

Student artwork

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Monday, Jan. 11, 2010

Two Tulare County students were chosen to have their artwork displayed on the 2010 San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District calendar. Irma Perez, a Parlier Junior High School student, and Kathleen Bailey, a Maple Elementary School student in Tulare, are featured.

The calendar is distributed to schools, community groups, health-care facilities, churches and nonprofit groups in the Valley.

Public Meetings

Lodi News Sentinel, Monday Jan. 11, 2010

San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors

Key items:

- Lease agreement for Lodi Memorial Hospital to move its "free clinic" from the Salvation Army headquarters to the county Public Health Services building at 300 W. Oak St., Lodi. In 2008, Lodi Memorial served 1,535 adults and children from Lodi who were not eligible for government, employer or private medical insurance. The demand for services now exceeds the Salvation Army's capacity. Lodi Memorial would not pay the county any rent to use the county building, but it will pay half the phone, utility and janitorial costs.
- Adoption of the county's 2010 state and federal legislative program.
- Appointments to the Lockeford Municipal Advisory Council, [San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District](#) Citizens Advisory Committee and the Workforce Investment Board.

When and where: 9 a.m., county administration building, sixth floor, 44 N. San Joaquin St., Stockton.

Air quality forecast and woodburning rules

Sun-Star Staff

Merced Sun-Star, Sunday, Jan. 10, 2010

MERCED

AQI Forecast for 1/10/2010: 72 Moderate (PM2.5)

School Flag color for 1/10/2010: Yellow

Fireplace/Wood Stove Burning Status for 1/10/2010: Please burn cleanly

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>.

Taft: Interior Secretary Salazar Launches Onshore Oil and Gas Leasing Reforms Reforms Will Make Oil Drilling Tougher on Public Lands, Carrizo Plain

Taft Independent, Friday, Jan. 8, 2010

Citing a need to improve certainty and order in oil and gas leasing on U.S. public lands, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar today announced several reforms that the Bureau of Land Management will undertake to improve protections for land, water, and wildlife and reduce potential conflicts that can lead to costly and time-consuming protests and litigation of leases. Interior will also establish a new Energy Reform Team to identify and implement important energy management reforms.

"The previous Administration's anywhere, anyhow policy on oil and gas development ran afoul of communities, carved up the landscape, and fueled costly conflicts that created uncertainty for investors and industry," said Secretary Salazar. "We need a fresh look - from inside the federal government and from outside - at how we can better manage Americans' energy resources."

Les Clark of the Independent Oil Producers Association told the Independent that the IOPA opposes these new guidelines and said that the government is just making it more difficult for oil producers to lease and explore for oil on public lands.

According to Salazar, the new guidance BLM is issuing for field managers will help bring clarity, consistency, and public engagement to the onshore oil and gas leasing process while balancing the many resource values that the Bureau of Land Management is entrusted with protecting on behalf of the American people. "In addition, with the help of our new Energy Reform Team, we will improve the Department's internal operations to better manage publicly owned energy resources and the revenues they produce."

Many of the reforms that the Bureau of Land Management will undertake follow the recommendations of an interdisciplinary review team that studied a controversial 2008 oil and gas lease sale in Utah.

Congressman Kevin McCarthy issued a statement about the new policy and said, "The Department of Interior's decision takes a step backward in ensuring that our families have reliable access to affordable American energy. Our local communities are blessed with abundant resources that can be responsibly developed, creating good, well-paying jobs and promoting domestic energy production. Rather than promoting this, Interior's additional layer of bureaucracy could instead lead to higher energy prices at a time when hardworking Americans are already shouldering high costs."

Under the reformed oil and gas leasing policy, BLM will provide:

Comprehensive interdisciplinary reviews that take into account site-specific considerations for individual lease sales. Resource Management Plans will continue to provide programmatic-level guidance, but individual parcels nominated for leasing will undergo increased internal and external coordination, public participation, interdisciplinary review of available information, confirmation of Resource Management Plan conformance as well as site visits to parcels when necessary; Greater public involvement in developing Master Leasing and Development Plans for areas where intensive new oil and gas extraction is anticipated so that other important natural resource values can be fully considered prior to making an irreversible commitment to develop an area; Leadership in identifying areas where new oil and gas leasing will occur. The bureau will continue to accept industry expressions of interest regarding where to offer leases, but will emphasize leasing in already-developed areas and will plan carefully for leasing and development in new areas.

BLM Director Bob Abbey said the increased opportunity for public participation and a more thorough environmental review process and documentation can help reduce the number of protests filed as well as enhance BLM's ability to resolve protests prior to lease sales. A comparison of the new guidance with current policy can be found [here](#).

"The new approach can help restore certainty and predictability to a system currently burdened by constant legal challenges and protests," said Abbey. "It will also support the BLM's multiple-use mission, which requires management of the public lands to provide opportunities for activities such as recreation, conservation, and energy development both conventional and renewable."

BLM will also issue guidance regarding the use of categorical exclusions, or CXs, established by the Energy Policy Act of 2005 and that allow the bureau to approve some oil and gas development activities based on existing environmental or planning analysis. Under the new policy, in accordance with White House Council on Environmental Quality guidelines, BLM will not use these CX's in cases involving "extraordinary circumstances" such as impacts to protected species, historic or cultural resources, or human health and safety.

Salazar also issued a Secretarial Order establishing an Energy Reform Team within the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals Management that will identify and oversee implementation of energy reforms.

"The creation of the new Team focuses on our important stewardship responsibility in the management of the nation's energy resources," said Wilma Lewis, Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals Management. "Through its work, the team will promote efficiency and effectiveness in the development of renewable and conventional energy resources, so that we can be properly accountable to the American public."

Under the Assistant Secretary's direction, the Energy Reform Team will provide greater coordination and improved accountability to ensure the orderly, efficient, responsible and timely development of public resources critical for our national energy security. Through its own efforts, as well as by considering good ideas from stakeholders, industry, and the public, the Team will help ensure that Interior is a responsible steward of the public resources it manages and obtains fair value for energy resources owned by the public.

The new oil and gas leasing guidance and CX guidance will be implemented once BLM has completed final internal reviews.

According to Forest Watch, the Carrizo Plain National Monument, in San Luis Obispo County, has also experienced increased pressure from the oil industry. In 2006, an oil tycoon announced his intent to drill an exploratory well inside the Carrizo Plain National Monument boundary. His lease eventually expired before he was able to do so. In 2008, a subsidiary of Occidental Petroleum announced its intent to explore for oil on the valley floor of the Carrizo Plain National Monument. That proposal is still pending.

New smog limits to hit Bay Area counties hard

Peter Fimrite, Chronicle Staff Writer
SF Chronicle, Friday, Jan. 8, 2010

Numerous California counties, including several in the Bay Area, will have to get tougher on polluters to meet strict new limits on smog proposed Thursday by the Environmental Protection Agency.

The tighter regulations, which would replace Bush-era rules, are expected to leave hundreds of counties nationwide out of compliance with federal standards and cost up to \$90 billion a year to implement by 2020.

In the Bay Area, four counties would have been out of compliance under the Bush rules, which were supposed to kick in between 2014 and 2020. The new rules would make it even tougher for those four counties -- Alameda, Contra Costa, Santa Clara and Solano -- to comply. The proposed rule would add Napa County to that out-of-compliance list.

The smog levels in San Francisco, Marin, San Mateo and Sonoma counties would be acceptable even under the stricter rules.

EPA officials said the proposed rules would ultimately save billions in avoided emergency room visits due to respiratory conditions, premature deaths, missed work and school.

"Using the best science to strengthen these standards is long overdue action that will help millions of Americans breathe easier and live healthier," said EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson.

Smog is created by the breakdown of chemical emissions that spew from vehicle exhaust pipes and refinery smokestacks. It has been linked to asthma and other respiratory illnesses.

The EPA proposal would limit ground-level ozone, the main ingredient in smog, to between 60 parts per billion and 70 parts per billion measured over an 8-hour period. The exact number will be determined later this year after hearings. The standard adopted in 2008 by the Bush Administration was 75 parts per billion.

Counties miss mark

As many as 40 California counties would fail to meet the pollution limits under the most lenient scenario, but most of them would have been out of compliance with the Bush rules, regulators said.

"We estimate that three out of four Californians are breathing air that fails to meet federal health standards," said Leo Kay, the spokesman for the California Air Resources Board, who singled out the

Central and Sacramento valleys and the Los Angeles basin as the worst polluters. "We're cursed by our geography, the population bases and the amount of vehicle miles driven in California."

Kay said that counties that fail to reduce smog from vehicles and industry will face government sanctions, most likely the loss of federal transportation dollars.

Past recommendation

President Obama indicated last year that he would scrap the smog limits set by former President George W. Bush. The proposal that the EPA came up with Thursday was what scientists had recommended to Bush in 2008, but he set the standard above what was advised, evidently as a result of protests from electric utilities and the petroleum industry.

Several environmental groups and 11 states filed a lawsuit challenging the Bush standard of 75 parts per billion.

The EPA's new regulations were hailed by environmentalists and regulatory officials despite the fact that they could cost California millions of dollars.

"I'm happy with the rules because they are consistent with what scientists and health experts are telling us," said Rolf Skar, a senior campaigner with Greenpeace. "It's a relief to once again see science-based decision making."

Industry differs

Representatives of the oil and gas industry begged to differ, saying the proposal lacked "scientific justification."

"There is absolutely no basis for EPA to propose changing the ozone standards promulgated by the EPA administrator in 2008," the American Petroleum Institute said in a statement. "To do so is an obvious politicization of the air quality standard-setting process that could mean unnecessary energy cost increases, job losses and less domestic oil and natural gas development and energy security."

Counties and states will have up to 20 years to meet the limits, depending on how severely they are out of compliance. They will have to submit plans to comply with the law by the end of 2013 or early 2014, according to the EPA.

"In spite of all the progress we've made, we still have a long way to go," Kay said. The new standards will "require those rural counties to come up with additional local smog-forming emission reductions, and it is going to require those of us who live in cities to tighten the belt even further."

Third straight Spare the Air Day declared

Chronicle Staff Report

SF Chronicle, Sunday, Jan. 10, 2010

SAN FRANCISCO -- The Bay Area's run of bad air days continues, with officials declaring a third consecutive Spare the Air Day for today.

The declaration by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District means indoor and outdoor burning is prohibited until at least midnight. The ban covers all open fires that burn wood, manufactured fire logs or other solid fuel. It applies to fireplaces, woodstoves, pellet stoves and outdoor fire pits.

The rash of winter-season Spare the Air Days - a burning ban also was in effect Tuesday - has been caused by a largely stagnant weather pattern that has seen inland areas socked in by fog at night and for much of the day.

During such cool, still conditions, the fine particulates in wood smoke can be trapped close to the ground, causing health problems for people with asthma, and lung and heart disease.

The air quality in most of the Bay Area is forecast to be unhealthy for such people today.

Changes may be in the wind, however - the National Weather Service is predicting a good chance of rain starting Monday night and continuing into Wednesday.

The burning ban is in effect for Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo and Santa Clara counties, along with southern Sonoma and southwestern Solano counties.

Cleaner port air, but how?

Legal tussles on trucker rules bedevil Los Angeles and Long Beach ports.

By Ronald D. White

L.A. Times, Saturday, Jan. 9, 2010

Not too long ago, the 10,500-acre complex at the southern tip of Los Angeles County wasn't just the home of the nation's busiest seaports, it was the graveyard where old trucks went to die.

Dented, rusting 1988-and-older rigs hauled cargo containers to and from the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, earning the harbor the nickname of "diesel death zone."

On Jan. 1, the neighboring ports cruised past a major pollution-fighting milestone, banning trucks made before 1994 and those that don't meet at least 2004 emissions standards -- trucks such as the 15-year-old Freightliner once owned by Guido Perez. The Lancaster resident now drives a 2008 ultra-low-emission Peterbilt, one of more than 6,000 new trucks brought into cargo service at the ports in the last 15 months.

"It's a beautiful truck," Perez said. "I can't even smell the exhaust."

But for all the progress since mayors Antonio Villaraigosa of Los Angeles and Bob Foster of Long Beach launched the nation's most ambitious clean-trucks program at a ceremony Oct. 1, 2008, a new lawsuit shows that hardly anyone is completely happy with how the changes are being carried out.

At the heart of the conflict is the issue of whether drivers must work for trucking companies, as the Los Angeles clean-trucks program requires, or can remain self-employed, as Long Beach's plan allows. The Los Angeles effort is seen as pro-union because working for a trucking company makes drivers more likely to be recruited by the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

The Natural Resources Defense Council and the Sierra Club recently sued Long Beach officials, accusing them of cutting a deal with the trucking industry that puts "the wolf in charge of the henhouse." They charged in Los Angeles Superior Court that Long Beach, in reaching a settlement that got it out of a lawsuit against the two ports brought by the American Trucking Assn., failed to seek public input. The settlement, the groups' lawsuit said, would leave Long Beach unable to "stop trucking companies from using dirty trucks that fail to meet environmental and safety standards."

Long Beach City Atty. Robert Shannon said municipal officials "believe these allegations have no merit."

On Monday, the American Trucking Assn. is to head to federal court seeking a summary judgment to prevent Los Angeles from executing its plan. The ATA says the Los Angeles port is violating federal deregulation laws by requiring drivers to give up independent owner-operator status and work for trucking companies, a mandate that is being phased in.

Perez, 53, is an owner-operator who says the clean-trucks program is working for him. Perez found his Peterbilt for \$80,000 after the company he drives for said it would no longer give him work if he were using his old 1995 truck.

On Oct. 1, 2008, the ports had barred all 1988 and older trucks. As of Jan. 1 this year, all 1993 and older trucks are banned. Trucks built from 1994 to 2003 will be allowed access only if equipped with verified diesel emission control retrofits. Only 2004 and younger rigs can enter without question.

Since the restrictions were set, the California Air Resources Board has adopted similar rules for all ports and railroad yards in California.

The only thing Perez finds daunting is the economy, which he says is still slower than it has been in several years. Perez's usual gig is hauling borax from Trona, Calif., for a trucking company that seems committed to getting him enough work to keep up with his \$1,600 monthly truck payment. He says it's "a lot more than my home mortgage."

But Rafael Dominguez, 31, said he has had a nightmare experience. Dominguez gave up his rig, a 1997 Volvo, after learning that a retrofit would cost more than the truck was worth. He said he worked out a "lease-to-own" deal in March of last year on a new rig bought by a local trucking company.

But Dominguez said the company, which he declined to identify, kept changing the rules on him, raising what he would have to pay for the lease, which began at \$1,640 a month. Dominguez said the company set up an unfairly competitive system under which drivers who did the most work would be allowed to pay less. In November, Dominguez walked away from what he had already paid on the lease and became an employee of another firm.

"As an independent driver, I wasn't really independent at all. I had no rights, no benefits, no paid time off. The trucking company could say 'take it or leave it' and do anything they wanted," Dominguez said.

John Holmes, deputy executive director of operations for the Port of Los Angeles, doesn't know Dominguez or his situation. But he said that the port was trying to push the industry away from a system in which drivers were compelled to "undercut one another, always trying to be \$5 cheaper than the next guy, at the expense of the environment."

Toward that end, the port shelled out \$44 million in the form of \$20,000-per-truck incentives.

"It was pretty clear to us that we were going to have to change the industry in order for this to be successful and sustainable," Holmes said.

Mayor Foster, who went out to view port operations Monday, said the Long Beach plan was "succeeding better than our best hopes" and was proof that his port "can have robust commerce and cleaner air."

Mike Fox has a different perspective. He's owner and chief executive of Fox Transportation Inc., a trucking company in Rancho Cucamonga. He's also one of the principals of the Clean Truck Coalition, a group of 10 small to medium-size family-owned companies that was among the first to apply for the incentive money from Los Angeles, ultimately buying 600 vehicles.

Fox said he wanted the L.A. and Long Beach ports to get out of their court battles and work together on a single plan. That, he said, would end the apprehension some customers feel because of the disputes.

Without a single plan, some businesses might go to other ports where the situation is less confusing.

"Our businesses work with both Los Angeles and Long Beach," Fox said. "We are the home teams, and what we want to see is more business at the ports."

New Franklin County feedlot nearly ready to open

Capital Press, Sunday, Jan. 10, 2010

TRI-CITIES, Wash. (AP) -- A feedlot operator has nearly completed work on a new feedlot 25 miles northeast of Pasco that would hold 30,000 head of cattle.

Easterday Ranches is continuing work on the \$11 million project despite the opposition of neighbors and environmentalists concerned about air and water pollution.

Cody Easterday told The Tri-City Herald the feedlot has all the required permits and will exceed state standards.

A group of nearby property owners called Five Corners Family Farmers is appealing the Easterday air quality permit, but the appeal to the Pollution Control Hearings Board isn't scheduled until July.

A water permit lawsuit filed by the neighbors and environmental groups is pending in Franklin County Superior Court.

3 NM gas plants to add pollution controls in deal

The Associated Press

In the Contra Costa Times & Tri-Valley Herald, Saturday, Jan. 9, 2010

SANTA FE, N.M.—Three southeastern New Mexico natural gas plants will spend more than \$33 million to upgrade pollution control equipment under a settlement with state regulators.

Targa Midstream Services and Versado Gas Processors also will pay about \$1.5 million in penalties for air pollution violations at their Eunice, Monument and Saunders plants.

The settlement announced by the state Environment Department on Friday requires cuts in carbon dioxide, sulfur dioxide and other pollutants.

The companies will drill acid gas injection wells at the Eunice and Monument plants to cut flaring of toxic gases in all but emergency situations.

Environment Department Secretary Ron Curry says eight of the state's 13 sour gas plants now operate under agreements requiring installation of new pollution control equipment.

PGE begins push for new power plants

Capital Press, Saturday, Jan. 9, 2010

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) -- Oregon's largest utility is beginning its push to build a new gas-fired power plant in the northcentral part of the state, one of a host of investments Portland General Electric plans in the next five years.

The utility hopes to address an energy supply shortfall, transmission bottlenecks and regulatory requirements.

Next to its coal-fired power plant in Boardman, east of Mount Hood, PGE hopes to construct a gas plant capable of generating some 400 megawatts of electricity.

Also planned is a 100 to 200 megawatt single-cycle turbine to fill in peak needs that the company hopes to build adjacent to its existing Port Westward gas plant in Clatskanie, west of Portland.

The Oregonian says the utility hasn't developed cost estimates for either plant, which would come on line between 2012 and 2015. But PGE has a \$2 billion slate of investments it is discussing with regulators.

Since its Trojan nuclear plant was closed in 1993, PGE has built only two power plants. It now faces pressure to close or heavily modify the coal-fired plant near Boardman.

Also looming is the expiration of long-term contracts for some 300 megawatts of low-cost power it has been buying from municipally owned hydroelectric dams on the mid-Columbia River.

To renegotiate some of those contracts, PGE will be competing with other utilities and with computer-server operations that companies such as Google have built in this area to take advantage of the region's cheap power.

In all, Portland General Electric forecasts it will need an additional 1,700 megawatts of generation capacity to meet its customers' peak demand by 2015.

The company's plan relies on energy efficiency first, but also includes an array of investments.

"You can add up the price tag and it's a lot of money, but it's still aiming to be the most cost-effective combination of resources," PGE spokesman Steve Corson said. "The growth in demand has to be met."

The utility is spending \$750 million to expand its Biglow Canyon Wind Farm in central Oregon.

In addition to the new gas-fired power plants, the company plans to spend as much as \$650 million on mandated pollution controls at its Boardman coal plant, and between \$600 million and \$800 million on a new transmission line to ship power from the Boardman area to the Willamette Valley.

To meet state renewable energy mandates, the company will also need to build or buy more renewable power, such as from wind. If the choice is to build, that could easily add more than a half billion dollars to its capital expenses by 2015.

The investment plans "are significant, and that's why we have a real concern with PGE being able to demonstrate that it can manage its costs effectively," said Bob Jenks, executive director of the Citizens' Utility Board of Oregon.

Gas industry says trying to reduce smog in Wyoming

By MEAD GRUVER, Associated Press Writer

Washington Post, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Monday, Jan. 11, 2010

Cheyenne, Wyo. (AP) --The gas industry says it has taken steps to reduce smog in western Wyoming, but whether that will be enough to comply with a proposed new federal smog rule remains to be seen.

Thousands of new natural gas wells have created smog problems in parts of western Wyoming over the last five years. The problem becomes more pronounced each January through April because of weather conditions.

Last winter, the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality twice issued advisories warning that conditions were ideal for high levels of ground-level ozone, the main ingredient in smog. The year before, the department issued five advisories.

Ozone levels in the Upper Green River Basin didn't exceed the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency standard of 75 parts per billion in 2009 — the forecasts didn't come true — but ozone levels did exceed the standard a few times in 2008, said department spokesman Keith Guille.

The peculiarity of smog in a remote basin in the wide-blue-sky West didn't escape EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson when she visited the gas patch last May.

"It's hard to believe that this is a place that has had some problems," she remarked.

The Department of Environmental Quality has yet to issue a smog advisory this winter, although Jackson's announcement Thursday that the EPA is considering a limit between 60 and 70 parts per billion presages additional expense for industry to control pollution.

"Our industry — industry in general — is a big target. That said, we take this very seriously," said Randy Teeuwen, spokesman for EnCana Inc., a major Wyoming gas developer. "Our aim certainly is to be a good environmental steward."

Dave Finley, administrator of the Department of Environmental Quality's Air Quality Division, spent much of Friday in meetings to discuss the proposed EPA smog rule with department staff, Guille said.

Not that the announcement took industry or regulators by surprise. Last year, the state Environmental Quality Council denied a request by environmentalists to set a state ozone limit of 65 parts per billion.

One reason for the denial was the expected tougher EPA rule, said Wyoming Outdoor Council attorney Bruce Pendery.

"This new EPA rule will of course apply nationwide and therefore in Wyoming. It will in all likelihood be very, very close to what we asked for and possibly exactly the same," Pendery said.

He praised the proposed rule as consistent with what independent scientists have recommended.

The gas industry has been working for years to reduce smog, Teeuwen said. It has cut emissions of nitrogen oxide — a contributor to smog — by converting rig engines to run on natural gas instead of diesel fuel, he said.

"We have significantly reduced — virtually eliminated — the NOx we emit into the atmosphere," he said.

EnCana also has consolidated equipment to reduce pollution sources and improved equipment to reduce emissions of volatile organic compounds, which also can create smog.

One volatile organic compound is methane. Teeuwen said EnCana would rather pump the methane it produces into pipelines than release the valuable gas into the atmosphere.

Teaching Green, Beyond Recycling

By Mireya Navarro and Sindya N. Bhanoo

N.Y. Times, Monday, Jan. 11, 2010

Jose Chirino, a 10th grader in Brooklyn with shoulder-length hair and a thin mustache, says flatly that his high school was his last choice.

"They're experimenting on us," he said, recalling his first impression of the Green School in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, which laces an environmental theme into most of its coursework.

Jennifer Aucedo, 17, was similarly wary, given that she wanted to be a singer and never saw herself as a "science person."

"I thought it was going to be about the inside of trees," she said.

But the two reluctant recruits, who had both failed to get into the high schools they favored, said they were won over after realizing that the school casts a wide net.

Rather than simply covering predictable topics like recycling and tree planting, they say, it has alerted them to problems like sooty air and negative media representations of their neighborhoods.

"Green is not just the environment," Jennifer said. "It's politics, government, social justice."

"We do a lot of things other schools are not doing," said Jose, 15. "I feel like we're doing something important."

While plenty of city schools, from elementary to secondary, teach students about environmental issues like endangered species or global warming, places like the Green School put an overwhelming emphasis on civic involvement.

The students are encouraged to delve into local issues that may affect them and their families, like contamination in waterways like the Gowanus Canal, water quality or the razing of low-scale housing.

"You can't have a kid in a violent neighborhood and say, 'Let's talk about the polar bear,'" said Karali Pitzele, one of the school's two co-directors.

Across the nation, the range of green schools form a fledgling network, with some of them benefiting from state grants and mandates to incorporate environmental education into the curriculum.

They have found eager partners in groups like the Sierra Club and the National Wildlife Federation, which provide lesson plans or money for field trips, and in private and government agencies that are making concerted environmental efforts in communities and cities.

Alison Suffet Diaz, founder of the Environmental Charter High School in Los Angeles, says the focus on environment hits particularly close to home in poor communities that she says are disproportionately affected by problems like contamination from industrial sites.

If grass-roots change is needed to address those issues, she said, "it can't just be a rich person's desire to be green."

Still, Randall E. Solomon, executive director of the New Jersey Sustainable State Institute at Rutgers University, which guides New Jersey towns on environmental efforts, said that green schools were not just a niche phenomenon for the poor or for the wealthy. "It's also mainstream public schools that are taking this on," he said.

It is hard to pin down how many private, and charter and traditional public schools nationwide have adopted an environmental theme. Many are new; some have a low profile. They do not share uniform standards that define them as green.

The Green Charter Schools Network, based in Madison, Wis., says it has counted about 200 green charter schools nationwide.

In New York, the green school phenomenon feeds into an effort to break up the city's enormous high schools into smaller learning settings, a centerpiece of Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg's overhaul of the school system.

At least 11 traditional and charter green schools at varying grade levels have opened in the last six years, officials at the city's Department of Education say, while cautioning that they were counting only those that identified themselves by name as "green" or "environmental."

Many of the schools have yet to graduate their first class, and their progress reports show grades from A to D, school officials said.

The Growing Up Green Charter School, an elementary school in Long Island City, Queens, opened in September with one kindergarten and one first grade class. It plans to expand gradually through grade five.

On a recent afternoon, in a classroom that is also home to an army of compost bin worms and a bearded dragon named Daphne, two dozen first-grade students thrust their hands into bags of potting soil while taking turns planting squash seeds, beans and corn kernels in plastic containers.

The task at hand was to answer the question of the day, posed by a sign in the back of the classroom: “How do we get our food?”

But the real point, said the children’s teacher, Michelle Robles, was to help them understand how the local environment affects food choices, and the need to tend to the soil, air, water and plants.

“If you take care of plants, they can grow and grow so we can cook them,” Alayla Mack, 6, said after the lesson.

Some green schools in New York chiefly emphasize the environmental sciences or teach skills that will prepare students for careers in renewable energy or other pillars of a greener economy.

The Urban Assembly School for Green Careers, a high school on Manhattan’s Upper West Side, opened this year with a ninth-grade class and a focus on job skills needed for the design and operation of energy-efficient buildings.

Gregg Bethel, who heads the Office of Postsecondary Pathways and Planning in the city’s Department of Education, said the school sprang out of specific efforts to match secondary education to labor trends and to the city’s own goal of attracting more green industry.

Students learn hands-on skills like installing insulation and solar panels in preparation for entering the work force after graduation or pursuing college degrees in fields like engineering.

“We’ve got some schools investing in the skills kids need to compete,” Mr. Bethel said. “No way is this a fad.”

At the more civic-oriented Green School in Brooklyn, teachers send the students out into their neighborhoods to record public service announcements and videos about smoking and air pollution. They also walk the streets to map trees and trash cans, then incorporate their findings into mural sketches for geometry class.

In a recent class, students watched trailers for the films “2012,” about humans struggling to survive a global apocalypse, and “Precious,” about an abused teenager who finds a form of salvation in learning to read and write. The goal was to analyze the media messages telegraphed by the trailers before starting on their own videos.

At elementary schools, teachers in the lower grades emphasize hands-on projects like building habitats for specific environments, like teepees, or mapping the path of trash from their classroom bin to a landfill.

“It helps them learn early how their choices make an impact,” said Barbara Weber, 43, whose 6-year-old son, Lawless Morse, is in first grade at Growing Up Green in Long Island City.

Ms. Weber, a textile designer from Jackson Heights, Queens, said she had already noticed some changes in Lawless. After a week of studying habitats, she said, he asked why many homes in their neighborhood were made of brick. He also peppers her with questions about how and where various animals live.

Lawless, wearing neatly pressed khakis and a polo shirt with an embroidered “Growing Up Green” logo on a recent morning, said he really liked school.

But as it turns out, a movie — “Wall-E,” about a garbage-collecting robot on an Earth bereft of inhabitants — seems to have made an even bigger impression on him.

“All the people were gone because they littered so much,” he said. “That’s why we reduce, reuse and recycle.”

Western Pa. county to keep pollution program

The Associated Press

In the Contra Costa Times & Tri-Valley Herald, Monday, Jan. 11, 2010

PITTSBURGH—Allegheny County's chief executive has accepted a task force recommendation that the county keep its pioneering air pollution control program but make significant changes in its operations.

Allegheny County Chief Executive Dan Onorato ordered a full-scale review in 2008 to determine whether the program should be disbanded and its duties handed over to the state. Businesses had accused the county of taking too long to issue permits and said its tougher regulations hindered efforts to attract new industry.

The report to be submitted Wednesday recommends "fundamental changes" in the 51-year-old Air Bureau's monitoring and enforcement, permit and appeals processes.

The Group Against Smog and Pollution criticized the proposed changes, saying they would increase the regulatory burden, drain resources from the program and prompt lawsuits.

NorthWestern: Frenchtown plant could burn biomass

Matt Gouras, Associated Press

Capital Press, Sunday, Jan. 10, 2010

HELENA, Mont. (AP) -- NorthWestern Energy told state lawmakers Friday that a Frenchtown linerboard plant soon to be shuttered by Smurfit-Stone Container could make a good location for a biomass energy production facility -- but no firm plans are in place.

Northwestern Energy said entering talks about such a plan with Smurfit-Stone would be premature until that company emerges from bankruptcy.

"We have contacted Smurfit and told them we would be interested in having a conversation with them about that facility," company lobbyist John Fitzpatrick told the legislative Environmental Quality Council.

But getting the plant would just be the first of many big issues to deal with, he said. A biomass plant would burn wood to make electricity using a conventional boiler system. It would be used as a source of primary power for NorthWestern, and would not be suitable as "firming" power for other alternative energy sources like solar and wind, Fitzpatrick testified.

Fitzpatrick said the U.S. Forest Service would have to allow a lot more logging of beetle killed trees in order to ensure enough fuel to keep a large plant running. NorthWestern estimates that as much as 4,000 acres a year would be needed to supply such a facility.

"Something is going to have to happen with this process so you can get quantity for fuel supply," he told the legislative oversight panel. "They are not doing a tremendous amount of logging at this time."

Other types of fuel, such as agriculture waste, would not work because the transportation costs would be too high, he said.

But he told the EQC that NorthWestern plans to pursue the idea as a way to get another sizable power plant in the state.

U.S. Sen. Jon Tester has said that wood that would have gone to Smurfit's pulp mill could be used as an energy source.

Tester is trying to advance a plan to mandate a lot more logging in Montana, and a lot more cutting of beetle-killed trees. It is touted as a careful compromise between the logging industry which would get the trees and environmentalists who would secure more declared wilderness area with the deal.

Smurfit-Stone Container's pending closure of the plant, which employs 417, will be phased in over the rest of the month.

Smurfit-Stone Container Corp. first announced on Dec. 14 that it was closing the Frenchtown plant as the company sought to cut costs and emerge from bankruptcy protection.

Pope denounces failure to forge new climate treaty

By Nicole Winfield- Associated Press Writer

In the San Diego Union Tribune and Merced Sun-Star, Monday, Jan. 11, 2010

VATICAN CITY -- Pope Benedict XVI denounced the failure of world leaders to agree to a new climate change treaty in Copenhagen last month, saying Monday that world peace depends on safeguarding God's creation.

He issued the admonition in a speech to ambassadors accredited to the Vatican, an annual appointment during which the pontiff reflects on issues the Vatican wants to highlight to the diplomatic corps.

Benedict has been dubbed the "green pope" for his increasingly vocal concern about protect the environment, an issue he has reflected on in encyclicals, during foreign trips and most recently in his annual peace message. Under Benedict's watch, the Vatican has installed photovoltaic cells on its main auditorium to convert sunlight into electricity and has joined a reforestation project aimed at offsetting its CO2 emissions.

For the pontiff, it's a moral issue: Church teaching holds that man must respect creation because it's destined for the benefit of humanity's future.

In his speech, the pontiff criticized the "economic and political resistance" to fighting environmental degradation that was exemplified in the negotiations to draft a new climate treaty at last month's summit in Copenhagen.

Officials from 193 countries met at the summit, which ended Dec. 19 having failed to produce a successor treaty to the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. It produced instead a nonbinding accord that included few concrete steps to combat global warming.

The Copenhagen summit did set up the first significant program of ensuring aid to help poorer nations cope with the effects of a changing climate. But while the accord urged deeper cuts in emissions of carbon dioxide and other gases blamed for global warming, it did nothing to demand them.

"I trust that in the course of this year ... it will be possible to reach an agreement for effectively dealing with this question," Benedict said.

Benedict didn't name countries responsible for bogging down negotiations, but he listed as the victims island nations at risk of rising seas and Africa, where the battle for natural resources, increased desertification and over-exploitation of land has resulted in wars.

"To cultivate peace, one must protect creation!" Benedict told the ambassadors, many of whom wore their national dress or medal-draped formal attire for the audience in the frescoed Sala Regia of the Vatican's apostolic palace.

The pontiff said the same "self-centered and materialistic" way of thinking that sparked the worldwide financial meltdown was also endangering creation. To combat it will require a new way of thinking and a new lifestyle - and an acknowledgment that the question is a moral one, he said.

"The protection of creation is not principally a response to an aesthetic need, but much more to a moral need, inasmuch as nature expresses a plan of love and truth which is prior to us and which comes from God," he said.

To illustrate his point, the German-born pope recalled the experiences of eastern Europe under the "materialistic and atheistic regimes" of the former Soviet bloc.

"Was it not easy to see the great harm which an economic system lacking any reference to the truth about man had done not only to the dignity and freedom of individuals and peoples, but to nature itself, by polluting soil, water and air?" he asked.

"The denial of God distorts the freedom of the human person, yet it also devastates creation."

Benedict's theme was similar to the message he issued for the church's World Day of Peace, on Jan. 1, where he argued that climate change and natural catastrophes threaten people's rights to life, food, health - and ultimately peace.

And it was reminiscent of the exhortation to world leaders that he issued ahead of Copenhagen summit, on Dec. 6, in which he called for them to "identify actions that respect creation and promote sustainable development," noting that they would have to adopt "sober and responsible lifestyles" to do so.

"In this sense, to guarantee full success at the conference, I invite all those people of good will to respect God's laws of nature and rediscover the moral dimension of human life," he said at the time.

[Fresno Bee commentary, Saturday, Jan. 9, 2010:](#)

Wood fires don't belong in national parks

By Richard Bair

Even on "no burn days," we have fires in our national parks. You see, the style points would drop without those fireplaces roaring. It just wouldn't be the same, so the fireplaces get stoked and lit, and the lodges have their fires. It all seems proper and good with the cold and snow outside. But it's not.

The San Joaquin Valley is a very smoggy place. We all know this. There are days where it's downright nasty. Then there are the days when it's unhealthy.

Soon, we'll have days that are officially "dangerous." Just to the east of the Valley are the beautiful Sierra Nevada Mountains, the home to Yosemite, Kings Canyon and Sequoia national parks. These are three of the smoggiest national parks in America.

In the summer, if you stand at a point above 9,000 feet in these parks and look west toward the Valley, it looks like a vast brown ocean lapping at your feet. The views are obscured deep into the mountains now, much worse than only 15 years ago.

We complain about the problem, we try various things to correct or at least slow the growth of the problem, but the problem continues.

And we have fires in the parks. We pump yet more smoke into the air. Every day, in every fireplace. For ambience. For style points.

Perhaps we should re-think this? It seems a no-brainer to me. In the smoggiest national parks in the nation, and in the clean air ones too, let's stop burning wood in those fireplaces. Let's change them to gas or eliminate them all together.

Mostly, the lodges in our parks are exempt to the regulations that make burning on a "no burn day" a crime. There are two ways to be exempt. One is if your wood-burning device is your only source of heat.

The other is if you have no natural gas service. The parks fall into the latter category. They're usually either electric or propane heated. It's legal, but wrong.

There's no need for the fires. The lodges are nice and warm without them. For ambience's sake, a gas fireplace would be fine. But please, please stop burning wood in the national parks.

All over the Valley people are restricted in their burning, in part to help keep the air clean and plant life healthy in those parks. The least the concessionaires in the parks can do is reciprocate. It seems silly for Joe Smith in Visalia to stop burning to help them out while they have fires themselves.

So I call out to you concessionaires to stop burning wood in the lodges in the national parks. Put in gas fireplaces. Do it now. Please. While you're doing that, feel a little shame for blowing it for such a long time when you're so good about being green in most other ways.

Finally, to the National Park Service I say that you are the guardians. You're ultimately responsible. Where many things happen that are out of your control, this isn't one of them.

You have concession specialists who inspect everything from food service to how the beds are made. You approve the prices and enforce the laws and regulations. You can and long since should have set a higher standard. You can fix this simple problem. You're invaluable when it comes to the protection of these beautiful places. Our gratitude to you for that is immense. Please help with this.

Since it's a no-brainer, I'll thank you in advance.

Richard Bair has lived, worked and played in Sequoia National Park for many years.

[Merced Sun-Star, Commentary, Monday, January 11, 2010](#)

Score two for the environment

McClatchy-Tribune News Service

The following editorial appeared in the Los Angeles Times on Friday, Jan. 8:

After eight long years during which regulators pillaged the environment rather than protecting it, there's a clean breeze wafting out of Washington. Last week, the Obama administration took key steps toward reversing two of President George W. Bush's more egregious assaults on science, conservation and public health.

Remember Tim DeChristopher? He was the courageous University of Utah student who, in December 2008, thwarted the Bush administration's 11th-hour attempt to auction off pristine parcels of Utah's red-rock desert for oil and gas development by submitting bogus bids. DeChristopher was partly vindicated when a federal judge later blocked the land leases because the Bureau of Land Management hadn't bothered to evaluate the impact of drilling on air quality and prehistoric artworks. That prompted a review of BLM procedures, which culminated Wednesday when Interior Secretary Ken Salazar announced a series of reforms to ensure that such fiascoes aren't repeated.

Under the changes, there will be more government and public review of proposed leases and a better planning process. Congressional Republicans and the oil industry are crying foul, saying Salazar's initiatives will create delays and lead to higher energy prices. But it's hard to believe things could get worse for the industry than they are now; the Bush administration's laissez-faire attitude led to multiple court challenges of leasing decisions. In essence, the failure of federal regulators to do their job forced the courts to do it for them, costing the industry millions in legal fees and worsening delays.

In even better news for everyone who breathes, the Environmental Protection Agency on Thursday proposed a stricter federal standard for smog. In 2008, the EPA's science panel had unanimously recommended an air standard of less than 70 parts per billion of ozone, a pollutant that has been linked to respiratory conditions and premature death. Scientists also proposed a secondary standard during growing seasons to protect crops, whose growth is retarded by ozone – the main ingredient in smog. Yet after direct intervention from Bush, the secondary standard was rejected and the primary standard was set at 75 parts per billion, too high to protect human health. After reviewing the evidence, EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson is now proposing to set the standards that the agency had originally endorsed. Meeting the tougher rules will be expensive, but not as costly as treating the medical conditions linked to smog.

The score: Public recreational, cultural, health and conservation interests 2; polluters 0. The game has changed.

[MediaNews editorial, Monday, Jan. 11, 2010:](#)

More money for port truckers but still far too little

As some had prayed he would, Oakland Mayor Ron Dellums has come to the aid of hundreds of truck drivers who stand to lose their livelihoods because of strict new state air regulations that took effect Jan. 1.

Dellums has helped to secure another \$11 million to help truck drivers purchase filters that are now required for any vehicles manufactured between 1994 and 2003 that deliver cargo to California ports.

The mayor is to be applauded for helping to bring about a more humane outcome to a crisis that resulted as a result of the stricter air quality standards.

The California Air Resources Board had the right idea when it took action to reduce truck emissions, which pose a greater risk of cancer, asthma and other respiratory illnesses for those who live near ports, as well as for the truckers themselves.

Officials mandated that costly new filters be installed to drastically reduce dangerous emissions. Trucks 16 years and older were banned altogether, effective last Friday.

The problem was that a state fund set up to help truckers make the expensive retrofits to their vehicles, was never enough to meet demand. The \$22 million in state and federal money ran out, leaving about 1,000 independent truckers out in the cold. As we previously stated on this page, we feel it is unfair that air quality officials continued to accept applications from desperate truckers trying to comply with the Jan. 1 deadline when they had to have known by then that there was no more money left for retrofits.

Air quality officials have said that those who couldn't afford to buy a \$16,000 filter or those whose trucks were too old to qualify for a filter — requiring them to have to purchase a new \$100,000 truck — would simply have to find some other way to make a living.

Mayor Dellums recognized that this callous approach would create an economic catastrophe for truckers and their families. Dellums has said that he will continue to work with local, state and federal partners to help get more funding for the truckers.

The new money that Dellums has helped to secure is certainly welcome news. It allows individual truckers to apply for grants of \$5,000 for filters.

The problem is that the truckers only have two weeks to make up the difference — a huge gap for people who are already in many instances financially stressed. What truckers desperately need are loans. Yet the Catch-22 is, many don't have collateral.

Dellums has said that he will try to push banks to make loans to distressed truckers so that they may retrofit their vehicles.

We wish him success, but given the current state of affairs, it's difficult to be optimistic.

[N.Y. Times commentary, Sunday, Jan. 10, 2010:](#)

Of Individual Liberty and Cap and Trade

By Robert H. Frank

Some people oppose measures to limit greenhouse gases because they believe that global warming is a myth. These denialists may have a little extra spring in their step during the current cold snap, but their influence has been steadily waning.

The biggest remaining obstacle is disagreement over the legitimacy of proposed solutions. At the heart of attempts to curb carbon dioxide emissions are two related proposals: taxation of those emissions and a system of tradable emission permits, also known as cap and trade. Both have been attacked as unacceptable restrictions on individual liberty. The attacks have come from both sides of the political aisle, but have been pressed with particular insistence by conservatives and libertarians.

It's a puzzling objection, because both proposals are squarely consistent with the framework advocated by conservatives' patron saint regarding matters related to private actions that harm others. That would be Ronald H. Coase, professor emeritus at the University of Chicago and the 1991 Nobel laureate in economics, who will turn 100 this year.

Mr. Coase (the name rhymes with "dose") summarized his framework in a 1960 paper titled "The Problem of Social Cost," which has become one of the most-often-cited economics papers ever published. He stressed that actions with harmful side effects — negative externalities, in economists' parlance — are quintessentially practical problems. They are best solved, he argued, not by chanting slogans about rights and freedoms, but by steering mitigation efforts to those who can perform them most efficiently.

The pre-Coase tradition was to view externalities in terms of perpetrators and victims. The owner of a factory that emitted smoke was a perpetrator, for example, and those who were harmed by it were victims. The conventional view was that perpetrators should be restrained from harming victims.

Mr. Coase's profound insight was that this view ignored the inherently reciprocal nature of externalities. Smoke harms others, yes. But preventing smoke causes harm, too, because smokestack filters are costly. Our shared interest, he reasoned, was to use the least costly means of reducing the relevant damage.

In some cases, that might involve filtering out much of the smoke. But in others, the cheapest solution might be for parties downwind to relocate. Mr. Coase argued that whenever it was practical for affected

parties to forge private agreements among themselves, they would have strong incentive to use the least costly solution to the problem.

His paper provoked a firestorm of criticism, based on the impression that he was claiming that government didn't need to regulate activities that cause harm to others. As a closer reading makes clear, however, this could not have been his view, especially with respect to activities like global pollution.

Some pollution damage is localized. But when it comes to global warming, people cannot escape damage by simply moving upwind. Because of the wide variety of activities involved and the large number of people affected, there is no practical way to negotiate private solutions. In such cases, Mr. Coase suggested, government regulators should try to mimic solutions that people would have adopted on their own if negotiations had been practical.

Climate scientists agree that the cheapest way to combat global warming is to curb carbon dioxide emissions. And economists agree that the cheapest way to do that is by changing emitters' incentives, either by taxing emissions or requiring emission permits.

I chatted with Mr. Coase briefly last week, and he is still following these issues. He agreed that both taxes and tradable permits satisfy his criterion of concentrating damage abatement with those who can accomplish it at least cost. Those with inexpensive ways of reducing emissions will find it attractive to adopt them, thus avoiding carbon dioxide taxes or the need to purchase costly permits. Others will find it cheaper to pay taxes or buy permits.

Although both proposals pass muster within the Coase framework, conservatives remain almost unanimously opposed to the cap-and-trade proposal approved last year in the House and currently under discussion in the Senate. Much of this opposition is rooted in a passionate distaste for "social engineering," which, according to the conservative columnist Henry Lamb, "always ends in disaster."

But social engineering is just another term for collective action to change individual incentives. And unconditional rejection of such action is flatly inconsistent with the Coase framework that conservatives have justifiably celebrated.

According to Conservapedia.com, an online encyclopedia with a conservative orientation, Mr. Coase's "extraordinary insight was that the free market always reaches the most efficient level of productive activity, in the absence of transaction costs." Maybe, but as Mr. Coase himself also recognized, transaction costs are often prohibitive, and in such cases all bets regarding free-market efficiency are off. When negotiation is impractical, collective action can often improve matters.

In the case of global warming, markets fail because we don't take into account the costs that our carbon dioxide emissions impose on others. The least intrusive way to have us weigh those costs is by taxing emissions, or by requiring tradable emissions permits. Either step would move us closer to the conservative/libertarian gold standard — namely, the outcome we'd see if there were perfect information and no obstacles to free exchange.

The Conservapedia.com entry on Mr. Coase continues, "To this day, liberals fail to give him the recognition he earned." A fair point, perhaps. But while Mr. Coase has often been skeptical of government intervention, he is no ideologue. Conservatives, too, have sold him short.

Robert H. Frank is an economics professor at the Johnson Graduate School of Management at Cornell University.

[USA Today Commentary, Friday, Jan. 8, 2010:](#)

Climate change: A civil rights issue for blacks

By Julianne Malveaux

Climate change is more than an environmental issue. It is a human rights and economic justice issue. Why? Because though climate change impacts all of us, different nations, and different communities within nations, experience the effects of climate change in varying ways, some worse than others.

This point was clearly made at last month's U.N. climate change conference in Copenhagen, where it quickly became evident that the rich and powerful nations — particularly the U.S. and members of the European Union — dictate the debate at the expense of poorer countries. That needs to change.

I was part of the only African-American delegation at the conference as a member of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies' Commission to Engage African Americans on Climate Change. We were there because African Americans have a dog in this fight. We produce less greenhouse gas emissions (about 20% less than other Americans, according to a Congressional Black Caucus Foundation study), but we bear a greater burden in terms of pollution and climate change.

Robert Bullard, who runs an environmental justice program at Clark Atlanta University, has noted that the adverse impacts of climate change fall most heavily on people of color who are concentrated in urban centers, coastal regions and areas where the air quality is poor.

After Copenhagen, the U.S. has committed to reduce emission levels and has begun the slow transition to a low-carbon economy. But these policies are likely to increase the cost of gasoline and electricity, which disproportionately impact people of color. The non-partisan Center for Budget and Policy Priorities says that even a modest 15% reduction in greenhouse-gas emissions would cost the poorest fifth of Americans an average of about \$750 a year per household. While both the Senate and House energy bills include proposals to offset costs to help the poor, the aid allotted is less than is necessary to fully protect low-income consumers.

According to a Joint Center poll on global warming, 54% of African Americans considered it a major problem and 24% a moderate problem. Awareness, however, has not resulted in activism.

If African Americans are not fully engaged in the climate justice movement, and if the differential impacts of new policies are not explored, the poor will pay from their pocketbooks and with their health. That is why climate change is not just an environmental issue, but an important civil rights issue for people of color.

Julianne Malveaux is president of Bennett College for Women in Greensboro, N.C.

[Contra Costa Times commentary, Saturday, Jan. 9, 2010:](#)

Do we really need to snitch on our neighbors to Spare the Air?

By Tom Barnidge

My neighbor Woody said he had a blast on Christmas. As soon as he finished his first cup of coffee, he grabbed a notepad and hopped in his car. Within 90 minutes, he'd jotted down seven addresses where smoke was rising from fireplace chimneys.

"There's nothing like a Spare the Air day," he said, eyes twinkling. "I feel like Sherlock Holmes solving a crime. I love tracking down those no-good, wood-burning lawbreakers and turning 'em in."

He did a lot better than his brother, Asher, who lives a few miles away. It took him four hours and a half-tank of gas to identify three suspects.

"And one of those was just a guy smoking a turkey, so that didn't count," Woody said. "You can't bust people for cooking outdoors, although we both hope that rule is changed."

Woody says he owes a tremendous debt to the Bay Area Air Quality Management District for creating this game. The agency sets the no-burn days and fields the complaints, but anybody who wants to play Turn In Your Neighbor can participate.

"When I used to rat on kids in grade school, everybody called me a tattletale," he said. "Now I'm a health advocate."

OK, none of that really happened. But it's not too far removed from reality.

More than 1,200 complaints have been filed this winter — Alameda, Napa, Marin and Contra Costa counties rank 1 through 4 in snitching — and somewhere, George Orwell smiles. Neighbors ratting out neighbors. Friends turning on friends. Smokey Bear becoming Smokey Informant.

To be fair, public complaints are only one means by which the air-quality agency polices smoke — it has 60 inspectors for nine Bay Area counties — and its concerns extend well beyond wood-smoke particulates. It also monitors industrial emissions, automotive exhaust, greenhouse gases, anything foul in the air.

But the neighborhood snitch program easily ranks first in controversy.

"Yes, I know," sighed Jack Broadbent, the agency's chief executive. "It is part of our overall program, but we don't rely on it heavily. It certainly isn't the foundation of the program."

That's a good thing, judging by its popularity. When the Times recently surveyed visitors to its Web site to see if they would turn in a neighbor on Christmas, 86 percent of more than 900 respondents said no, and many added stinging commentary.

"Today, it's snitch on your neighbor for burning wood in a fireplace. Tomorrow, it's snitch on your neighbor for smoking around the house."

"What kind of country are we turning into where our officials are asking us to turn in our neighbors?"

"America is turning into a socialist country."

Broadbent would prefer to steer the conversation away from the spy game and on to airborne health dangers. He explained that on cold, wind-free days, when a thermal inversion system prevents the dissipation of wood smoke, the fine particles in the air produce breathing hazards comparable to diesel exhaust.

Generally, those conditions arise only about a dozen times each fall and winter. (To his dismay, two were Thanksgiving and Christmas.) And when someone receives a warning notice — a second violation brings a \$400 fine — most violators are responsive.

But that doesn't mean the rule has been well received. Some residents want to know whom to blame (the Legislature). Others ask how much more intrusive government agencies will become (as much as possible is our guess).

"Overwhelmingly, people did not like to be told not to burn wood on Christmas," Broadbent said. "I understand the program is not popular. But in the end I think it's the right thing to do."

Catharine Ahr, a Lafayette homemaker, is among the many who disagree.

"It seems, bit by bit, we are being told what we can and cannot do," she said, "and we're losing our liberties. I think these government agencies have to justify their existence, and one way they do is by flexing their power. That legitimizes their existence.

"Most people have the common sense to look outside, and if it's an overcast day, not have a fire."

Broadbent said it's because a voluntary program didn't work that legislation was enacted. When there was a rule with teeth, the whistle-blowers puckered up.

Wrote one reader on the Times Web site: "Soon they will want you to turn in your neighbors for leaving their porch light on while they're away because they're killing the Earth with an incandescent bulb."

That's fine by Woody. He can hardly wait.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Sunday, Jan. 10, 2010:](#)

Change no-burn rules

The no-burn day needs improvising. Most residents who use their fireplaces for warmth are retired people, since the rest of us are working during the day. I'm sure that those few people burning their fireplace does not affect our air either way. The no-burn day should be mainly for farmers who are burning large amounts of debris, not the average homeowner trying to warm their home. Maybe they need to have gas-powered yardblowers that all the gardeners use during those days. Put a stop to them, and maybe you'll see a difference in the air.

My dad burns his wood stove to heat the house. His heater works, but being on a fixed income he saves money by using his fireplace. When there is a no-burn day, he does not burn even though I tell him go for it. So his house stays cold those days.

Lift the ban for homeowners using their fireplace on no-burn days, please! It doesn't make a bit of difference!

Patrick Martinez, Fresno

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses US strengthens the norms against air pollution. For more information on this Spanish clip, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

EU endurece normas contra contaminación

Millonarias normas contra el esmog

The Associated Press

Univision, Monday, January 11, 2010

WASHINGTON, D.C. - La Agencia Protectora del Medio Ambiente, EPA por sus siglas en inglés, propuso endurecer los límites a las emisiones de esmog, reemplazando los establecidos por el anterior gobierno, adoptados pese a ciertas recomendaciones científicas.

Menos esmog, más salud

Los nuevos límites harán seguramente que centenares de condados sean incluidos en la lista de infractores de las normas, por lo que tendrán que adoptar normas adicionales para combatir la contaminación ambiental o encararán sanciones gubernamentales, seguramente mediante la pérdida de subvenciones para el mantenimiento de las carreteras.

Las nuevas normas costarán decenas de miles de millones de dólares, aunque a la postre podrían ahorrar miles de millones en visitas a las salas de urgencias, muertes prematuras y absentismo laboral y escolar, según la EPA.

Los condados y los estados dispondrán de 20 años para adoptar los nuevos límites, dependiendo de su incumplimiento actual. Tendrán que presentar planes a fin de alcanzar los nuevos objetivos para el 2013 o principios del 2014.

Los límites fueron recomendados por los científicos durante el anterior gobierno. Empero, el entonces presidente George W. Bush intervino personalmente y estableció nuevas normas menos rígidas tras las protestas de las empresas generadoras de electricidad y otras industrias. Con todo, las normas adoptadas por Bush fueron más rígidas que las de 1997.

Los estadounidenses respirarán mejor

La administradora de la EPA, Lisa Jackson, dijo el jueves en una declaración que en esta ocasión ha imperado la ciencia.

"La EPA intenta proteger a los estadounidenses de uno de los más persistentes y generalizados contaminantes que encaramos", dijo Jackson. "Hacer esto mediante los mejores métodos científicos para endurecer estas normas es algo que estaba pendiente desde hace mucho tiempo y ayudará a millones de estadounidenses a respirar mejor y vivir vidas más sanas".

La Casa Blanca indicó el año pasado que pensaba derogar los límites decretados por Bush sobre esmog, cuando pidió a un juez federal que postergara una demanda contraria a las normas de marzo del 2008 propuestas por 11 estados y grupos activistas.

Esmog es un contaminante relacionado con dolencias respiratorias, generado por la combustión de gasolina, el polvo y las plantas químicas, refinerías y otras fábricas cuando se mezclan con la luz del Sol.