated create methane. He sees a non-monetary benefit.

"Everything about our industry's been (viewed as) bad. We're perceived as bad guys with methane and everything else," he said. "And now it's kind of nice to know that we're doing something that's good for the environment."

Funds lined up for hydrogen power plant feasibility studies

Bakersfield Californian, Friday, Dec. 4, 2009

A clean-burning, hydrogen power plant proposed to be built outside Taft moved forward Thursday as the state Public Utilities Commission voted to allow Southern California Edison to charge its ratepayers up to \$30 million to help cover the project's preliminary costs.

The commission gave SCE permission to contribute up to \$17 million to the first phase of feasibility studies, and up to \$13 million for a possible second phase. Together the sums would cover about a fifth of the studies' total costs, according to the commission.

Commission staff said the project would greatly benefit SCE's customers and further the state's goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The Hydrogen Energy California Project is considered forward-thinking in that it would extract hydrogen from otherwise dirty petroleum products -- petroleum coke or coal, or a combination of the two.

The plant would burn the hydrogen for fuel and put most of the byproduct carbon dioxide to good use increasing nearby oil production. Most of the carbon dioxide ultimately would be sequestered underground so as not to increase greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

The roughly \$2 billion project would create up to 1,500 construction jobs, as many as 100 permanent jobs and enough energy to power more than 150,000 homes.

In July the federal government pledged \$308 million toward the project's development.

The partnership behind the project has said it does not expect to make a decision until late 2010 or early 2011 on whether it actually will build the plant. The plant would not open until 2014 at the soonest.

Hanford to get high-speed rail station

By Eiji Yamashita, staff writer

Hanford Sentinel, Friday, Dec. 4, 2009

California's bullet trains -- now expected to come on line by 2020 -- will most likely shoot through east Hanford, state planners told city leaders this week.

The evaluation of alternative routes is still ongoing, but California High-Speed Rail Authority planners are officially proposing an alignment that would skirt around Laton and come down along Highway 43 toward Bakersfield, said Carrie Bowen, regional director of the authority.

Bowen updated the Hanford City Council during a study session Tuesday on the project's progress. Bowen was also there to remind decision-makers that now is the time to decide whether Hanford would like to pursue bringing a high-speed rail station to the region -- something Visalia had aggressively lobbied for during the process.

Visalia leaders might have lost their bid for a route closer to their community, but are eager to work with Hanford to bring a stop to benefit the South Valley, Bowen said.

"They were saddened when we gave them the news, but literally within 10 minutes, they got on board with supporting Hanford," Bowen said. "They started discussing how they can support making it real."

The pressure is now on for Hanford city leaders to step up and get involved in a dialogue.

Kings County officials, including those representing Hanford, are scheduled to sit down with their counterparts from Tulare County this Friday in Hanford in a kick-off meeting to do just that.

"The competition for a stop is now moot, because the track is where it's going to be and a stop is going to be on the track," said Gary Misenhimer, Hanford city manager. It's now about how we can get together as a region to get enough support to get the rail committee to agree to build a station."

California's high-speed rail system, if built, will bring San Francisco and Los Angeles within an hour's reach of Hanford. Despite the recession and state budget crisis, \$40 billion proposals for bullet trains that could travel up to 220 mph and possibly stop in the South Valley, are making progress. The project is envisioned as a way to ease the state's highway congestion, reduce pollution and boost the economy.

The local alignment being proposed is not a done deal.

The High-Speed Rail Authority is still in the process of refining the list of alternative alignments across the system. A final decision by the authority's governing board isn't expected until 2012.

Still, Hanford -- if it wants to -- has a good chance of getting a station if it acts now to muster regional support and begin planning, Bowen said.

"Many municipalities up and down California have requested additional stations," Bowen said. "This is the only one that we're looking at and that the board is in support of us looking at it, even though it's not a done deal."

On Tuesday, Hanford's decision-makers had more questions than comments.

Without making any commitment, council members asked the obvious question: "How do we pay for it?"

"I think this is a great idea, but it's just the money issue," said Councilman Dave Thomas.

Mayor David Ayers said there are also pros and cons to be considered before making a commitment as a region.

"Do we want the station is a complicated question," Ayers said. "If that stop comes to Hanford, I feel, it's going to change Hanford into more of a commuter community. Also, it could be an economic draw where it might make it desirable for companies to want to locate in our area."

The station -- which could be located near Highway 198 and Highway 43 -- could also benefit the area by providing a link to the east-west corridor that is being expanded. But Hanford will also face a decision on whether to expand its sphere of influence farther east.

Yet the only money in place now is for the rail line. The station will have to be funded by local interests, not the state.

"All of us will have to put our heads together and see how we're going to pull our resources together and whether we want to build it," Ayers said. "Once that's decided, what we want to build will probably depend on how we coordinate other types of transportation we have available -- highways, buses and other rails. It's going to take a while to evaluate all that."

The Valley is in play for two other key elements to the high-speed rail project.

The authority is looking for local governments and private entities between Merced and Bakersfield that are interested in offering sites for a heavy maintenance depot along the planned high-speed train route. The facility is expected to generate 1,500 jobs.

That seemed to interest Councilwoman Sue Sorensen more than the potential train stop.

"I think I'd rather have the heavy maintenance facility first -- that's a guaranteed 1,500 jobs," Sorensen said.

Officials also say the Valley would be the backbone of the system because its flat geography allows the trains to achieve their top speed. That's why the Valley may become the first region in the system to see the tracks built for testing and certification, Bowen said.

Peaker plant expansion moves forward

by Justin Lafferty, staff writer

Tracy Press, Thursday, Dec. 3, 2009

Plans to nearly double the size of a local peaker power plant to be going smoothly, after a hearing earlier this week where the state energy commission officially received all information regarding the project, although some residents disapprove of it.

The Tracy Combined Cycle Peaker Plant, operated by GWF Energy in an unincorporated area southwest of town, generates up to 169 megawatts in the peak hours of electricity use. The company wants the part-time power generating plant to become a full-time plant, boosting it up to 314 megawatts.

At a hearing on Monday at Tracy's City Hall, the California Energy Commission entered all of the documents from GWF and any interveners regarding the project into the record. Raoul Renaud, a hearing adviser for commission, said the hearing was pretty much straightforward.

"It was just kind of dotting all the Is and crossing the Ts," GWF business manager Riley Jones said. "It was very short, and it went well. That's our plan. Right now, everything is moving forward."

Renaud said that Annette Tuso Elissagaray, whose family lives and farms near the plant, read aloud a statement to oppose the plant because it will generate more air pollution and noise.

The statement Elissagaray read and submitted was similar to one filed in July by herself and the Tuso families, who also opposed the plant when it opened in 2002. Renaud said that the concerns of Elissagaray and the Tuso families will be taken into consideration before the final decision is made.

"The applicant and the energy commission staff have worked on the project for over a year and had resolved all issues concerning environmental impacts," Renaud said.

For the next step, commission spokesman Percy Della said the state will publish a preliminary decision in 45 to 60 days, then open it up to 30 days of public comment. After that, Della said the commission will vote to OK or deny the peaker plant's expansion.

If the plans are OK'd by the state, construction would start in the fall of 2010 and the plant would likely open in June 2012, according to the commission.

Right now, the plant can power up to 125,000 homes in the area when demand is high.

Jones said the plant, despite growing, would decrease its impact on the environment by going from a gas-burning system to steam.

But the plant that now annually spews about two tons of nitrogen oxide into the air will generate 90 tons if the plant doubles in size, says the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

He also noted that the plant's expansion will bring about 400 new jobs to the area as well as pour

\$20 million through purchases of goods and services into the community, or \$50,000 per worker.

Jones also said after construction is completed, the plant would have about 20 new jobs and GWF would have to pay in the neighborhood of \$4 million a year in property taxes.

"We have complied with all the requirements so there would be no reason for it to not move forward," Jones said.

Some ignore Thanksgiving burning ban

By Denis Cuff, staff writer

Contra Costa Times, Friday, Dec. 4, 2009

Ahh, Thanksgiving. Pass the drumstick and gravy. Light up the fireplace logs. Get ready for the ticket in the mailbox, you scofflaws.

In a regulatory twist of an old holiday custom, Bay Area Air Quality Management District pollution inspectors detected 22 violations of its no-wood-fire rule on Thanksgiving Day, the first Spare the Air day of this cold season. Burners get a warning letter for a first offense and a \$400 ticket for the second.

Air quality officials denied this week that they tried to snuff out holiday cheer. They were just doing their job when Thanksgiving happened to fall on a day last week when a temperature inversion trapped smoke near the ground and created unhealthy air — triggering the 24-hour burn ban, they said.

"We're not being Scrooges," said Lisa Fasano, a spokeswoman for the nine-county air district.

She threw in a plea for a little sympathy. "Our job is to protect public health. We have to do that on holidays, too, so our people are working just like police and firefighters on the holiday."

Earlier this year, the federal government ruled the Bay Area fails to meet the public health standard for soot and other fine particles in the air.

Weather with cold, stale air spurs about 20 or so Bay Area Spare the Air alerts in a cold season, triggering the ban on burning wood fires in fireplaces, wood stoves and pellet stoves.

People who barbecued Thanksgiving turkeys were off the hook.

The district's 2008 wood smoke rule exempts cooking fires.

"We spent a lot of time chasing down barbecued turkeys that day," Fasano said.

Nine air pollution inspectors who worked Thanksgiving patrolled known smoke hot spots. They also checked out areas where the public made 138 public complaint calls about smoke on Thanksgiving.

Before mailing a violation notice to an offender, an inspector must see the smoke and determine that the home is not in a rural area exempt from the rule because it lacks PG&E service and must rely on wood fires for heating.

Ten of the 22 observed cases of Thanksgiving wood burners were in Woodacre in Marin County, where several homes are off the utility grid, officials said.

Inspectors also observed burning in Concord, Castro Valley, Santa Rosa, Mill Valley, San Jose and Santa Clara.

"We know many people like to burn wood fires on a holiday like this," Fasano said, "but it needs to be on a day when we don't have these unhealthy air conditions."

In East Bay, where pollution goes, health problems follow

By Sandy Kleffman and Suzanne Bohan

Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald, Monday, Dec. 7, 2009

In some hardscrabble East Bay neighborhoods, people die of heart disease and cancer at three times the rates found just a few miles away in more well-to-do communities.

Children living near busy freeways in Oakland are hospitalized for asthma at 12 times the rate of young people in Lafayette's wooded housing tracts.

The East Bay's striking health inequities extend far beyond life expectancy and involve more than differences between the rich and the poor. Disparities exist up and down the East Bay's socioeconomic ladder, according to data compiled by the Alameda County Public Health Department for Bay Area News Group.

Middle-class communities in Dublin, Castro Valley and Fremont have higher heart disease death rates than wealthier neighborhoods in Walnut Creek and Berkeley, but lower rates than struggling areas of East Oakland and North Richmond.

These facts have led public-health leaders to advocate to equalize opportunities for healthful living, instead of focusing only on a never-ending battle to treat disease.

Alameda and Contra Costa County health leaders have stepped outside of their traditional roles to tackle the root causes of ill health. That means attempting to ensure people have clean air to breathe, decent housing, walkable neighborhoods, well-maintained parks, violence-free streets, and grocery stores with fresh fruits and vegetables.

"Your choices are shaped by the options you have and the environment you live in," said Dr. Wendel Brunner, Contra Costa County public health director. "We want to create an environment that supports individuals in making good choices."

The new direction also means addressing the health-sapping economic stresses and lack of opportunity and power that plague some communities, said Dr. Anthony Iton, who recently left his position as Alameda County's public health director to head an Oakland foundation's health disparities program.

Iton changed jobs in part because of his frustration at being unable to win widespread political support for such public health initiatives.

Examining asthma rates reveals a stunning pattern. By far, the most hospitalizations occur in low-income communities near the Port of Oakland, along busy Interstate 880 in East and West Oakland, and the convergence of freeways near North Oakland and Emeryville.

The medical staff at Children's Hospital Oakland has worked for more than a decade to bring down asthma hospitalizations, with limited success.

Asthmatic children seek emergency room help there 5,000 times a year.

Nearly one-fourth of them will return within 12 months.

Asthma colors much of John Fitzpatrick Jr.'s young life.

Bronchiolitis first hospitalized the easygoing fifth-grader when he was eight months old. Since then, he has returned to the emergency room so many times his family has lost count.

"He had some scary times when he was younger," said Mindy Benson, the asthma program manager at Children's Hospital Oakland who has treated John for many years. "It was really hard to get his asthma under control."

Now 10, John attends Santa Fe Elementary School. He lives in a two-bedroom rented house in the 94608 ZIP code with his brother, mother and grandmother.

This North Oakland ZIP code has the East Bay's second-highest asthma hospitalization rate. Highway 24 and Interstates 580 and 80 pass close by. Nearly 200,000 cars and trucks use the I-80/I-580 interchange each day.

"Where they live, every day there is soot on the window sills," Benson said. Soot is also in the air that neighborhood children take into their lungs.

Asthma occurs when airways become restricted, making breathing difficult. Numerous triggers exist, including auto exhaust, industrial emissions, tobacco smoke, dust, mold, pets, weather changes, even strong emotions.

John routinely takes six medications to help control his asthma and uses a nebulizer 10 to 15 minutes every morning before he goes to school, and again at night before he sleeps.

"The stuff that works for him has real terrible side effects," including causing frequent headaches and nosebleeds, said his mother, Dorothy Littman. "But he needs that."

John keeps an inhaler in his backpack and sometimes has to stop playing during school recess to use it.

He loves basketball and baseball but has to limit his activities because of breathing difficulties.

"I'll be wheezing," he said. "It's not fun because I want to run, and it slows me down."

The inability to sustain prolonged physical activity has affected his weight. During a recent doctor's visit, he was chagrined to learn that at 4 feet 6 inches tall, he weighed 102 pounds.

"He's gotten extremely overweight," Benson said.

Benson, who has analyzed asthma statistics for years, has noticed a link with low-income communities.

West Oakland youths breathe in diesel exhaust from trucks, trains and ships at the port, and the aging homes near the waterfront become magnets for mold, she said.

John and his mother lived in West Oakland during the first few years of his life. John is allergic to mold and mildew. It was a constant struggle to keep it out of the home.

"No matter how you clean it, it still comes back," his mother said.

John sees Benson once a month to help control his asthma. Because his mother does not own a car, they ride three buses to reach the clinic. John misses a day of school each time, and his mother takes a day off from her job providing home care for the elderly.

Volunteers from the American Lung Association gave Littman a special vacuum and anti-allergen solution to help control dust in their home. But that is a difficult task. Their house has no bedroom closets, so "we've got baskets and tubs with clothes in them because there's nowhere to put stuff," she said. It accumulates dust.

John's older brother walks him to and from school each day. They pass through an industrial area where at times, "it smells like tar or primer or something," his mother said. "John's thrown up a few times on the way to school."

He knows exactly how often. "It's seven times," he said.

Despite the asthma triggers, many families in John's neighborhood cannot afford to move, so county leaders are seeking ways to lessen the exposure to health threats.

One policy that many believe contributes to the high asthma rates is a truck ban on Interstate 580 in the upscale Oakland hills. This funnels large volumes of truck traffic through low-income communities lining Interstate 880 in west and East Oakland.

The ban has existed since the freeway opened more than 40 years ago. In 2000, the California Trucking Association sought to overturn it, but ran into fierce opposition from hillside residents, the city councils of Oakland and San Leandro, and the Alameda County Board of Supervisors. After the public outcry, state lawmakers made the ban permanent.

Alameda County health leaders and others have seized on a different target: the Port of Oakland, where they have fought to reduce diesel emissions from trucks, trains and ships.

The diesel exhaust has led to a cancer risk in West Oakland that is three times higher than the Bay Area average, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District told federal officials in September.

Yet some view this struggle as an improper attempt by Alameda County health leaders and others to rein in a major economic force.

"People see us as operating outside of our purview," said Iton, now senior vice president for healthy communities with the California Endowment in Oakland. "But spewing chunks of carcinogen out of an industry on a day-in, day-out basis that's proven to cause lung cancer, heart disease, and asthma is not good for people living adjacent to these places."

So, he said, the county ought to lessen "the burden of disease that they have to bear in order to support the whole region's economic benefit."

Realigning economic benefits and public health concerns creates new challenges, however. Changes can affect people's livelihoods. Just ask trucker Manuel Lino-Rivas, who lost his job partly because of a victory over toxic emissions at the port.

Rivas is worried. A widower, he has no idea how he can continue to support his 9-year-old son and 14-year-old twins.

"I am broke completely," he said, sighing over a stack of bills.

The family rents a three-bedroom house in the 94621 ZIP code of East Oakland, an area with the East Bay's second-lowest life expectancy: 72 years. Rivas moved to the United States in 1980 from El Salvador. For two decades, he worked as an independent trucker at the port.

That ended this summer when his 1989 truck, purchased several years ago for \$12,000, broke down. Now, it makes no sense to fix it.

Beginning Jan. 1, the port will ban all trucks manufactured before 1994. Trucks built between 1994 and 2003 will be required to have filters for particulate emissions. The goal is to eliminate the worst-polluting rigs.

Rivas supports such goals. His own health, he said, was jeopardized as he sat breathing fumes among idling rigs. But he wants better solutions for the truckers.

"I have 22 years working in the port — half of my life," he said. "I don't have nothing. I'm an old man. I'm 56 years old. I go to any factory, and they don't give me job. I pray my Lord I'll drive very soon."

He is not alone. As many as 1,000 truckers could be out of work beginning Jan. 1. A grant fund set up to help them buy new rigs or install filters ran out of money, leaving many with nowhere to turn.

Rivas, who averaged about \$24,000 annually as a trucker, says he cannot afford to buy another rig at \$60,000 to \$80,000 for a 2004 or '05 model. Even if he could afford it, he said, in five years that rig, too, would become obsolete. At that time, only trucks built after 2007 will have access to the port.

Iton and others seeking changes are well aware of the truckers' plight.

"They're extremely low-wage," he said. "They have no health insurance. They have no workers' compensation. They have very limited access to social services that they may need. Many of them are low-income immigrants that are working under those conditions because that's the only work they can find."

"The goal is not to put the burden on the backs of the truckers," Iton said, "but to put the burden where it belongs: on the entities making the profits from the business."

For that reason, a coalition of groups aims to have trucking companies, instead of the independent truckers, bear the responsibility of buying and maintaining clean rigs. The groups

want the port to have the power to create operating agreements with trucking firms, which would hire truckers and give them health care and other benefits.

The Port of Los Angeles last year adopted a similar program, which has been credited with removing several thousand dirty trucks from service. But it and the Oakland port campaign are on hold pending the outcome of a lawsuit by the American Trucking Association.

So for now, truckers such as Rivas remain independent.

In July, when Rivas developed a gall bladder problem, he decided it would be cheaper to pay \$450 for a round-trip flight to see a doctor in El Salvador than to rack up hefty bills in a hospital emergency room here.

In his native country, he spent \$20 for an ultrasound and \$20 for medication prescribed by a doctor who told him he had inflammation. He figures it would have cost him at least \$3,000 for an emergency room visit in the United States.

"That's the only way I can take care of my health," he said.

Twenty-one miles northwest of Rivas' home lives Johnny Fulmore. At age 52, he has had a stroke and two heart attacks. In his North Richmond neighborhood, heart problems are not unusual.

The 94801 ZIP code has the East Bay's fourth-highest heart disease mortality rate. It includes Richmond's Iron Triangle, named because it is bounded on three sides by railways.

Fulmore has lived here nearly all of his life.

His stroke occurred in 2002 while he helped erect a scaffold on the Bay Bridge, a profession he held at various locations for 20 years. "I was unable to move, talk or do anything," he recalled. Co-workers rushed him to a hospital emergency room.

A year later, he had his first heart attack. Doctors told him he had blocked arteries and performed an angioplasty.

In December 2008, he had his second heart attack. "That one was a little more severe," he said. He had another angioplasty.

In March, doctors did two more angioplasties to ward off additional problems.

The heart difficulties transformed Fulmore's life. He now deals with migraines. Hot weather bothers him. He tires easily, and he takes medication to lower his blood pressure.

His health problems also have affected his livelihood. Unable to continue as an ironworker, he takes odd jobs when he can find them. Recently, he has been on-call as a driver for a funeral home.

"I did construction for so long, that was a hard adjustment," he said. "A pretty nice income was gone. It's been a strain at times, but you keep going on."

Many factors contribute to some communities' high rate of heart disease. Genes and lifestyle choices, including whether people eat healthful foods and exercise, play a role.

But other factors have more to do with the neighborhood than with individual choices, health experts say. How easy is it to eat healthfully and to work out? Do people have access to fresh fruits and vegetables and safe places to exercise?

A growing body of evidence suggests another important factor: chronic stress. This can include everything from job and financial struggles to difficulty paying a mortgage, coping with racism, lacking control over one's life, and worrying about the future.

Stress causes the body to prepare to flee or fight, scientists have found.

Hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol flood the body. Glucose levels rise. The heart rate jumps, and the body remains in a heightened state until the perceived threat passes.

Repeated stress over long periods revs up the cardiovascular system, strains the heart and increases cholesterol and plaque. That can lead to hardening of the arteries, stroke and heart attacks.

For Fulmore, "the biggest stress is just keeping up with day-to-day living and not having normal employment at your disposal."

The North Richmond area shows signs of the economic struggles many of its residents experience. The median household income here is \$24,131, compared with \$73,125 in Point Richmond, the hilly enclave a few miles away.

A couple of doors from Fulmore's house are what he calls "great big eyesores": two boarded-up, abandoned homes where vandals have removed pipes, brass, electrical wiring, toilets and sinks. The property has been vacant for years.

Economic forces have stripped the neighborhood of other vital resources. It can be difficult to find healthful food in the area, which is dotted with small neighborhood markets.

At the Mom, Pop and Son's store on Filbert Street, owner Nagi Alkahli carries no fresh fruit or produce. When he tried to do so, he said, the health department gave him a hard time because he did not meet safe storage regulations.

"I'm doing pretty good with this," he said, pointing to shelves filled with chips, canned goods and sodas.

Fulmore was in good shape before his heart problems began. An athlete most of his life, he ran regularly and lifted weights.

"I never had major health problems," he said.

While working in construction, he often ate hamburgers, burritos and french fries from food trucks. Not exactly the most healthful lunch, he acknowledges.

"Put some butter on it and fry it up, and that's what they gave you," he said.

Healthful eating rarely rises to a priority in his neighborhood, he said.

"A lot of people are just too busy thinking about: How am I going to make it through this day?"

Fulmore now drives two to three miles to shop for fresh fruits and vegetables at larger chain stores. He regularly visits a farmers market near City Hall. But traveling such distances is not easy for people who lack cars.

Fulmore also leaves his neighborhood to exercise, preferring to walk at the scenic Richmond Marina, although he could visit a park five blocks from his home. "I'm not going to go there because there's a lot of hanging out," he said. "I don't think people in the neighborhood utilize the park as much as they would if they felt comfortable."

In October, a 35-year-old man was fatally shot while sitting in a car at the nearby Shields-Reid Park.

"We've probably had 16 shootings in this area alone this year," Fulmore said.

Many local parks are underutilized because of run-down equipment and a lack of maintenance, said Andres Soto, former project director for the West County Healthy Eating Active Living Collaborative, or HEAL.

During a recent walk through Lucas Park in the Iron Triangle, Soto pointed to a vacant slab where a park building had been torn down. The tennis courts lacked nets, an empty sand pit spread where play equipment once stood and cracks zigzagged across the basketball court. At midday, no one was there.

"This park is hardly used anymore," Soto said. "It used to be full of activity."

Despite the challenges, glimmers of hope exist in this neighborhood. Community residents concerned about high asthma rates have succeeded in restricting flare emissions at the nearby Chevron refinery.

The HEAL project, with a grant from Kaiser Permanente, is working to set up physical education programs in local schools, encourage businesses to provide more healthful lunches, improve park maintenance, and organize walking groups.

On 23rd Street, grocery stores have sprung up with an array of healthful foods. The El Campesino Market offers apples, melons, fresh fish, radishes, cucumbers, pineapples, bananas and baked goods.

Young Latinas, many of them immigrants, walk their children to school and stop at the markets on their way home to pick up fresh meats and produce for the evening dinner.

Fulmore has noticed more homeowners, as opposed to renters, moving into the area.

"We have a lot of problems here," he said, "but there's a lot of good, productive people."

Local actions, global impact

By Mike Taugher, staff writer

In the Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald, Sunday, Dec. 6, 2009

Last month, the city of Berkeley wrapped up a one-year experiment in which 13 residents were able to install solar panels with little out-of-pocket expense. The effort was part of a city plan to combat global warming.

The pilot hit a few snags but was promising enough that a coalition of as many as 14 counties is now seeking a grant of federal stimulus funds to dramatically expand it. In October, the Obama administration announced plans to foster similar programs across the country as part of its "Recovery Through Retrofit" initiative.

As environment ministers from around the world gather in Copenhagen this week to try to reach agreement on cutting greenhouse gas emissions, the nitty-gritty work of doing that falls on state and local shoulders. And perhaps nowhere is that truer than in the Bay Area.

The steps are early ones, to be sure, but as the international debate focuses on how deeply to cut global emissions and how much financial assistance to offer developing countries, cities and counties in the Bay Area and beyond already are measuring emissions and drawing up plans to reduce them.

"It has been a bottom-up, state and local government-led effort," said Richard Frank, director of the Center for Law, Energy and the Environment at UC's school of law.

In a state already struggling financially and politically, the progress in California on climate protection "is a very encouraging bright light in an otherwise dark scene," Frank said.

Three-fourths of the Bay Area's cities and counties have already voluntarily inventoried their emissions and most have at least begun to draw up plans to reduce them, according to the Bay Area Air Quality Management District.

Innovative solutions

And as those plans develop, local governments are finding innovative ways to make emissions cuts.

In Berkeley, city officials allow residents to avoid the steep upfront costs of installing solar panels while also ensuring they won't be stuck with the bill if they move.

The solution: The city borrows money from investors by selling bonds, which are repaid through a supplemental property tax. The upfront costs are kept down, and the repayment obligation stays with the property when the house is sold.

"It's more natural — you pay for your energy bills each month instead of all at once," said Neal De Snoo, Berkeley's energy program officer.

In Sonoma County, officials may ask to be regulated, in one respect, like a refinery, said Mike Schmitz, California director for ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability, an association of 600 local governments working on climate and energy sustainability.

Under a cap-and-trade emissions trading plan taking shape in California, Sonoma might be asked to be "capped." That would force it to cut emissions but also give it the opportunity to sell credits to businesses who are not meeting their reduction targets if it can cut its emissions more than required. The county could generate revenues by greening up.

California takes action

In the absence of an international treaty that obligates the U.S. to cut emissions and the reluctance from Washington to tackle climate change, California took major steps, first with a 2002 law to reduce emissions from cars sold in California and then four years later with a sweeping bill, Assembly Bill 32, that is meant to cut emissions to 1990 levels by 2020 — a 30 percent cut in projected emissions.

That, by itself, will not do a whole lot to reduce greenhouse gases in the atmosphere because California accounts for about 1.8 percent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions.

But California is having an outsize effect through new mandates, like the 2002 law that effectively forces automakers to make more fuel-efficient vehicles, and new strategies, like municipal financing for residential solar panels.

Relying on ice cores and air samples, scientists have determined that carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere held relatively steady for 10,000 years at about 280 parts per million, but then began increasing rapidly in the mid-19th century and now stand at 380 parts per million and rising.

The increase in carbon dioxide, along with the presence of other greenhouse gases, are believed by scientists to have contributed to a rise in average temperatures around the world. Scientists have measured an increase of more than 1 degree Fahrenheit in average temperature and about a 8-inch rise in sea level off San Francisco over the last 100 years, leaving little if any doubt that the climate is warming and human activity is at least partly to blame.

How quickly the climate will continue to warm and what the impacts will be is much less certain, but the picture taking shape suggests things might be more serious than scientists generally thought just a few years ago. Arctic sea ice, for example, is melting much faster than anticipated in a 2007 assessment by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Also weighing on delegates to the climate talks in Copenhagen are thousands of e-mails that were apparently taken illegally from a prominent climate research center at a British university. The e-mails have raised an international controversy over the quality of some climate research and whether conflicting data and dissenting voices have been improperly suppressed.

At least two investigations are under way and the head of the climate unit at the University of East Anglia has stepped aside pending the result of an investigation started by the university.

Skeptics of the prevailing view of climate change are seizing on the e-mails as evidence that there is no climate crisis, while others say the e-mails do nothing to change the underlying reality that the climate is responding in worrisome ways to increases in greenhouse gases.

Sold out in nine minutes

The Berkeley solar program was launched in November 2008 with the idea that the first 40 residents to apply would be accepted if they met certain criteria.

It took only nine minutes for the program to sell out.

But with a new program, no track record and the financial markets in turmoil, borrowing rates were relatively high, Berkeley city officials said.

The average installation of about \$26,000 cost about \$200 a month in increased property taxes, said Dan Lambert, Berkeley's sustainable energy programs manager.

Of the 40 applicants, only 13 used the program to install solar panels. Several found it cheaper to use a home equity line of credit to finance the installation, Lambert said.

La Mesa seeks input on raising building height limits

By Michele Clock, staff writer

San Diego Union-Tribune, Saturday, Dec. 5, 2009

La Mesa is considering a request to allow development to rise up to 18 stories high near the downtown area.

A private company is asking the city to consider changes to its specific plan for a potential office, retail, residential or hotel development on a 6.5-acre site near Interstate 8 at the southeast corner of El Cajon Boulevard and Baltimore Drive. The plans are also expected to include a park.

At up to 18 stories, the structure would tower over the seven- and eight-story buildings that are currently the city's tallest, city officials said.

An open house will be held Wednesday night at La Mesa City Hall to gather input from the public as the city prepares an environmental impact report on the possible changes.

Bill Chopyk, the city's director of planning and development services, said those public comments will be addressed in the report, which is expected to take about 12 to 18 months to complete. A number of potential impact areas have already been identified, including biological resources, noise and traffic levels, and air quality. The specific plan being considered would allow for a combination of up to 500 residential units or up to 500 hotel rooms, retail space, office space and a park.

The site is currently home to stores.

A representative for the company, South Baltimore LLC, said the longtime landowners want to build a smart growth, transit-oriented development. The site is close to the freeway and the trolley and within walking distance of the library.

Chris Wahl, president of Southwest Strategies communications firm, declined to offer a timeline for the project, dubbed Park Station at the Crossroads of La Mesa, saying the timing would depend on many variables.

Chopyk said public opinion will be one of them.

"A lot of it depends on the community's desire for and reaction to" the potential changes, Chopyk said.

Utah Supreme Court rules against coal plant

By Paul Foy, Associated Press

In the S.F. Chronicle and papers, Dec. 5, 2009

Salt Lake City (AP) -- The Utah Supreme Court ruled Friday that a company fighting to build a coal-fired power plant in central Utah will have to try to obtain a pollution permit anew.

It was a major setback for Sevier Power Co., which got its emissions permit in 2004 and may not want to bother starting again, according to the company's lawyer.

Fred Finlinson said Nevco Energy Co. — the Nevada power producer behind the Utah project — may decide it's not worth the expense, time or labor trying to win a permit again.

Finlinson said opponents will fight every step of the way at the Utah Air Quality Division and in the state courts, and that any single delay is a loss for the developer.

"We won on four of the seven issues, but we still lost," Finlinson said of the Utah Supreme Court's unanimous decision.

"The net effect is we still have to go back to the state division to submit additional evidence. We've got to do it over," he said. He said they were in the process of assessing whether or not it's worth doing.

The Utah Supreme Court ruled that Sevier Power Co. and state officials incorrectly calculated allowable nitrous oxide emissions in the permit.

On another major issue, the court ruled that regulators didn't give enough consideration to requiring Sevier Power Co. to build a cleaner-burning coal gasification plant.

Finlinson said converting coal to gas before burning is too expensive and that NEVCO isn't inclined to underwrite that kind of power plant. It planned to build a regular pulverized-coal burning plant, which emits more pollution.

The court also held that Sevier Power Co.'s emissions permit expired because the company failed to start construction within 18 months of receiving the permit.

Finlinson said administrative delays, appeals and court challenges made getting anything done in 18 months impossible.

The court's decision was a victory for the Utah Chapter of the Sierra Club and two Sevier County retirees, Jim Kennon and Dick Cumiskey, who led the local opposition.

Nevco planned to build the 270-megawatt power plant on 300 acres of privately owned land near Sigurd, a bucolic farm community in central Utah.

Study finds 'slight' impact of Games on Vancouver

By The Associated Press

San Diego Union-Tribune, Friday, Dec. 4, 2009

VANCOUVER, British Columbia — Preparations for the 2010 Winter Olympics have had a "slight positive" impact on Vancouver, according to a study released Friday.

The study, conducted by the University of British Columbia, measured economic, social and environmental changes in the metro Vancouver area between 2002 and 2006.

The report is the second of four studies required by the International Olympic Committee to analyze the overall impact of the games in the host city over a 12-year span.

The study is designed to assist bidding cities and future organizing committees to "maximize the benefits of the games" and create a benchmark for all future Olympics.

The results were largely inconclusive, particularly on issues such as housing and environment, and offered no dramatic positive or negative findings.

"The overall conclusion is there was a very slight positive impact up to 2006," Prof. Rob Van Wynsberghe, who led the study, said in a conference call.

The next report, which will focus on the impact of the Feb. 12-28 games, will be released in June 2010. The final report will be issued in 2013.

The most tangible result of the new study was the boost in medals won by Canadian athletes at the Olympics, world championships and other elite events. This was attributed in part to the "Own the Podium" programs for assisting Canadian athletes and coaches.

The number of Canadian medals increased by 41 percent, from 17 in Salt Lake City in 2002 to 24 at the 2006 Turin Games. The report said the overall rise was because of improved performances by female athletes.

Vancouver's selection as 2010 host likely contributed to the increase in businesses in the city (17 percent) and the Squamish-Lillooet region (36 percent), the report said. It added that it is "plausible" that British Columbia's unemployment rate has improved as a result of the games.

The report said the Olympics may have had "an indirect negative" and "possibly temporary" impact on air quality in Whistler and nearby Squamish, likely because of venue construction and other preparations. However, it stated overall air quality in metro Vancouver improved between 2002 and 2006.

Fairbanks area power plants not big polluters

The Associated Press

In the Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald, Monday, Dec. 7, 2009

FAIRBANKS, Alaska—A study finds that the three power plants in the Fairbanks area do not contribute much to the city's pollution problem.

Nicole Molders, chairwoman of the atmospheric sciences department at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, says the plants are a contributor, but not a main one.

Molders began studying power plant emissions last winter using mathematical models.

She says so far her research shows emissions from the three coal-fired power plants goes high into the air. She says the pollution is so diluted, levels are not considered unhealthy.

UAF, Fort Wainwright and downtown Fairbanks each have coal-fired power plants with highly visible smoke stacks.

The last best chance: U.N. climate conference opens

By Arthur Max, Associated Press

In the Washington Post and other papers, Monday, Dec. 7, 2009

COPENHAGEN -- The largest and most important U.N. climate change conference in history opened Monday, with organizers warning diplomats from 192 nations that this could be the last best chance for a deal to protect the world from calamitous global warming.

The two-week conference, the climax of two years of contentious negotiations, convened in an upbeat mood after a series of promises by rich and emerging economies to curb their greenhouse gases. Still, major issues have yet to be resolved.

At stake is a deal that aims to wean the world away from fossil fuels and other pollutants to greener sources of energy, and to transfer hundreds of billions of dollars from rich to poor countries every year over decades to help them adapt to climate change.

Scientists say without such an agreement, the Earth will face the consequences of ever-rising temperatures, leading to the extinction of plant and animal species, the flooding of coastal cities, more extreme weather events, drought and the spread of diseases.

Conference president Connie Hedegaard said the key to an agreement is finding a way to raise and channel public and private financing to poor countries for years to come to help them fight the effects of climate change.

Hedegaard - Denmark's former climate minister - said if governments miss their chance at the Copenhagen summit, a better opportunity may never come.

"This is our chance. If we miss it, it could take years before we got a new and better one. If we ever do," she said.

Negotiations have dragged on for two years, only recently showing signs of breakthroughs with new commitments from The United States, China and India to control greenhouse gas emissions.

But the commitments remained short of scientists' demands, and the pressure was on those major emitters for bigger cuts. Swedish Environment Minister Anders Carlgren, speaking for the European Union, said it would be "astonishing" if President Barack Obama came for the final negotiation session "to deliver just what was announced in last week's press release."

The conference opened with video clips of children from around the globe urging delegates to help them grow up without facing catastrophic warming. On the sidelines, climate activists competed for attention to their campaigns on deforestation, clean energy and low-carbon growth.

Mohamad Shinaz, an activist from the Maldives, plunged feet-first into a tank with nearly 200 gallons (750 liters) of frigid water to illustrate what rising sea levels were doing to his island nation.

"I want people to know that this is happening," Shinaz said as the water reached up to his chest. "We have to stop global warming."

Leah Wickham, a 24-year-old from Fiji, broke down in tears as she handed a petition from 10 million people asking the negotiators at Copenhagen to come up with a deal to save islands like hers.

"I'm on the front lines of climate change," she said.

Denmark's prime minister said 110 heads of state and government will attend the final days of the conference. Obama's decision to attend the end of the conference, not the middle, was taken as a signal that an agreement was getting closer.

"The evidence is now overwhelming" that the world needs early action to combat global warming, said Rajendra Pachauri, the head of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, an U.N. expert panel.

He defended climate research in the face of a controversy over e-mails pilfered from a British university, which global warming skeptics say show scientists have been conspiring to hide evidence that doesn't fit their theories.

"The recent incident of stealing the e-mails of scientists at the University of East Anglia shows that some would go to the extent of carrying out illegal acts perhaps in an attempt to discredit the IPCC," he told the conference.

The first week of the conference will focus on refining the complex text of a draft treaty. But major decisions will await the arrival next week of environment ministers and the heads of state in the final days of the conference, which ends Dec. 18.

"The time for formal statements is over. The time for restating well-known positions is past," said the U.N.'s top climate official, Yvo de Boer. "Copenhagen will only be a success it delivers significant and immediate action."

Among those decisions is a proposed fund of \$10 billion each year for the next three years to help poor countries create climate change strategies. After that, hundreds of billions of dollars will be needed every year to set the world on a new energy path and adapt to new climates.

"The deal that we invite leaders to sign up on will be one that affects all aspects of society, just as the changing climate does," said Danish Prime Minister Lars Loekke Rasmussen. "Negotiators cannot do this alone, nor can politicians. The ultimate responsibility rests with the citizens of the world, who will ultimately bear the fatal consequences if we fail to act."

A study released by the U.N. Environment Program on Sunday indicated that pledges by industrial countries and major emerging nations fall just short of the reductions of greenhouse gas emissions that scientists have said are needed to keep average temperatures from rising more than 2 degrees C (3.6 F) by the end of the century.

In Vienna, another senior U.N. official warned that the fight against climate change must not "cannibalize" development financing.

Kandeh Yumkella, director-general of the U.N Industrial Development Organization, said poor countries need "fresh money" to combat global warming, not funds diverted from efforts to improve maternal health or fight world hunger.

Obama meets business, environment leaders Wednesday

By Jeff Mason, Reuters

In The Washington Post, Monday, Dec. 7, 2009

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. President Barack Obama will meet with leaders from the business and environmental communities Wednesday to discuss climate change negotiations in Copenhagen, the White House said Monday.

The White House said in a statement Obama would meet with former Vice President Al Gore, an environmental activist, later Monday.

Obama leaves Wednesday for Oslo, where he will pick up his Nobel Peace Prize. He will attend the climate negotiations in Denmark at the end of the talks next week.

EPA: Greenhouse gases endanger human health

By Dina Cappiello and H. Josef Hebert, Associated Press writers

In the S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Monday, Dec. 7, 2009

WASHINGTON (AP) -- The Environmental Protection Agency has concluded greenhouse gases are endangering people's health and must be regulated, signaling that the Obama administration is prepared to contain global warming without congressional action if necessary.

EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson scheduled a news conference for later Monday to announce the so-called endangerment finding, officials told The Associated Press, speaking privately because the announcement had not been made.

The finding is timed to boost the administration's arguments at an international climate conference — beginning this week — that the United States is aggressively taking actions to combat global warming, even though Congress has yet to act on climate legislation.

Under a Supreme Court ruling, the so-called endangerment finding is needed before the EPA can regulate carbon dioxide and five other greenhouse gases released from power plants, factories and automobiles under the federal Clean Air Act.

The EPA signaled last April that it was inclined to view heat-trapping pollution as a threat to public health and welfare and began to take public comments under a formal rulemaking. The action marked a reversal from the Bush administration, which had declined to aggressively pursue the issue.

Business groups have strongly argued against tackling global warming through the regulatory process of the Clean Air Act. Any such regulations are likely to spawn lawsuits and lengthy legal fights.

The EPA and the White House have said regulations on greenhouse gases will not be imminent even after an endangerment finding, saying that the administration would prefer that Congress act to limit such pollution through an economy-wide cap on carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.

Nevertheless, the EPA has begun the early stages of developing permit requirements on carbon dioxide pollution from large emitters such as power plants. The administration also has said it will require automobile fuel economy to increase to a fleet average of 35 miles per gallon by 2016, another push to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

The EPA's readiness to tackle climate change is expected to give a boost to U.S. arguments at the climate conference opening in Copenhagen this week that the United States is making broad commitments to reduce greenhouse gases.

While the House has approved climate legislation that would cut emissions by 17 percent by 2020 and about 80 percent by mid-century, the Senate has yet to take up the measure amid strong Republican opposition and reluctance by some centrist Democrats.

Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., lead author of the Senate bill, has argued that if Congress doesn't act, the EPA will require greenhouse gas emissions. He has called EPA regulation a "blunt instrument" that would pose a bigger problem for industry than legislation crafted to mitigate some of the costs of shifting away from carbon emitting fossil fuels.

The way was opened for the EPA to use the Clean Air Act to cut climate-changing emissions by the Supreme Court in 2007, when the court declared that carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases are pollutants under the Act. But the court said the EPA must determine if these pollutants pose a danger to public health and welfare before it can regulate them.

Decade of 2000s was warmest ever, scientists say

By Charles J. Hanley, AP Special Correspondent

In the Washington Post and other papers, Monday, Dec. 7, 2009

It dawned with the warmest winter on record in the United States. And when the sun sets this New Year's Eve, the decade of the 2000s will end as the warmest ever on global temperature charts.

Warmer still, scientists say, lies ahead.

Through 10 years of global boom and bust, of breakneck change around the planet, of terrorism, war and division, all people everywhere under that warming sun faced one threat together: the buildup of greenhouse gases, the rise in temperatures, the danger of a shifting climate, of drought, weather extremes and encroaching seas, of untold damage to the world humanity has created for itself over millennia.

As the decade neared its close, the U.N. gathered presidents and premiers of almost 100 nations for a "climate summit" to take united action, to sharply cut back the burning of coal and other fossil fuels.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told them they had "a powerful opportunity to get on the right side of history" at a year-ending climate conference in Copenhagen.

Once again, however, disunity might keep the world's nations on this side of making historic decisions.

"Deep down, we know that you are not really listening," the Maldives' Mohamed Nasheed told fellow presidents at September's summit.

Nasheed's tiny homeland, a sprinkling of low-lying islands in the Indian Ocean, will be one of the earliest victims of seas rising from heat expansion and melting glaciers. On remote islets of Papua New Guinea, on Pacific atolls, on bleak Arctic shores, other coastal peoples in the 2000s were already making plans, packing up, seeking shelter.

The warming seas were growing more acid, too, from absorbing carbon dioxide, the biggest greenhouse gas in an overloaded atmosphere. Together, warmer waters and acidity will kill coral reefs and imperil other marine life - from plankton at the bottom of the food chain, to starfish and crabs, mussels and sea urchins.

Over the decade's first nine years, global temperatures averaged 0.6 degrees Celsius (1.1 degrees F) higher than the 1951-1980 average, NASA reported. And temperatures rose faster in the far north than anywhere else on Earth.

The decade's final three summers melted Arctic sea ice more than ever before in modern times. Greenland's gargantuan ice cap was pouring 3 percent more meltwater into the sea each year. Every summer's thaw reached deeper into the Arctic permafrost, threatening to unlock vast amounts of methane, a global-warming gas.

Less ice meant less sunlight reflected, more heat absorbed by the Earth. More methane escaping the tundra meant more warming, more thawing, more methane released.

At the bottom of the world, late in the decade, International Polar Year research found that Antarctica, too, was warming. Floating ice shelves fringing its coast weakened, some breaking away, allowing the glaciers behind them to push ice faster into the rising oceans.

On six continents the glaciers retreated through the 2000s, shrinking future water sources for countless millions of Indians, Chinese, South Americans. The great lakes of Africa were shrinking, too, from higher temperatures, evaporation and drought. Across the temperate zones, flowers bloomed earlier, lakes froze later, bark beetles bored their destructive way northward through warmer forests. In the Arctic, surprised Eskimos spotted the red breasts of southern robins.

In the 2000s, all this was happening faster than anticipated, scientists said. So were other things: By late in the decade, global emissions of carbon dioxide matched the worst case among seven scenarios laid down in 2001 by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the U.N. scientific network formed to peer into climate's future. Almost 29 billion tons of the gas poured skyward annually - 23 percent higher than at the decade's start.

By year-end 2008, the 2000s already included eight of the 10 warmest years on record. By 2060, that trajectory could push temperatures a dangerous 4 degrees C (7 degrees F) or more higher than preindustrial levels, British scientists said.

Early in the decade, the president of the United States, the biggest emitter, blamed "incomplete" science for the U.S. stand against rolling back emissions, as other industrial nations were trying to do. As the decade wore on and emissions grew, American reasoning leaned more toward the economic.

By 2009, with a new president and Congress, Washington seemed ready to talk. But in the front ranks of climate research - where they scale the glaciers, drill into ocean sediments, monitor a changing Earth through a web of satellite eyes - scientists feared they were running out of time.

Before the turn of the last century, with slide rule, pencil and months of tedious calculation, Svante Arrhenius was the first to show that carbon dioxide would warm the planet - in 3,000 years. The brilliant Swede hadn't foreseen the 20th-century explosion in use of fossil fuels.

Today their supercomputers tell his scientific heirs a much more urgent story: To halt and reverse that explosion of emissions, to head off a planetary climate crisis, the 10 years that dawn this Jan. 1 will be the fateful years, the final chance, the last decade.

Pope to climate summit: respect God's creation

The Associated Press

In the Merced Sun-Star, Sunday, December 6, 2009

VATICAN CITY -- Pope Benedict XVI has told world leaders attending the climate summit in Copenhagen that caring for God's creation requires they adopt sober and responsible lifestyles.

Benedict said Sunday he hoped the meeting, which opens Monday, would outline actions that respect creation and promote development while respecting human dignity and the common good.

The Vatican, which has U.N. observer status, is sending a delegation to Copenhagen.

Benedict has spoken out frequently about the need to care for the planet, dedicating a good part of his last encyclical to the issue. Under his pontificate, the Vatican has also installed photovoltaic cells on the roof of its auditorium and begun a reforestation project aimed at offsetting its CO₂ emissions.

Official questions pollution proposal: OMB says views of economist on rule are 'irrelevant'

By Juliet Eilprin, staff writer

Washington Post, Friday, Dec. 4, 2009

An economist at the Office of Management and Budget who has battled environmentalists for years on issues such as climate change and smog has raised questions about the economic impact of a proposed new rule on air pollution, according to documents obtained by The Washington Post.

Randall W. Lutter, a Food and Drug Administration employee detailed to the OMB, looked at whether the rule proposed by the Environmental Protection Agency imposes higher costs on coal-fired power plants than the agency has assumed.

Documents in the EPA's public docket show he has questioned the economic assumptions underlying a rule to cut sulfur dioxide emissions. The rule, which was proposed last month and would take effect in June under a court order, would prohibit short-term spikes of sulfur dioxide, which has been linked to respiratory diseases and premature deaths.

Sulfur dioxide emissions are now measured in 24-hour and annual increments. The new rule would evaluate them every hour, prohibiting sulfur dioxide from exceeding a limit of 50 to 100 parts per billion in one hour.

In a Nov. 19 e-mail to EPA employee Charles Fulcher, Lutter questioned whether power plants, known as EGUs, or electric generation units, could reduce sulfur dioxide emissions without financial pain.

"Are these really instances of zero-cost emissions reductions, or are they instead instances of emissions reductions that should already be in the baseline?" wrote Lutter, once a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute. He has been examining the economic impact of federal rules as a detailee at the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, which is under the OMB.

OMB spokesman Kenneth S. Baer said Lutter "is a career civil servant on temporary detail from FDA" who joined the OIRA staff because "we're stretched." He added that Lutter, who worked in the OIRA under President Bill Clinton, sent the e-mail three days after the OMB finished its review of the EPA rule.

"Dr. Lutter's personal, political and ideological views are irrelevant to his position as a detailee. He provides technical economic advice," Baer said. "He has no decision-making role or authority."

Lutter's role has alarmed environmentalists, who worry about his record on air pollution and global warming. In the 1990s, Lutter questioned the merits of imposing tougher smog standards, on the grounds that they could lead to more cases of skin cancer.

He wrote an essay in a book called "Painting the White House Green," in which he criticized Carol M. Browner -- who now advises President Obama on climate change but pushed for the ozone standards as EPA administrator under Clinton -- for making "an overzealous grab for more administrative authority."

Frank O'Donnell, president of the advocacy group Clean Air Watch, said, "Putting Lutter at OMB on environmental issues is like getting Dr. Kevorkian to review health-care reforms."

But Jeffrey R. Holmstead, who headed the EPA's air and radiation office under President George W. Bush, called Lutter "a well-respected economist" familiar with air pollution issues from his earlier stint at the OMB. "If Randy is raising an issue, it will need to be taken seriously," Holmstead wrote in an e-mail.

Lutter did not return a call placed to his White House office.

Obama administration will formally declare danger of carbon emissions

By Juliet Eilprin, staff writer

Washington Post, Monday, Dec. 7, 2009

The Obama administration will formally declare Monday that carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions pose a danger to the public's health and welfare, a move that lays the groundwork for an economy-wide carbon cap even if Congress fails to enact climate legislation, sources familiar with the process said.

The move, which Environmental Protection Agency administrator Lisa P. Jackson will announce at an afternoon press conference, comes as the largest climate change conference in history gets underway in Copenhagen. It will finalize an initial "endangerment finding" by the government in April.

While an EPA spokeswoman declined to comment on the matter, the agency sent out a press advisory that Jackson will make "a significant climate announcement at a press briefing" at 1:15 p.m. at EPA headquarters. Jackson will also speak at the U.N.-sponsored climate conference

Wednesday; her address is titled "Taking Action at Home." Obama, who will attend the end of the U.N. talks Dec. 18, has sent a series of recent signals to the international community that the United States will curb its carbon output as part of a new global climate deal.

The endangerment finding stems from a 2007 Supreme Court decision in which the court ordered the EPA to determine whether greenhouse gases qualify as a pollutant under the Clean Air Act. It could trigger a series of federal regulations affecting polluters, from vehicles to coal-fired power plants.

Businesses argue that such a finding would mean even emitters as small as a mom-and-pop grocery store would be forced to comply with onerous greenhouse gas regulations. The administration has crafted rules that would exempt facilities that emit less than 25,000 tons of carbon dioxide or its equivalent annually. But it remains unclear if that exemption would hold up in court.

"An endangerment finding from the EPA could result in a top-down command-and-control regime that will choke off growth by adding new mandates to virtually every major construction and renovation project," Thomas Donohue, president and CEO of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, said in a statement. "The devil will be in the details, and we look forward to working with the government to ensure we don't stifle our economic recovery."

Facilities that produce at least 250,000 tons of carbon dioxide or its equivalent yearly account for in excess of 70 percent of the nation's greenhouse gas emissions.

Environmentalists said the scientific finding will spur Congress, which has yet to enact a final climate bill, to take action. The House passed a bill in June, but the Senate will not take up its version until 2010.

Bill Becker, executive director of the National Association of Clean Air Agencies, said officials on the state and local level "are extraordinarily pleased that President Obama is making this endangerment finding.

It will trigger subsequent measures to continue on the road toward making significant progress to address the global warming problem."

Obama finalizes 'endangerment finding' on global warming

The declaration could give the EPA the power to issue sweep regulations on greenhouse gases. That could mean tough new emissions standards for vehicles, factories and power plants.

By Jim Tankersley, staff writer

N. Y. Times, Monday, Dec. 7, 2009

Reporting from Copenhagen - The Obama administration has finalized a declaration that greenhouse gases endanger public health, a senior administration official said today, opening the door to broad new regulations that could affect the largest segments of the American economy.

Under the so-called "endangerment finding," the Environmental Protection Agency asserts the power to regulate carbon dioxide and other gases that scientists blame for global warming. That authority comes from the Clean Air Act and has been recognized in a Supreme Court decision.

Now that it is final, the finding will allow the EPA to proceed with tough new vehicle emissions standards and a proposal to regulate factory and power-plant emissions.

The move figures to strengthen America's bargaining hand in Copenhagen, where 190 nations kicked off a two-week summit today in hopes of reaching a new international climate accord.

Top climatologist wishes Copenhagen negotiators all the worst

By Steven Mufson, staff writer
The Washington Post, Monday, Dec. 7, 2009

A famous climate scientist is so worried about climate change that he hopes the talks at Copenhagen fail

James Hansen, who is the director of NASA's Goddard Institute of Space Studies, is routinely called the grandfather of the science of climate change. But he isn't going to the Copenhagen climate conference.

Moreover, he's hoping that the negotiations there fail.

He's given a bunch of interviews in the past two weeks along these lines. (These interviews not only coincide with the Copenhagen climate conference, but also with the publication next month of Hansen's book, "Storms of My Grandchildren.")

In the Times of London, Hansen said time put into negotiating a global cap-and-trade system is "time wasted." He reiterates his oft-stated view that a gasoline tax should start at \$1 a gallon and rise from there.

He would favor returning carbon taxes to people in the form of dividends. Hansen, who was arrested earlier this year for protesting against mountaintop coal removal at a Massey Energy site, said that government inaction on climate change called for "civil resistance."

In the Guardian of London, Hansen said, "The approach that is being talked about is so fundamentally wrong that it would be better to reassess." He compared the cap-and-trade approach that is being heavily promoted by European nations and congressional Democrats to the medieval Catholic practice of selling indulgences for people's sins.

He told the Huffington Post that the cap-and-trade approach to limiting greenhouse gas emissions isn't tough enough. Hansen said that it's taken a decade to just to put the Kyoto Protocols partially in place and that during that time emissions kept rising. He argues that cap and trade didn't work for sulfur dioxide emissions, often cited as a success story. Instead, he points to British Columbia's approach of putting a stiff tax on carbon that would be 100 percent refunded through cuts in payroll taxes.

Yesterday he again sounded the same theme. In an oped in the New York Times, he said that cap and trade "merely allows polluters and Wall Street traders to fleece the public out of billions of dollars."

Hansen has long portrayed the climate battle in stark, urgent terms. He raised a fuss in 2007 by equating coal freight trains to Nazi trains carrying people to "crematoria." He apologized and no longer uses the

Nazi analogy, but he told Nature last month that his new book still refers to the trains as "death trains."

UN climate science head hopes for more US action

By Charles J. Hanley, AP Special Correspondent
In the S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Sunday, Dec. 6, 2009

COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP) -- By executive action, the Obama administration can boost the U.S. target for reducing greenhouse gas emissions beyond levels envisioned in legislation working its way through Congress, the head of the U.N. climate science network said Sunday.

"There is scope for going above what is going to be legislated," Rajendra Pachauri, chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, told The Associated Press on the eve of the U.N. climate conference in Copenhagen.

Senate and House bills capping carbon dioxide emissions would reduce them by 17 to 20 percent by 2020, compared with 2005 levels. Compared with 1990 levels, the standard U.N. benchmark, that's only a 3-4 percent reduction, experts calculate, a contribution far short of what scientists say is needed among industrial countries to avoid dangerous climate change.

Environmentalists have long urged the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to act on its own, without Congress, to rein in carbon dioxide, the most important greenhouse gas blamed for global warming.

Two years ago, the U.S. Supreme Court held that greenhouse gases were pollutants under the Clean Air Act, enabling the EPA to take action, but the administration of President George W. Bush opposed using the act to address climate change.

Last April, under President Barack Obama, the EPA said for the first time it was ready to use the Clean Air Act to curtail release of carbon dioxide from the burning of fossil fuels, and other climate-changing pollution. It did so by declaring that CO₂ and five other greenhouse gases are a major hazard to Americans' health. In October, it proposed rules to require emissions reductions by power plants, factories and refineries.

Any further U.S. steps to finalize the EPA action could be a major boost to reaching broad agreement here on emissions cuts.

In the interview on the outskirts of Copenhagen, Pachauri told AP that U.S. executive action would also be taken to improve the energy efficiency of buildings and to provide incentives to invest in clean-energy public transport.

"I think this is a beginning and we can still go several miles beyond this," he said, but "I think the first challenge for the United States is to get this legislation through the Senate."

Pachauri said he hopes other nations, too, will raise their emission-reduction pledges.

"I also believe that Copenhagen will not be the final word," Pachauri said.

The EPA administrator, Lisa Jackson, speaks at the 192-nation Copenhagen gathering on Wednesday, a week before Obama and about 100 other national leaders converge on the Danish capital to lend top-level backing to the talks.

Copenhagen climate talks will hinge on economics

Most nations agree on the dangers of climate change and its causes. The question is how to balance the risks and opportunities of curbing carbon emissions and promoting cleaner energy

By Jim Tankersley, staff writer

N.Y. Times, Monday, Dec. 7, 2009

Reporting from Washington - When world leaders gather in Copenhagen today for negotiations on a new agreement to combat climate change, their success or failure will ride on economics, not environmental science.

Theoretically, the two-week conference will focus on measures to limit emissions of the heat-trapping gases blamed for global warming. But the major debates will center on money: How could emission limits affect major industries and the jobs they provide? How could a new climate treaty reshape the global economic playing field?

Those issues sharply divide some of the most important players at the conference, as they

ponder the economic possibilities and pitfalls.

For China and nearly all of Europe, the issue offers tempting opportunities to expand industries and create jobs by developing and selling new technologies for wind, solar, nuclear and other low-emission energy. That is especially the case if there is a strong agreement to move away from the carbon-based energy sources that the world has depended on for more than a century.

Many of those nations, particularly China, devoted huge chunks of recent economic stimulus measures to low-emission energy technology.

"You're seeing a shift in developing countries," said Ned Helme, a climate policy veteran who is president of the Center for Clean Air Policy in Washington. "Rather than looking out and saying, 'How do we protect our old cement kilns?' they're looking forward to clean energy as their new market."

Meanwhile, the most immediate concern of nations such as the United States, Canada and India is the potential economic and political cost of imposing stricter limits on greenhouse gas emissions -- particularly for their coal, oil and manufacturing industries.

For example, the Obama administration won more than \$80 billion in stimulus spending to promote "clean energy." But its push to combat climate change and create "clean energy" jobs has been slowed by resistance from members of Congress who represent parts of the country that produce coal and oil or depend on those energy sources for power and manufacturing.

Tension between the possible winners and losers of a low-carbon energy future runs through every major negotiating topic, including how deeply individual nations will cut their emissions and how much richer countries are willing to spend to help poorer countries adopt cleaner energy sources and adapt to a warming world.

"One of the reasons that this negotiation is difficult is it really does involve issues of competitive and comparative advantage between countries," said Nick Main, the global managing partner for climate change and sustainability at the consulting firm Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu.

"I don't think there will be any science debate of any substance," he added. "This is really an economic debate of, 'How do you pay the costs?'"

In the dozen years since the first climate treaty was signed in Kyoto, both sides have squabbled bitterly over the science of global warming -- how serious the threat is, how rapidly conditions are changing and what role carbon emissions play in the problem.

The war of words intensified in recent weeks after hackers stole and released thousands of e-mails between leading climate scientists that skeptics say undercut the evidence of anthropogenic climate change.

But the leaders of the world's largest and fastest-growing nations have reached a broad consensus on the fundamentals: With rare exceptions, the negotiators in Copenhagen agree that Earth is warming; that humans are largely to blame; and that current trends in greenhouse gas emissions will result in flooding, drought and death in many parts of the world.

Representatives of 192 countries will be attending the 15th United Nations Climate Change Conference that opens today and runs through Dec. 18. Although some of the debate will focus on how much emissions must be reduced to lower the probability of catastrophic warming, the big disagreements center on what to do about the cost of change.

Poorer countries want the developed world to help finance their energy transition. That could mean tens, or even hundreds, of billions of dollars a year in direct aid and technology transfers

from nations such as Japan and the United States to less developed nations.

By some reckonings, that could result in U.S. dollars flowing to China -- a politically unpalatable prospect.

How much money President Obama is willing to pledge for developing countries will be one key to the negotiations, said Abraham Haspel, a lead climate negotiator during the Clinton administration who is now president of the Cogent Analysis Group.

"And can he sell the notion that a lot of that money is going to China or to India?" Haspel asked.

Another issue is whether nations' varied emissions targets will give any an unfair edge. Europe is already on its way to steep cutbacks. The Obama administration has pledged much more modest reductions for the United States.

China and India say they will emit less as a share of their economies, but because both countries are growing so quickly, their emissions could still rise overall.

A group of Senate Democrats considered swing votes on a climate bill, most of them from manufacturing states, warned Obama in a letter last week that "reciprocal commitments are essential" to any international agreement.

Environmentalists contend that the potential for clean-energy jobs will change the dynamics of the coming talks.

If the talks do lead to agreement, Main of the Deloitte consulting firm and his colleague Joseph Stanislaw wrote in a policy paper last week, businesses around the world will change investment decisions. Countries will rethink competitive advantage.

"It is," they wrote, "a whole new framework of risk and opportunity."

India Announces Plan to Slow Emissions

By Jim Yardley, staff writer

N.Y. Times, Thursday, Dec. 3, 2009

NEW DELHI — With international talks on climate change, starting next week in Copenhagen, India staked out its early position on Thursday by announcing that it would slow the growth of the nation's greenhouse gas emissions by 2020, while also leaving open the possibility of taking bolder steps if an "equitable" deal can be reached during the negotiations.

The Indian initiative, presented in Parliament by the country's top environmental official, means that India has now joined the United States, China, Brazil, Indonesia and South Africa in making a domestic emissions pledge before the Copenhagen talks. Like China, its approach is focused on improving energy efficiency rather than accepting mandatory limits on emissions.

India is a critical player in the climate change talks, if one in a complicated position. With 1.2 billion people, it is the world's second most populous country, having both high rates of poverty and high rates of economic growth. Its population means it has a much lower per-capita emissions rate than that of the industrialized world, yet it has high levels of total emissions. It ranks fifth globally in overall emissions and is projected to rank higher as its economy grows.

Indian leaders have refused to sign any pact that would inhibit the country's growth, but India is considered especially vulnerable to the problems attributed to global warming, like alterations in the annual monsoon season and rising sea levels. These problems are among the reasons that Indian officials, once regarded as obstructionist on the climate change issue, have sought to reposition the country as a constructive participant in the talks.

“India must show leadership to its own people,” Jairam Ramesh, the environment minister, told Parliament on Thursday. “We must show action.”

Under the plan, India would slow the growth of emissions by reducing its levels of so-called carbon intensity — roughly the amount of carbon dioxide emitted per unit of economic output — by 20 to 25 percent by 2020, compared with 2005 levels. In the past, India has resisted setting such targets as a potential constraint on growth. Yet even with the target, total emissions would continue to rise, though the rate of growth would slow.

“We are prepared to do even more,” Mr. Ramesh said, if a fair deal can be reached in Copenhagen. “This is our baseline. We will do this on our own.”

Last week, President Obama announced that the United States, the world’s second largest emitter of greenhouse gases, after China, would set a provisional target to cut its total greenhouse gas emissions by roughly 17 percent below 2005 levels by 2020, and 83 percent by 2050. The next day, the Chinese government announced a target to slow emissions by reducing carbon intensity levels by 40 to 45 percent by 2020, compared with 2005 levels.

Neither the Chinese nor the American plan satisfied many critics, who want both countries to commit to far bolder steps, Navroz K. Dubash, a climate change specialist in New Delhi, said the American pledge was actually a lesser commitment than it would have been obligated to meet under the Kyoto Protocol, which the United States refused to ratify. Mr. Dubash said that India had become a more constructive participant in climate change negotiations, but that the flurry of pre-Copenhagen announcements did not represent a breakthrough response to the crisis.

“The game seems to be that all countries pick a politically safe number,” said Mr. Dubash, an analyst with the Center for Policy Research. “India is now joining that game. And the game started with the United States.”

As yet, it is unclear how to assess the significance of the Indian target. Mr. Ramesh told Parliament that the country’s carbon intensity level had already dropped by 17.6 percent from 1990 to 2005 — even as total emissions rose rapidly.

Michael A. Levi, an energy and environment expert at the Council on Foreign Relations, questioned the value of developing countries’ using carbon intensity targets as a measurement for slowing emissions growth.

In India’s case, Mr. Levi said, the target announced Thursday was less ambitious than policies the country had previously announced. Last summer, India announced that it would introduce domestic legislation to institute fuel efficiency standards, rapidly expand the use of solar power and so-called clean coal technology, introduce green building codes and expand forest cover.

“The offer is actually much smaller than almost every projection of what their current policies will accomplish, whether by Western or Indian economists,” Mr. Levi said by e-mail.

Politically, the climate change negotiations are a touchy subject in India. Many conservatives and leftists continue to argue that India should not be obligated to take any action, because developed countries are responsible for the bulk of the emissions currently in the atmosphere. Mr. Ramesh has come under harsh criticism for saying that India would be willing to show flexibility in negotiations. Some critics accused him of selling out Indian interests to the United States.

But in his speech, Mr. Ramesh reiterated what he described as India’s nonnegotiable positions: It would not agree to any legally binding emissions reductions and would not sign any agreement that stipulated a peak year for Indian emissions.

India is seeking financial and technical assistance from the West. If such assistance is forthcoming, he said, India could be willing to submit to international oversight on any emissions mitigation financed by that aid.

[Fresno Bee Earth Blog, Thursday, Dec. 3, 2009:](#)

Neighbors suffer when you ignore the wood-burning ban

By Mark Grossi

A spike in soot pollution late last night tells me there might have been folks ignoring the no-burn order yesterday. Or, maybe you just hadn't heard about it.

The people living around you are breathing dirtier air because of your fire.

Take a look at the readings in Fresno. The soot level was 43 micrograms per cubic meter of air at 4 p.m. An hour later, it had jumped to 61. By midnight, it was 89.

The health threshold is 35, and many health studies question whether it really protects people. If you burn wood on a day when the air district is prohibiting it, you're creating a health problem in your own neighborhood.

And someone might turn you in. It's a \$50 fine for burning wood on a no-burn day.

[Bakersfield Californian commentary, Sunday, Dec. 6, 2009:](#)

Smack down at the air board? I can only hope

By Lois Henry, Californian Columnist

If you happen to be in Sacramento on Wednesday, you might want to drop by the California Air Resources Board meeting to watch the fireworks.

Ok, ok, ok, it's a government meeting, so fireworks might be a stretch.

Two board members have now stated publicly that they want the board to suspend the new diesel regulations that were to go into effect over the next few years requiring heavy trucks to retrofit with prohibitively expensive filtration devices to reduce PM2.5 emissions.

PM2.5 is tiny bits of soot in diesel emissions that CARB has deemed deadly per a report by CARB researcher Hien Tran that was used to justify the new regs.

Therein lies (part of) the problem.

Tran lied about having a PhD.

The other part of the problem, I say, is the crappy way Tran put the report together, discounting opposing studies that found no link between premature deaths and PM2.5 (especially in California) and averaging results of other studies and applying them across the state -- among other slap dashery.

His lie was discovered by a number of CARB muckety-mucks, as well as the Chair of the Board, Mary Nichols, and at least one other board member, John Balmes, prior to the December 2008 vote on the regulations.

But that information was kept from the full board.

It wasn't until September that board members got an earful from citizens about the Tran report.

That riled board member John Telles, a Fresno cardiologist, who threw down the gauntlet last month saying while the science in the report is solid (I disagree), CARB's credibility is now in question.

He wants to suspend the rule and redo the report.

Now board member Ron Roberts has joined Telles, writing in the San Diego Union Tribune on Friday that the retrofit requirements will cost California trucking businesses \$4.5 billion between 2010 and 2030.

"Imposing such expensive and groundbreaking regulation requires securing the full faith and confidence of the public. Unfortunately, actions by air board members and staff have shaken that trust."

Balmes and Nichols have already said they think the rule should stand.

They've both said Tran's report was incidental to their votes, that they "knew" the science supported the regulations.

Well, heck, if the science is so infallible, redoing the report should produce the same result, right?

Unless, of course, a redo would include an honest look at all the science, including those that find no link to PM2.5 and premature deaths.

And perhaps, not including studies in which the authors have refused to open their raw data to independent examination -- which, by the way, would eliminate the main studies Tran used in his report.

Back to the boardroom showdown.

So far, it's two against two.

There are 11 members total. So all Telles and Roberts need are four more level heads who care about good science and good government.

Given what we've seen so far from CARB, that seems like a big number.

[Washington Post commentary, Sunday, Dec. 6, 2009:](#)

To really save the planet, stop going green

By Mike Tidwell

As President Obama heads to Copenhagen next week for global warming talks, there's one simple step Americans back home can take to help out: Stop "going green." Just stop it. No more compact fluorescent light bulbs. No more green wedding planning. No more organic toothpicks for holiday hors d'oeuvres.

December should be national Green-Free Month. Instead of continuing our faddish and counterproductive emphasis on small, voluntary actions, we should follow the example of Americans during past moral crises and work toward large-scale change. The country's last real moral and social revolution was set in motion by the civil rights movement. And in the 1960s, civil rights activists didn't ask bigoted Southern governors and sheriffs to consider "10 Ways to Go Integrated" at their convenience.

Green gestures we have in abundance in America. Green political action, not so much. And the gestures ("Look honey, another Vanity Fair Green Issue!") lure us into believing that broad change is happening when the data shows that it isn't. Despite all our talk about washing clothes in cold water, we aren't making much of a difference.

For eight years, George W. Bush promoted voluntary action as the nation's primary response to global warming -- and for eight years, aggregate greenhouse gas emissions remained unchanged. Even today, only 10 percent of our household light bulbs are compact fluorescents. Hybrids account for only 2.5 percent of U.S. auto sales. One can almost imagine the big energy companies secretly applauding each time we distract ourselves from the big picture with a hectoring list of "5 Easy Ways to Green Your Office."

As America joins the rest of the world in finally fighting global warming, we need to bring our battle plan up to scale. If you believe that astronauts have been to the moon and that the world is not flat, then you probably believe the satellite photos showing the Greenland ice sheet in full-on meltdown. Much of Manhattan and the Eastern Shore of Maryland may join the Atlantic Ocean in our lifetimes. Entire Pacific island nations will disappear. Hurricanes will bring untold destruction. Rising sea levels and crippling droughts will decimate crops and cause widespread famine. People will go hungry, and people will die.

Morally, this is sort of a big deal. It would be wrong to let all this happen when we have the power to prevent the worst of it by adopting clean-energy policies.

But how do we do that? Again, look to the history of the civil rights struggle. After many decades of public denial and inaction, the civil rights movement helped Americans to see Southern apartheid in moral terms. From there, the movement succeeded by working toward legal change. Segregation was phased out rapidly only because it was phased out through the law. These statutes didn't erase racial prejudice from every American heart overnight. But through them, our country made staggering progress. Just consider who occupies the White House today.

All who appreciate the enormity of the climate crisis still have a responsibility to make every change possible in their personal lives. I have, from the solar panels on my roof to the Prius in my driveway to my low-carbon-footprint vegetarian diet. But surveys show that very few people are willing to make significant voluntary changes, and those of us who do create the false impression of mass progress as the media hypes our actions.

Instead, most people want carbon reductions to be mandated by laws that will allow us to share both the responsibilities and the benefits of change. Ours is a nation of laws; if we want to alter our practices in a deep and lasting way, this is where we must start. After years of delay and denial and green half-measures, we must legislate a stop to the burning of coal, oil and natural gas.

Of course, all this will require congressional action, and therein lies the source of Obama's Copenhagen headache. To have been in the strongest position to negotiate a binding emissions treaty with other world leaders this month, the president needed a strong carbon-cap bill out of Congress. But the House of Representatives passed only a weak bill riddled with loopholes in June, and the Senate has failed to get even that far.

So what's the problem? There's lots of blame to go around, but the distraction of the "go green" movement has played a significant role. Taking their cues from the popular media and cautious politicians, many Americans have come to believe that they are personally to blame for global warming and that they must fix it, one by one, at home. And so they either do as they're told -- a little of this, a little of that -- or they feel overwhelmed and do nothing.

We all got into this mess together. And now, with treaty talks underway internationally and Congress stalled at home, we need to act accordingly. Don't spend an hour changing your light bulbs. Don't take a day to caulk your windows. Instead, pick up a phone, open a laptop, or travel to a U.S. Senate office near you and turn the tables: "What are the 10 green statutes you're working on to save the planet, Senator?"

Demand a carbon-cap bill that mandates the number 350. That's the level of carbon pollution scientists say we must limit ourselves to: 350 parts per million of CO₂ in the air. If we can stabilize the atmosphere at that number in coming decades, we should be able to avoid the worst-case scenario and preserve a planet similar to the one human civilization developed on. To get there, America will need to make deep but achievable pollution cuts well before 2020. And to protect against energy price shocks during this transition, Congress must include a system of direct rebates to consumers, paid for by auctioning permit fees to the dirty-energy companies that continue to pollute our sky.

Obama, too, needs to step up his efforts; it's not just Congress and the voters who have been misguided. Those close to the president say he understands the seriousness of global warming. But despite the issue's moral gravity, he's been paralyzed by political caution. He leads from the rear on climate change, not from the front.

Forty-five years ago, President Lyndon B. Johnson faced tremendous opposition on civil rights from a Congress dominated by Southern leaders, yet he spent the political capital necessary to answer a great moral calling. Whenever key bills on housing, voting and employment stalled, he gave individual members of congress the famous "Johnson treatment." He charmed. He pleaded. He threatened. He led, in other words. In person, and from the front.

Does anyone doubt that our charismatic current president has the capacity to turn up the heat? Imagine the back-room power of a full-on "Obama treatment" to defend America's flooding coastlines and burning Western forests. Imagine a two-pronged attack on the fickle, slow-moving Senate: Obama on one side and a tide of tweets and letters from voters like you.

So join me: Put off the attic insulation job till January. Stop searching online for recycled gift wrapping paper and sustainably farmed Christmas trees. Go beyond green fads for a month, and instead help make green history.

Mike Tidwell is the executive director of the Chesapeake Climate Action Network.

[N.Y. Times commentary, Sunday, Dec. 6, 2009:](#)

Cap and Fade

By James Hansen

At the international climate talks in Copenhagen, President Obama is expected to announce that the United States wants to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to about 17 percent below 2005 levels by 2020 and 83 percent by 2050. But at the heart of his plan is cap and trade, a market-based approach that has been widely praised but does little to slow global warming or reduce our dependence on fossil fuels. It merely allows polluters and Wall Street traders to fleece the public out of billions of dollars.

Supporters of cap and trade point to the 1990 Clean Air Act amendments that capped sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide emissions from coal-burning power plants — the main pollutants in acid rain — at levels below what they were in 1980. This legislation allowed power plants that reduced emissions to levels below the cap to sell the credit for these excess reductions to other utilities whose emissions were too high, thus giving plant owners a financial incentive to cut back their pollution. Sulfur emissions have been reduced by 43 percent in the two decades since. Great success? Hardly.

Because cap and trade is enforced through the selling and trading of permits, it actually perpetuates the pollution it is supposed to eliminate. If every polluter's emissions fell below the incrementally lowered cap, then the price of pollution credits would collapse and the economic rationale to keep reducing pollution would disappear.

Worse yet, polluters' lobbyists ensured that the clean air amendments allowed existing power plants to be "grandfathered," avoiding many pollution regulations. These old plants would soon be retired anyway, the utilities claimed. That's hardly been the case: Two-thirds of today's coal-fired power plants were constructed before 1975.

Cap and trade also did little to improve public health. Coal emissions are still significant contributing factors in four of the five leading causes of mortality in the United States — and mercury, arsenic and various coal pollutants also cause birth defects, asthma and other ailments.

Yet cap-and-trade schemes are still being pursued in Copenhagen and Washington. (Though I head the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies, I'm speaking only for myself.)

To compound matters, the Congressional carbon cap would also encourage "offsets" — alternatives to emission reductions, like planting trees on degraded land or avoiding deforestation in Brazil. Caps would be raised by the offset amount, even if such offsets are imaginary or unverifiable. Stopping deforestation in one area does not reduce demand for lumber or food-growing land, so deforestation simply moves elsewhere.

Once again, lobbyists are providing the real leadership on climate change legislation. Under the proposed law, some permits to pollute would be handed out free; and much of the money actually collected from permits would be used to pay for boondoggles like "clean coal" research. The House and Senate energy bills would only assure continued coal use, making it implausible that carbon dioxide emissions would decline sharply.

If that isn't bad enough, Wall Street is poised to make billions of dollars in the "trade" part of cap-and-trade. The market for trading permits to emit carbon appears likely to be loosely regulated, to be open to speculators and to include derivatives. All the profits of this pollution trading system would be extracted from the public via increased energy prices.

There is a better alternative, one that would be more efficient and less costly than cap and trade: "fee and dividend." Under this approach, a gradually rising carbon fee would be collected at the mine or port of entry for each fossil fuel (coal, oil and gas). The fee would be uniform, a certain number of dollars per ton of carbon dioxide in the fuel. The public would not directly pay any fee, but the price of goods would rise in proportion to how much carbon-emitting fuel is used in their production.

All of the collected fees would then be distributed to the public. Prudent people would use their dividend wisely, adjusting their lifestyle, choice of vehicle and so on. Those who do better than average in choosing less-polluting goods would receive more in the dividend than they pay in added costs.

For example, when the fee reached \$115 per ton of carbon dioxide it would add \$1 per gallon to the price of gasoline and 5 to 6 cents per kilowatt-hour to the price of electricity. Given the amount of oil, gas and coal used in the United States in 2007, that carbon fee would yield about \$600 billion per year. The resulting dividend for each adult American would be as much as \$3,000 per year. As the fee rose, tipping points would be reached at which various carbon-free energies and carbon-saving technologies would become cheaper than fossil fuels plus their fees. As time goes on, fossil fuel use would collapse.

Still need more convincing? Consider the perverse effect cap and trade has on altruistic actions. Say you decide to buy a small, high-efficiency car. That reduces your emissions, but not your country's. Instead it allows somebody else to buy a bigger S.U.V. — because the total emissions are set by the cap.

In a fee-and-dividend system, every action to reduce emissions — and to keep reducing emissions — would be rewarded. Indeed, knowing that you were saving money by buying a small car might inspire your neighbor to follow suit. Popular demand for efficient vehicles could drive gas guzzlers off the market. Such snowballing effects could speed us toward a pollution-free world.

The plans in Copenhagen and Washington have not been finalized. It is not too late to trade cap and trade for an approach that actually works.

James Hansen is the author of the forthcoming "Storms of My Grandchildren: The Truth About the Coming Climate Catastrophe and Our Last Chance to Save Humanity."

[Stockton Record, Guest Commentary, Saturday, Dec. 5, 2009:](#)

UC Merced helps bring economic oomph to Valley

By Steve Kang, Chancellor, University of California, Merced

This fall, the University of California, Merced, marked a major milestone as we welcomed our fifth - and by far our largest - incoming class of students. Of the 3,400 students enrolled this fall, compared with just 875 in our inaugural year, about 110 are from San Joaquin County. These results should make everyone in the greater Stockton area very proud. We all benefit when the doors of higher education are opened to the future leaders of our region, our state and our nation.

While enrollment growth may be the best single measure of year-to-year progress, economic investment may be the best measure of potential long-term impact. Solid growth continues on this front as well.

Since UC Merced began administrative operations in 2001, the value of construction contracts awarded to San Joaquin Valley businesses, and goods and services purchased within the Valley has reached more than \$450 million. In San Joaquin County alone, that number is about \$15.8 million, while the statewide total is approaching \$1 billion.

Although this growing level of investment hasn't been enough to offset the most difficult financial climate our region has seen in decades, it is clearly helping to stabilize the regional economy, create new jobs and position us well for future financial progress when the underlying state economy rebounds.

These two factors - enrollment growth and economic contribution - are fundamental to our mission as the first UC campus established in the San Joaquin Valley. They're also closely related. College attendance rates have long been recognized as a leading indicator of future economic vitality. The Valley's chronic battle with poverty and unemployment is attributable, in part, to a level of performance on this important measure that has been well below state averages for decades.

Now, that's changing. We are thrilled to report that students from throughout the Central Valley are applying to the 10-campus UC system at a dramatically higher rate than ever before. Compared with 2004, the year before UC Merced was established, applications from Central Valley students in 2008 increased by 41 percent, and admissions increased by 45 percent. These results reflect a growing awareness that education is the key to personal opportunity and long-term financial achievement.

As I walk through our bustling campus this fall, I see many other signs that something special is happening here.

I see the most diverse student body of any UC campus, one that proudly reflects the character, the hopes and the aspirations of our culturally rich state.

I see striking new buildings constructed to such high environmental standards that our young campus is already recognized nationally as one of the "greenest" in the country.

I see world-class faculty mixing comfortably with students at all levels in a way seldom seen on larger campuses.

I see students engaged in real-world research projects that expose them to the most fundamental and rewarding form of learning - the discovery and application of new knowledge.

Despite an extremely challenging economic climate throughout California, UC Merced remains on track to enroll 5,000 students by 2013. We are moving forward with the construction of new academic buildings and student housing to accommodate that growth, using sustainable design and construction techniques that are setting new standards for environmental responsibility.

We are strengthening our basic science curriculum to provide a strong foundation for the development of a fully accredited medical school when the state's economy turns around.

Our faculty members are winning millions of dollars in grants (nearly \$23 million in fiscal 2008-09) to fund primary research into the Valley's most pressing problems, including regional health disparities, water quality and supply, air pollution, energy supply, climate change and more. Discoveries from this research will have far-reaching benefits throughout the region, the state and the world.

UC Merced's presence in the Valley is also helping to attract significant new levels of federal and state funding for important regional needs. For example, the major health care reform measure passed Nov. 7 by the House of Representatives includes \$500 million for the development of medical schools in federally designated health professional shortage areas throughout the country, which could potentially help expedite the launch of a medical school at UC Merced. Similarly, the \$11 billion water bond approved last month by the state Legislature includes \$10 million in water-research projects to be led by our Sierra Nevada Research Institute.

We sincerely hope the communities that welcomed us here are seeing these unmistakable signs of progress. Times are tough throughout the Valley, but we truly believe the long-term prospects for our region have never been better. We are extremely pleased to be a catalyst in the process of improving the Valley's quality of life and lifting our region to its fullest potential.

Sung-Mo "Steve" Kang is chancellor of the University of California, Merced. Before joining UC Merced in 2007, Kang was the dean of engineering at UC Santa Cruz.

[San Diego Union-Tribune guest commentary, Friday, Dec. 4, 2009:](#)

Time to clear the air and breathe

By Ron Roberts

Breathe. For most of us, the air in our cities is the cleanest in our lifetimes. As a 15-year member of both the California Air Resources Board (CARB) and San Diego County Air Pollution Control District, I am proud of that fact and equally passionate about further improvement. But a pending state regulation to reduce diesel engine emissions carries an unpleasant odor, tainted by a falsified credential and information held secretly by staff and board members.

Next week, I will join my colleague Dr. John Telles in asking our fellow CARB members to suspend this "truck rule" regulation. Personally, this is an excruciating decision. Particulate pollution from large diesel engines causes annually thousands of premature deaths and cases of asthma, which I have.

Yet with these rules we are committing the owners of California-based commercial trucks and buses to \$4.5 billion in upgrades between 2010 and 2030. Imposing such expensive and

groundbreaking regulation requires securing the full faith and confidence of the public. Unfortunately, actions by air board members and staff have shaken that trust.

The process began several years ago with efforts to further reduce diesel pollution. Much of the justification came from a report titled "Methodology for Estimating Premature Death Associated with Long-Term Exposure to Fine Airborne Particulate Matter in California."

Overseeing this report was Hien Tran, a longtime CARB staff member who claimed to have a doctorate in statistics from the University of California Davis. He did not, a fact known only to a few board members and staff, and not properly disclosed. Had the full board been informed, we could have delayed the public hearing process until corrective actions were taken.

In uncovering how this deception unfolded, Telles has collected an array of documents that shed new light on the selectively shared information. As Telles wrote in a letter to the agency's attorney: "If staff and the chair can choose what information it gives or does not give to the board, information that could influence how the board might vote, then what purpose does the board have?"

In CARB's own internal disciplinary communication with Tran, it worries about the results, writing, "Your dishonesty regarding your education has called into question the validity of the report. This report in turn supports other controversial and critical regulations adopted by Air Resources Board."

I gain little comfort knowing Tran was suspended 60 days and demoted – a light penalty.

Satisfied with the punishment, CARB staff views the issue as closed. Since the allegation of falsified credentials was included in a letter submitted to the board, all disclosure requirements were met, they contend. Yet this is the first time in my 15 years on the board that I have seen anything less than full disclosure.

This new information was not just a rehash of opponents' comments. Rather it was fresh material actively being vetted by top CARB staff in the hours leading to the vote. When Tran confessed two days before the Dec. 12, 2008 meeting that his doctorate was bought online for \$1,000, six executive level staff members and a few board members were told. Days earlier, three board members were alerted to the falsification by a UCLA professor.

As the post-vote months passed, word of the deception began to leak. A few journalists, including the Union-Tribune's Chris Reed, homed in on the truth. Finally, at the Sept. 24 meeting in Diamond Bar, staff confirmed in public Tran's transgression.

Today, air board staff defend the Tran report as one subsequently validated by "rigorous internal as well as external review." Therefore, no need to revisit the vote, they say. Some board members have gone so far as to declare, "There was no abuse, manipulation or dishonesty of any type."

Well, that is simply not accurate. The investigative work of Telles shows the opposite is true. This withholding of information violates an important trust and is as serious as the original fabrication of credentials.

Telles is a passionate supporter of clean air and hails from Fresno, an area severely impacted by diesel exhaust. We both badly want cleaner diesel emissions and believe a new public hearing process will validate most of the earlier results. For now, however, the rule set to take effect in 2010 must be suspended.

California maintains the most effective air board not just in our country, but in the world, by earning the public's trust and confidence. It is essential for our long-term reputation that we never lose sight of this truth. We need to clear the air of this controversy.

Roberts represents the Fourth District on the San Diego County Board of Supervisors.

[Bakersfield Californian editorial, Sunday, Dec. 6, 2009:](#)

Suspend diesel regs, then do it right

Let there be no doubt: Soot, of the type produced by diesel engines, is hazardous to the human lung. We are all well advised to drastically limit our exposure.

That said, the California Air Resources Board has so thoroughly botched its efforts to regulate diesel emissions, the time has come to suspend rules aimed at cleaning up the estimated one million heavy-duty diesel trucks operating in California, due to go into effect in January 2011.

The problem is not the science supporting the Statewide Truck and Bus rules; no credible evidence suggests soot is anything but toxic to the respiratory system. The problem is a political fumble born of institutional dishonesty and arrogance so profound it boggles the mind.

California's new regulations, toughest in the nation, have been terminally compromised by revelations that the researcher who crafted a compelling study of diesel's damaging health effects falsified his academic credentials.

Hien Tran, the researcher in question, fabricated his doctoral degree from UC Davis, and at least one CARB board member knew about it, but kept quiet.

Big deal, some might say. Soot causes lung problems and a phoned-up resume doesn't change that.

"There's been an effort in some quarters to say (the agency) cooked the books ..." Dr. John Balmes, a board member and professor of medicine at the University of California San Francisco, told The San Diego Union-Tribune. "I don't think the science changed at all, not one iota."

But as pointed out by CARB board members Ron Roberts, a San Diego County supervisor, and Dr. John Telles, a Fresno physician who originally voted in favor of enacting the rule in December 2008, even the slight odor of impropriety invites a backlash of cynicism toward future clean-air initiatives.

"Failure to reveal this information to the board prior to the vote not only casts doubt on the legitimacy of the truck rule but the legitimacy of the (clean-air agency) itself," Telles told the Union-Tribune.

In an era when the opposing sides of assorted political and social issues wield competing scientific studies like clubs, it's more important than ever for legitimate policy-making bodies to be meticulously forthright and above-board. Critics are watching them, double-checking their numbers and reading their e-mails. There's no room for fraud, even fraud as relatively minor as Tran's might have been.

CARB needs to step away from any research that Tran conducted, compiled or reviewed and start over with a clean slate: Researchers beyond reproach weighing peer-reviewed studies beyond reproach.

Only then should the CARB board be given the opportunity to decide if these regulations, or regs like them, are appropriate. CARB's work is too important for the agency to abide the taint of anything remotely resembling fraud.

[L.A. Times editorial, Monday, Dec. 7, 2009:](#)

Climate talks need unity of purpose, not sniping

A dirty tricks effort by deniers of global warming shouldn't detract from the hard science behind the need for the Copenhagen summit opening today to act aggressively to stem dangerous human activity.

Norway's environment minister called the United Nations climate negotiations starting today in Copenhagen "the most difficult talks ever embarked upon by humanity." They are also probably the most important; at stake in this gathering of 190 nations intended to draft a successor to the Kyoto Protocol are the future of human civilization and the survival of countless plant and animal species threatened by climate change. Yet even at a time when unity of purpose is crucial, global warming deniers have stepped up their dirty tricks campaign and scored their biggest victory to date.

Hackers last month illegally intercepted hundreds of e-mails from scientists at a prominent British climate research center, a few of which show signs of ethical lapses. In some, researchers discuss withholding data or manipulating them in ways that, the deniers claim, show the scientists hyping the threat of global warming. In others, they discuss boycotting journal editors they believe are too accommodating of the work of climate skeptics. The content of many of these messages has been distorted or taken out of context -- for example, one of the correspondents, Pennsylvania State University professor Michael E. Mann, has said he was merely criticizing a journal editor who was notorious for publishing studies that didn't meet minimal scientific standards. Still, some climate scientists appear to have crossed the line that separates objective observers from advocates, undermining their credibility.

None of this comes close to refuting the decades of research by thousands of scientists providing overwhelming evidence that climate change is happening and is being caused by human activity. The future effects of warming are predicted by computer models, but you don't need a computer to see the damage already being wrought: accelerating species extinction, vanishing glaciers and killer heat waves, among other problems. A recent study by 26 top researchers showed that Arctic sea ice is melting much faster than predicted, raising fears that sea levels could rise by up to 6 1/2 feet by 2100 unless action is taken. So long, Florida.

The intercepted e-mails are adding decibels to a conservative noise machine that has successfully drowned out more responsible voices in the U.S. Senate, which has been unable to move ahead with a crucial climate bill. The Senate's failure, in turn, has all but ensured that the Copenhagen talks will produce at best a political agreement on emissions targets and aid to developing nations to help them build clean infrastructure, but no binding treaty. If this continues, the United States won't just be an international pariah; it will be a menace to humanity.

[Letter to the Sacramento Bee, Saturday, Dec. 5, 2009:](#)

Do not doubt that diesel kills

Re "Cover-up casts pall on diesel rules" (Capitol & California, Dec. 2): Dan Walters' column focuses on one academic credential and fails to recognize the much broader public health crisis of illness and death caused by exposure to diesel pollution in our communities.

A large body of independently peer-reviewed studies has clearly established that diesel soot increases cancer risk and contributes to thousands of premature deaths each year, as well as asthma attacks and other respiratory symptoms, acute bronchitis and hospitalizations for respiratory and cardiac illnesses. Unfortunately, children, the elderly and other vulnerable populations such as truck drivers and those who live or work in close proximity to ports, freeways, distribution centers and other sources of diesel exhaust are hit the hardest.

Other national and international bodies recognize the public health threat posed by diesel exhaust, including the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the World Health Organization and the International Agency for Research on Cancer.

There is no question that diesel exhaust kills. Too many people are dying every year from air pollution-related illnesses in California, and diesel trucks are a major source of this pollution. California must respond by moving forward to implement the state truck and bus rule to clean up diesel engines.

Bonnie Holmes Gen, American Lung Association, California

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the world climate summit in Copenhagen. For more information on this Spanish clip, contact Claudia Encinas at (559) 230-5851.

Cumbre de Copenhagen: 15 días para salvar el clima del planeta

El mundo entero converge desde el lunes hacia Copenhagen, convertida en la capital mundial del clima, donde se dirimirá durante dos semanas la mayor cita del planeta, por su magnitud y sus desafíos.

Terra, Monday, December 07, 2009

Los delegados de 192 países, entre ellos un centenar de jefes de Estado que arriban los 17 y 18 de diciembre, deben hallar un acuerdo que permita limitar la disparada del termostato mundial, y evitar graves desarreglos climáticos que afectarían a las poblaciones más desfavorecidas.

Para presionar a los delegados, numerosas ONG ya están batallando en la capital danesa: mientras sus expertos están en el Bella Center, sede de la conferencia, sus militantes están listos para llevar a cabo espectaculares acciones que atraigan sobre Copenhagen la atención del mundo.

El barco de Greenpeace "Arctic Sunrise" estaba anclado el domingo ante el parlamento danés, con una banderola: "Nuestro clima, nuestro futuro, tu decisión".

Paralelamente a la cumbre, se celebrará un foro alternativo de unos 10 mil participantes cerca de la estación central de tren, donde las actuales víctimas del cambio climático, en Bangladesh, Nigeria o Groenlandia, darán testimonios sobre sus vidas, ya afectadas por un alza de 0,8°C registrada en un siglo.

El objetivo de la cumbre -limitar el alza de temperaturas a +2°C- ya parece muy poco realista, teniendo en cuenta los compromisos de los principales actores de la negociación.

Un estudio publicado el sábado por la ONG científica alemana Climate Analytics, afirma que en el estado actual de las negociaciones, el aumento de la temperatura podría ser de +3,5°C de aquí a fines del presente siglo.

El precio a pagar sería un derrumbe de las producciones de cereales, masivas extinciones de especies, elevación de los océanos, y la migración forzada de centenares de millones de personas, expulsadas de sus hogares por las inundaciones, las sequías o la escasez.

Para evitarlo, el acuerdo de Copenhagen debe optar por una reducción drástica de los gases contaminantes provocados por la combustión de energías fósiles (petróleo, gas, carbón), y dividirlos por dos respecto a 1990 de aquí a 2050, según científicos del IPCC, un panel de expertos creado por la ONU.

Estos expertos recomiendan que desde 2020 los países industrializados reduzcan sus emisiones de 25 a 40%. Sin embargo, las propuestas oscilan solamente entre -12% y -16%.

Desde la adopción de la convención de Naciones Unidas sobre los cambios climáticos en 1992 en Rio, las emisiones mundiales aumentaron un 30%. El Protocolo de Kyoto, primer tratado internacional cuyo objetivo es reducirlas, adoptado en 1997 y que entró en vigor en 2005, generó compromisos que expiran a fines de 2012.