

San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District adopts new guidelines

Merced Sun-Star, Tuesday, January 12, 2010

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has adopted a policy and guidelines to help local cities and agencies address the impact of greenhouse gas emissions caused by development.

The guidelines answer several frequently asked questions related to the California Environmental Quality Act and uses existing standards to assess specific projects. The policy calls for the review of the significance of greenhouse gas emissions during the environmental review process required for new development.

Valley dairies go green, harness methane for energy -- and cash

By Robert Rodriguez

The Fresno Bee, Saturday, Jan. 9, 2010

The battle against global warming may turn out to be a boon for a California industry long targeted by environmentalists -- dairies.

Some dairy farmers have been so successful in reducing air pollution from animal waste that they are earning revenue from other industries that need help meeting their own emission goals.

Those transactions are tied to a controversial idea called "cap-and-trade," a system that lets companies meet air-pollution requirements by getting credit for reductions that other companies achieve.

Some critics on the conservative right, often skeptical that global warming is even a real problem, call cap-and-trade a pointless and expensive government intervention. Some critics on the left say the practice allows industrial polluters to buy their way out of tighter emissions controls.

But both state and federal governments are pushing cap-and-trade systems all the same, backed by supporters who say the practice creates a practical, market-driven tool to reduce emissions.

That has created a potential revenue source for California's struggling dairy industry -- and it could offer a glimpse of how the battle against global warming will be fought nationwide.

"Cap-and-trade does get a lot of people excited," said David Albers, president of the 2,800-cow Vintage Dairy in western Fresno County.

For years, dairies have come under scrutiny because cow manure releases methane as it decomposes. Methane is among the greenhouse gases blamed for global warming.

Across California, however, some dairies have been able to reduce the emissions with methane digesters, which work by capturing gas for use as fuel instead of allowing it to be released.

Albers uses a system that collects methane in covered manure lagoons and processes it. The refined natural gas is fed into a pipeline and sold to Pacific Gas & Electric Co.

Albers also operates a company called BioEnergy Solutions, which helps build digesters. He is trying to raise money to build a network of 40 digesters on dairies throughout the region, and he has been approached by several brokers interested in selling his clean-air credits, also known as "offsets."

"We get lots of offers, but we haven't moved on any of it yet," Albers said. He's waiting for the price to go up.

Brokers and investment firms are taking notice.

"We think the potential for dairies to profit is very good," said Yves Legault, a representative of Financial Solutions Consultant, a Quebec-based firm.

Legault's company is working with 28 dairy operators in the Valley to participate in the offset market.

California is ahead of the rest of the country in the effort to create a cap-and-trade system. While Congress continues to debate how it will reduce greenhouse gases, California passed landmark legislation in 2006. The state has set an ambitious goal of achieving an 80% reduction in 1990 greenhouse gas levels by 2050.

To help meet that goal, the state's cap-and-trade program will go into effect in 2012. That program will set limits on emissions and allow for credits to be traded.

The effort reflects a national movement. Even though there is no mandatory national cap-and-trade program yet, voluntary sales already are taking place on the Chicago Climate Exchange, North America's only cap-and-trade market.

Industrial polluters and investors are hedging their bets and have begun buying credits now in anticipation of a mandatory program -- and a potential price hike.

Dairies aren't the only likely beneficiaries. Other agricultural industries also have found ways to reduce their carbon footprint, through methods such as planting more trees or tilling farmland less often.

Credits from those efforts also can be traded.

But to Valley dairy farmers in particular, any potential for extra revenue is welcome. Last year was one of the worst for dairy farmers, who struggled with record low prices. Many dairies shut down.

There are challenges. Unlike most commodities, carbon credits are difficult to quantify.

"This isn't like selling corn that you can touch and feel," said Carl Morris, general manager of Joseph Gallo Farms in Atwater. "Your system has to be verified and measured."

Dairy credits are sold on a per-ton basis, and verification by a third party is necessary to ensure that practice is authentic and the amount of greenhouse gas is measurable.

Another difficulty is that some dairy operators have been forced to shut down their digesters because, ironically, of pollution concerns.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has placed restrictions on exhaust from engines, including engines on generators powered by the biogas produced by the digesters.

Ron Koetsier -- an early adopter of methane digesters -- recently shut down his system because he could not afford the \$150,000 in upgrades needed to meet the district's air-quality regulations.

Before he shut his system down, Koetsier had produced \$12,000 in offsets.

"I know that a lot of people are excited about this cap-and-trade program, but I am not so sure about the whole thing," Koetsier said. "The one thing I know for sure is that the offsets are not going to pay for the upgrades I need."

Indeed, it's still not clear how much farmers might earn from the offset market.

"We are proceeding cautiously," said Greg Tevelde, who runs a dairy in Tipton. "But if someone wants to give me money for something I am already doing, then I'll take it."

Proposed development behind Target up for review

By Seth Nidever

Hanford Sentinel, Tuesday, Jan. 12, 2010

Developers are looking to cash in on property close to Hanford's main commercial corridor.

A property owner will go before the Hanford City Planning Commission Tuesday to seek approval for a 53-acre development off Centennial Drive southwest of Lowe's behind Wal-Mart and Target.

The property owner, Hanford Southport, proposes to mix some office space with homes and apartments/condominiums.

The development would bring residents within walking distance of shopping. Recently, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has been trying to get developers and city planners to follow mixed-use concepts so that residents don't drive long distances from suburbs to get to shopping and work.

The concept of more concentrated development also dovetails with Kings County's longstanding policy of preserving as much agricultural land as possible. Agriculture remains the area's leading private industry.

The commission meets at 7 p.m. in the Civic Auditorium.

CORRECTION

A story Monday about a parcel of ground west of Target implied that the site is being proposed for development. In fact, the proposal simply calls for dividing up the parcel along existing zoning lines that allow for different uses. No development proposal has been received yet.

Officials spend \$74,103 on rail, lobbying efforts

By Him Houck and Valerie Gibbons

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Tuesday, Jan. 12, 2010

County officials incurred \$74,103 in travel expenses working on the preservation of the east county rail line and lobbying for other projects in the first half of 2009.

A look at expenses from the Tulare County Association of Governments shows that airfare, hotel rooms, meals and taxi expenses were billed to the county for four separate trips to Washington, D.C., during the first half of 2009.

"In each of those trips, we were combining purposes," said Ted Smalley, TCAG's executive director. "We were talking about rail and working on getting stimulus money and for projects for [air quality](#)."

The expense information was obtained by the Visalia Times-Delta through a series of California Public Records Act requests. The newspaper asked for expenses from Jan. 1, 2009, through July 15 for the five Tulare County supervisors, the county administrative officer and the director of the Tulare County Association of Governments.

But there may be more to that \$74,103 total. TCAG and the county refused to disclose the amount of money paid to the agency's rail attorney, John Heffner, in 2009 on the grounds that it was not legally required to do so.

Records show one trip in January, two in February and one in March to the capital to lobby for the rail line, federal stimulus money and for earmarks on the upcoming federal transportation bill.

One of those trips, billed as the county's "One Voice" trip, sent 22 local officials from the cities of Visalia, Tulare, Farmersville, Exeter, Dinuba, Woodlake, Lindsay and Porterville and four members of the Board of Supervisors to Capitol Hill. The priorities for the trip included lobbying for the rail line and stimulus money.

The county received \$23 million in stimulus money in 2009 and is vying for an additional \$20 million this year.

Supervisor Allen Ishida traveled to the East Coast on all of the trips. Smalley accompanied Ishida on all but one of them.

Another One Voice trip is planned next month.

Rain on the way, high 54

Staff Reports

The forecast calls for increasing clouds throughout the day as rain moves into the Valley.

Today's expected high is 54, with an overnight low of 47. The National Weather Service is predicting an 80 percent chance of rain tonight through Wednesday.

Air quality today is moderate (54).

It is a burn day for all parts of the San Joaquin Valley.

Air quality forecast and woodburning rules

Sun-Star Staff

Merced Sun-Star, late Monday, January 11, 2010

MERCED

AQI Forecast for 1/11/2010: 70 Moderate (PM2.5)

AQI Forecast for 1/12/2010: 52 Moderate (PM2.5)

School Flag color for 1/12/2010: Yellow

Fireplace/Wood Stove Burning Status for 1/11/2010: Wood burning prohibited

Fireplace/Wood Stove Burning Status for 1/12/2010: 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>.

County to grapple with pluses, drawbacks of solar gold rush

By James Burger, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Jan. 12, 2010

Kern County's reliable relationship with the sun has become an attractive lure for companies who want to convert sunlight to electricity here.

This year county planners will be able to process 12 photovoltaic solar power plant projects that, together, would cover thousands of acres of Kern County land.

On Tuesday Kern County supervisors will consider contracts -- totalling \$2.4 million -- with the two consulting companies that will prepare environmental reports for each of the 12 projects.

Developers of the projects, six in the Central Valley section of Kern County and six in the desert areas, will pay for the work.

Using two consultants is a way to streamline environmental work and help the solar power companies get a shot at project approval before a deadline for federal stimulus money expires at the end of 2010, said Lorelei Oviatt, special projects chief for the Kern County Planning Department.

Behind the 12 projects are more solar developers sniffing around the county's jurisdiction, Oviatt said. But only 12 projects will make it into the development pipeline for 2010.

So far the county has heard from proponents of about 60 potential solar projects.

Of those, about 22 projects seem likely to move into the planning process, Oviatt said.

Those 22 projects could cover nearly 20 square miles of ground with solar cells -- an area slightly larger than the cities of Delano and Tehachapi.

The biggest challenge to these projects is their voracious need for land.

Photovoltaic solar power is created when specially treated panels are bombarded by sunlight. The light frees electrons at the atomic level and those electrons create a low level of electrical current.

Oviatt said it takes about six acres covered in solar panels to generate one megawatt of electrical power.

"One of the challenges for these projects has been finding the right piece of property," Oviatt said.

The issue of land is what raises the most concerns from people at this point.

Local activist Gordon Nipp of the Sierra Club has been preaching the gospel of "distributed" photovoltaic power -- the kind you install on your home -- to home builders and buyers for years.

"I have solar on my roof and I produce about three-quarters of my electricity," he said.

In theory, he said, he supports utility-level solar developments as well.

"In general we should all be supportive of these things. They do address global climate change issues. They do address [air quality issues](#)," he said.

But Kern County will need to watch for the projects' potential impacts on protected animal species and farmland.

"If they're going to be built on farmland, there needs to be mitigation for farmland loss," Nipp said.

The same is true for animal habitat.

Oviatt said her goal with the upcoming environmental reviews is to make sure those exact challenges are overcome.

Supervisor Jon McQuiston, whose desert territory is in the heart of some of the proposed projects, has a different take on the impacts of converting that much land to a new use.

Unlike wind power projects, Oviatt said, solar projects are exempt from the property tax increase that would usually result from the investment of billions of dollars in property improvements.

But solar power, she said, is the most expensive method of producing alternative power and developers are extremely concerned about excess costs.

Without the increased taxes, McQuiston said, Kern County faces the challenge of providing police, fire and other critical services to newly developed solar projects without a revenue stream to fund that protection.

County leaders need to make sure the opportunities of creating a burgeoning alternative industry in Kern County are handled well.

"Clearly with solar energy, Kern County is a pristine location," McQuiston said. "It's a real plus opportunity for Kern County. We're plowing new ground and we need to make sure we get it right."

Biggest loser in Bay Area transit debacle may be the environment

By Mike Rosenberg

In the Contra Costa Times & Tri-Valley Herald, Tuesday, Jan. 12, 2010

In the war over the future of public transit in the eco-obsessed Bay Area, the biggest casualty could prove to be the environment.

Without a doubt, air quality inventories show that the best way to cut greenhouse gases in the region is by removing cars from the road.

However, with the cost to drive plummeting and fare increases and service cuts making transit less practical, transit agencies are having problems retaining their old passengers, let alone attracting new ones. If that continues, the effects could be dramatic — more cars on the road could endanger human health, produce hazier air and contribute to rising sea levels.

California is the 12th-largest source of global warming emissions worldwide, according to the Union of Concerned Scientists.

A nasty chunk of those pollutants originate in the Bay Area, where cars and trucks are the largest source of ozone precursor emissions, according to Bay Area Air Quality Management District inventories. Vehicles account for 35 percent of all reactive organic gases and 45 percent of nitrogen oxides in the region, according to the air district.

If commuters keep ditching transit for their cars, the problem will get worse. Each transit rider who switches to a 20-mile round-trip drive produces an additional 4,800 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions each year, a 10 percent increase in a two-car household's total carbon footprint, according to the American Public Transportation Association.

It is possible to curb driver emissions through other means, such as carpooling or greener vehicles, but the most powerful option may be transit.

Chris Peebles, vice president of AC Transit's board of directors, said the service cuts and fare increases that every major local transit agency has implemented recently are a blow to the Bay Area's crusade against greenhouse gases because they make it harder for commuters to get around without a car.

"The number of areas where you can get around completely on public transit are pretty limited," said Peebles, a 12-year board member who travels primarily by transit. "Every time you cut public transit, it becomes more limited."

Moreover, the environmental benefits of buses, diesel locomotives and electric rail cars are not realized unless enough commuters are riding, says Mikhail Chester, a postdoctoral researcher who studied green transportation at UC-Berkeley for six years. That's an issue in the Bay Area, where agencies have lost 66,000 daily passengers in just the past year.

Chester's study, published in June, looks "beyond the tailpipe" at 120 factors — from concrete and asphalt production to train and car manufacturing — to determine each mode of travel's real carbon footprint in the Bay Area. Chester and UC-Berkeley professor Arpad Horvath found that transit commuters have smaller carbon footprints than drivers only if the trains and buses are fairly full.

For instance, they discovered that a commuter driving an SUV with one passenger would have the same carbon footprint, per mile traveled, as a commuter on a bus carrying eight passengers. Similarly, a commuter on a light-rail train that is 34 percent full has the same environmental effect, per mile traveled, as a solo driver in a sedan.

Transit companies have an opportunity, however, to change that equation by investing money to make their fleets greener, much in the way automakers are rolling out more hybrids and cleaner cars.

Their funding problems, though, have erased many opportunities to do just that.

Most Bay Area operators have tested expensive zero-emission buses that use hydrogen fuel cell technology, but they have not had enough money for any mass rollouts. In some cases, the technology is not fiscally sustainable: The Valley Transportation Authority, for instance, says it costs about 32 times as much to operate a fuel cell bus as a traditional, dirtier diesel vehicle.

Caltrain has plans to electrify its diesel locomotive system, but it recently ran out of money in the environmental planning process.

The environmental problems are ironic because, before their funding problems, transit agencies said they had experienced a growing number of commuters citing the environmental benefits as a reason for riding. One-fourth of Caltrain riders, for instance, now say they ride in part because it is a greener commute, up from 10 percent in 2003.

Environmental groups try to block parts of California's green building code **The Sierra Club and Natural Resources Defense Council are among six groups waging a last-minute campaign to derail some of the rules, saying they aren't tough enough.**

By Margot Roosevelt, staff writer
L.A. Times, Monday, Jan. 11, 2010

Environmental groups are mounting a last-ditch effort to derail key elements of the state's first-in-the-nation green building code -- a major initiative of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's administration.

The proposed code, likely to be adopted Tuesday, would slash water use, mandate the recycling of construction waste, cut back on polluting materials and step up enforcement of energy efficiency in new homes, schools, hospitals and commercial buildings statewide.

"It is going to change the whole fabric of how buildings are built by integrating green practices into our everyday building code," said David Walls, executive director of the California Building Standards Commission. "The rest of the nation will be looking at what we have done."

But critics say the rules fall short of rigorous standards adopted by Los Angeles, San Francisco and more than 50 California jurisdictions in league with the U.S. Green Building Council, a national nonprofit group of architects, engineers and construction companies.

The council's voluntary Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design standards have become an industry norm in recent years, with architects and construction firms competing on four levels -- LEED basic, silver, gold or platinum -- to market their buildings as green.

In 2004, Schwarzenegger ordered that all new state buildings meet at least a LEED silver level.

But parts of the state's new code, which would take effect in January 2011, would amount to "a setback for California's leadership on green building," according to a Dec. 22 letter from six groups. They included the Sierra Club, the Natural Resources Defense Council and Global Green, along with two nonprofit certification groups, the Green Building Council and Berkeley-based Build It Green.

The groups largely applaud the code's mandatory rules as a baseline minimum standard.

But they take issue with its two-tier labeling system for stricter voluntary measures, CalGreen, saying it would be open to conflicting interpretations and be unenforceable by local building inspectors.

"The tiers cause confusion in the marketplace and the potential for builders to label their buildings green without substantiating their claims," said Elizabeth Echols, director of the Green Building Council's Northern California chapter. Many local officials who would be responsible for verifying builder claims do not have the technical expertise that LEED and other third-party verifiers provide, she added.

More than 200 architects, engineers and builders have e-mailed Schwarzenegger in the last three days to oppose the CalGreen label.

"The last thing we need is a new government rating system," said Phil Williams, vice president of Webcor, the state's biggest contractor.

But Dan Pellissier, a deputy cabinet official who met with critics last week, alleged that the Green Building Council is leading opposition to CalGreen because it does not want competition to its own private-sector LEED brand.

Meanwhile, many builders want an alternative to LEED. "The cost for owners to go through this rating system is astronomical -- in a very challenging commercial real estate market," contended Sandra Boyle, an executive vice president of Glenborough, a San Mateo developer.

Mary Nichols, chairwoman of the California Air Resources Board, said the building commission had tightened its proposal based on the board's requests, but she acknowledged it might not be as rigorous as third-party systems.

Still, she added, "it is a heck of a lot better than anything we have now."

The new code would require developers to slash water use in their buildings by 20%, using more efficient toilets, shower heads and faucets.

The code would divert half of all construction waste away from landfills by requiring recycling. And it would allow buildings to be occupied only after strict energy standards were verified.

Lobbyists aided Alaska's Murkowski in writing EPA limits bill

Erika Bolstad - McClatchy Newspapers

In the Merced Sun-Star, Tuesday, January 12, 2010

WASHINGTON — Two lobbyists had a hand in writing language proposed by Sen. Lisa Murkowski that could curtail the Environmental Protection Agency's ability to regulate major emitters of greenhouse gases.

Their involvement, first reported Monday by The Washington Post, came at the request of a staffer on the Senate Energy and Environment Committee, where the Alaska senator is the top Republican. Both of the lobbyists, Jeff Holmstead and Roger Martella Jr., represent a number of high-profile energy clients. Both had top positions in the EPA during the Bush administration.

Murkowski has led the charge against the EPA's role in regulating greenhouse gas emissions, saying she has concerns about an executive branch agency, rather than Congress, writing such regulations. Her

original amendment would have been attached to a spending bill and it would have prohibited the EPA for one year from spending any money on developing regulations for greenhouse gases.

Her original amendment failed to move forward but Murkowski has continued to search for a way to keep the EPA from drawing up regulations for large emitters, such as power plants and manufacturers.

Holmstead said he and Martella took a look at the language in Murkowski's original proposal and offered some suggestions. Such work is a common practice in Washington, Holmstead said. He said that he and Martella were not acting on behalf of any particular client. They also were not the only people to look at the language, Holmstead said.

"This is what lawyers in Washington do every day of the week, is to take a look," Holmstead said. "It happens all the time on almost every piece of legislation. Before language is introduced, it is almost always shared with people on all sides of the issue."

Both men had high-ranking positions in the EPA during the Bush administration. Holmstead was an assistant administrator for air and radiation. Martella served as the EPA's general counsel. Holmstead's clients include the CSX railroad, Arch Coal, Duke Energy and Progress Energy, according to Senate lobbying records. Martella's clients include the National Alliance of Forest Owners and the Alliance of Food Associations.

Murkowski's proposed amendment came shortly before the EPA announced in December that pollution from greenhouse gases endangers public health. At the same time, the agency announced plans to move forward with regulations that will limit emissions by large producers of greenhouse gases.

The EPA's move to regulate carbon dioxide and other emissions is part of its compliance with a 2007 U.S. Supreme Court decision requiring the agency to determine whether greenhouse gases endanger the country's health and welfare. If the agency found that such emissions are indeed dangerous -- which it did -- the court instructed the EPA to address the problem.

The Obama administration has said it would prefer that Congress write the guidelines, and it could be years before the EPA rules take effect. But if Congress doesn't act, the EPA's rules could set the standard for greenhouse gas emissions on the part of large emitters such as power plants, factories and other so-called stationary sources of pollution.

Murkowski's spokesman on the Energy committee, Robert Dillon, said Monday that Murkowski and her staff "write all of her amendments." He also said that Murkowski made it abundantly clear while writing the proposal that she had consulted a number of stakeholders, including lawyers with expertise in the Clean Air Act.

"While Sen. Murkowski did seek feedback on the amendment from many sources, including the Environmental Protection Agency, Democratic and Republican senators, as well as a number of Clean Air Act experts, it did not influence the substance of the amendment," Dillon said. Her aim was to avoid unintended consequences, Dillon said, including having an effect on EPA's new guidelines for automotive emissions.

He pointed to her Sept. 24 speech on the floor of the Senate, in which Murkowski complained the EPA had been unresponsive to her requests. In that speech, she disputed claims by the EPA that her amendment could have a negative effect on its effort to regulate automobile emissions, and said that it had been vetted by attorneys with expertise in such language.

"Some of our nation's leading Clean Air Act attorneys -- among the best and brightest legal minds -- have assisted us in its preparation," Murkowski said at the time. "They agree it will do exactly as it says, and that leaves very little ground for the claims that have been made against it."

Dillon said Murkowski may introduce the legislation next week as an amendment to a Senate bill that raises the limit on how much money the U.S. government can borrow. She also is considering going forward with a "disapproval resolution," a rarely used procedural move that prohibits rules written by executive branch agencies from taking effect.

Tribes sue over Simplot land swap in Idaho

By Rebecca Boone, Associated Press Writer

In the Washington Post, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Tuesday, Jan. 12, 2010

POCATELLO, Idaho—The Shoshone-Bannock Tribes have filed a federal lawsuit against the U.S. Department of the Interior and the Bureau of Land Management, contending that the government's land swap with the J.R. Simplot Co. could lead to greater pollution and poor air quality.

In the lawsuit, which was filed Wednesday in Boise's U.S. District Court, the tribes ask a federal judge to bar the land swap. The government in 2007 approved the deal, which would trade about 670 acres of Simplot-owned key mule deer winter range near Blackrock Canyon for 719 acres of BLM property near the company's Don Plant phosphate production area.

Simplot wants the land so it can expand its gypsum stack, a pile of gray dirt that remains after phosphate is removed from slurry. The region contains large deposits of phosphate, which is used for agricultural chemicals and fertilizer.

The tribes contend that federal regulations weren't properly followed when the government approved the swap, and that increasing the gypsum stack would degrade local air quality and pollute the Portneuf River.

Part of the land has been designated a Superfund site because of existing pollution from heavy metals, arsenic and other contaminants. Last year, federal environmental regulators began pressing the J.R. Simplot Co. to do more at the fertilizer plant to stem the flow of phosphates and other pollutants into groundwater and streams.

Though the land isn't on the Fort Hall reservation, the tribes say they have standing to bring the lawsuit because it is next to their land and part of their aboriginal homelands.

Simplot spokesman Rick Phillips didn't immediately return calls from The Associated Press, but he has said that the long-term viability of the Don Plant depends on the company's ability to handle the gypsum product.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Web site describes phosphogypsum as a radioactive waste product created when processing phosphate ore. When phosphogypsum decays, it forms radon, a radioactive gas that can cause cancer.

At Detroit auto show, the hot cars use the least energy

By Peter Whoriskey, Staff Writer

The Washington Post, Tues., Jan. 12, 2010

The 2010 North American International Auto Show, which opened for previews Monday, is more subdued than in years past and reflects the diminished sales of the U.S. industry. But there were still cars that caught people's attention, mostly by catering to the new taste for fuel efficiency.

The Ford Fusion Hybrid won the 2010 North American Car of the Year, which is juried by automotive journalists. The company boasts that the car "is America's most fuel-efficient midsize sedan," with an EPA-estimated 41 mpg rating in the city and 36 mpg on the highway. Ford also won the Truck of the Year award with its Transit Connect, a fuel-efficient commercial van.

Ford Chairman Bill Ford Jr. said he was pleased by the sweep but portrayed the accolades as steps in a longer journey for the company. "We haven't won anything yet," he said at a dinner Monday night.

Even aside from those fuel-efficient winners, however, the entire show seemed made to glorify vehicles that run on less energy. An entire section of the floor is given over to "Electric Avenue," displaying the latest in electric cars, mostly from small companies.

Another car that drew attention was the 2011 Honda CR-Z sport hybrid coupe, which is set to go on sale in the U.S. in the late summer and which company officials and analysts said was destined to prove that hybrids don't have to be frumpy or weak.

As the company puts it, the car is for people "with a spirit of adventure" and "an elevated sense of responsibility toward the environment."

Carbon market may trim farm acreage Ag economist defends model after Vilsack calls it flawed

By Wes Sander, Staff Writer

Capital Press, Saturday, Jan. 9, 2010

A prominent agricultural economist says a carbon market envisioned in climate legislation passed by the House and being considered in the Senate will apply pressure to remove land from food production.

Bruce McCarl, an agricultural economics professor at Texas A&M University, helped develop a model commissioned by the USDA and used by its economists to analyze climate legislation pending in Congress and backed by the Obama administration.

The model predicted the loss of 59 million acres of crop and grazing land as producers plant trees to capture profits from a future carbon-credits market.

"We'll see some rearrangements of agricultural production patterns," McCarl said.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said in December that the model did not accurately reflect the pending legislation, and was therefore flawed.

Vilsack said other analyses have shown that greenhouse-gas offsets and biomass-energy production can be accomplished without removing "significant amounts" of farmland from production.

"Careful design of the offsets program will be important in order to avoid unintended consequences," he said.

McCarl agreed that many factors could influence outcomes over time, and much depends on future policy that could protect agriculture.

But adding a carbon market to the mix -- in addition to a bioenergy market that has already altered food production -- will create pressures that will further alter crop patterns, McCarl said.

"One can always debate technical progress assumptions and (predict) different results," McCarl said. "But I think it's fair to say there will be major forces to move land from food production to forests and energy production if the cap and trade legislation (is passed)."

As one sign of how things can change, the amount of domestic corn serving the bioenergy market is roughly 10 times what it was a decade ago, McCarl said.

Some commodity groups have supported the carbon-offsets provisions of pending legislation. But Western-states agriculture has opposed them, saying specialty-crop production will see little opportunity to participate.

Vilsack said in December that specialty production will likely see negative impacts from new climate policy.

EPA proposes stricter limits on smog pollutants

By Juliet Eilperin, Staff Writer

The Washington Post, Friday, Jan. 8, 2010

The Environmental Protection Agency proposed stricter limits Thursday on the amount of pollution-forming ozone allowed in the air, significantly tightening rules the Bush administration had set for the nation's most widespread air pollutant.

The new rules, which must undergo 60 days of public comment before becoming final, would help determine the quality of the air Americans will breathe for at least a decade. The change, which represents only the third time in nearly 40 years that the standards have been toughened, could cost industry billions, while preventing thousands of premature deaths a decade from now, the EPA maintains.

The stricter standards would limit ozone in the air to 60 to 70 parts per billion for any eight-hour period, down from 75 ppb. Although the percentage change sounds small, Thursday's move ensures that state and local governments would face a much stricter air quality test in the years ahead.

The final target that the Obama administration adopts will have major implications for the regulations that state and local officials will have to set to meet the new federal requirements, which will become final between 2014 and 2031, depending on the region. Power plants and motor vehicles are significant emitters of pollutants such as nitrogen oxides and other chemical compounds, which form ozone when exposed to sunlight, but sources as small as gas lawn mowers could face new restrictions depending on what EPA chooses as its ultimate goal.

Exposure to ground-level ozone, or smog, is linked to an array of heart and respiratory illnesses. Smog causes burning and inflammation in sensitive tissues and can harm wilderness areas and farm crops by stunting the growth of trees and plants.

The American Petroleum Institute, which represents the nation's oil and gas industry, issued a statement saying the move "lacks scientific justification," because the EPA acknowledges that recent scientific studies on smog's health effects are no different from the research on which the Bush administration based its 2008 ruling.

"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," the institute said.

Ozone standards have been the center of a political and legal battle since the spring of 2008, when the EPA set a looser limit than what its own scientific advisers had suggested. After robust discussion, George W. Bush's White House then scaled back part of the agency's proposal out of concern for the economic impact and to create a consistent standard for both vegetation and human health. The new proposal mirrors what EPA's Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee unanimously recommended in 2007.

The American Lung Association challenged the Bush ozone rules in federal court, and as a result EPA agreed in September to review more than 1,700 scientific studies and a raft of other materials that served as the basis for the agency's 2008 decision.

"Smog in the air we breathe poses a very serious health threat, especially to children and individuals suffering from asthma and lung disease," EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson said in a statement. "Using the best science to strengthen these standards is a long overdue action that will help millions of Americans breathe easier and live healthier."

Under the Clean Air Act, the government must reexamine every five years whether its ozone standards are adequate, but it traditionally takes more than 10 years to enact new rules. The federal government has changed the standard three times since it was set in 1971, loosening it in 1979 and then tightening it in 1997 and 2008.

Depending on the level of the final standard, EPA estimates that by 2020 the proposal will cost \$19 billion to \$90 billion to implement and will yield health benefits worth \$13 billion to \$100 billion. The proposal would result in 1,500 to 12,000 avoided premature deaths by 2020, though the precise number depends on what limit the agency adopts.

EPA also announced that as part of its new smog proposal it will also set a secondary, seasonal limit to protect plants and trees from prolonged exposure to ozone.

S. William Becker, executive director of the National Association of Clean Air Agencies, said state and local officials are committed to tackling the nation's smog problem despite the "daunting challenges" doing so poses. "Though the task of putting new, better standards into practice won't be easy, it will most certainly be worth it," he said.

But the administration's plan could spark resistance among industries that will face new regulatory requirements, including utilities that have already cut their nitrogen oxide emissions in recent years.

Edison Electric Institute spokesman Dan Riedinger, whose group represents the majority of electricity generators in the United States, said "there's huge uncertainty about what this and other regulatory requirements will entail for utilities and other sectors."

Children and the elderly are particularly vulnerable to smog: Studies show that children who grow up in areas with high ozone concentrations never develop the same lung capacity as those who live in less polluted areas, and that they are more likely to develop asthma and other respiratory illnesses.

Not a single county in the D.C. area meets the strictest smog standards now envisioned by EPA, according to air quality measurements the agency collected between 2006 and 2008. Both the District and Fairfax had average eight-hour ozone levels of 87 ppb, making Fairfax the smoggiest of 21 monitored counties in Virginia. In Maryland, the city of Baltimore ranked as the least smog-filled monitored area, with an average of 67 ppb, though Baltimore County as a whole averaged 85 ppb.

[Washington Post Commentary, Tues., Jan. 12, 2010](#)

Environmentalists reject scaled-back energy bill

By Juliet Eilperin

The political class is chattering about how Congress may opt this year for an energy bill that doesn't cap greenhouse gas emissions. But environmentalists said Tuesday they would not accept that sort of legislative solution.

In a morning conference call with reporters, Jeremy Symons, senior vice president for the National Wildlife Federation, said his group and others still see a binding limit on carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases as a litmus test for legislation they can support.

"What our economy needs, and what our environment needs right now, is a clear signal that we're shifting to clean energy technologies that bring private investment into play," Symons said. "We don't see any significant shift coming from the alternatives that have been proposed."

This position could set up an eventual standoff between green groups and some centrist senators, who see a bill with energy efficiency and renewable energy targets as an acceptable fallback option. The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee has passed such a bill already.

But Symons noted that for the moment, activists are still counting on the White House and congressional leaders to deliver a comprehensive energy bill. "We're not there yet," he said.

[L.A. Times commentary, Monday, Jan. 11, 2010:](#)

Meg Whitman's climate change strategy

In what may be a risky political move, the GOP candidate for governor has come out strongly against the state's law on regulating greenhouse gas emissions.

By Phil Trounstine and Jerry Roberts

Although a 12.3% unemployment rate and \$20-billion budget deficit ensure the economy will dominate California's race for governor, Republican front-runner Meg Whitman has guaranteed that the environment will also be a high-profile issue in the campaign.

Whitman, the former CEO of EBay, declared in September that her first act as governor would be to suspend the state's pioneering climate change law, AB 32. It was a high-risk political move for Whitman, putting her campaign at odds with the views of a large majority of California voters while, more broadly, reigniting a statewide debate about the impact of strong environmental regulation on economic growth.

AB 32, which Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signed into law in 2006, sets increasingly stringent caps on greenhouse gas emissions, leading to a 25% reduction by 2020. The governor's office described the bill as "a first-in-the-world comprehensive program of regulatory and market mechanisms to achieve real, quantifiable, cost-effective reductions of greenhouse gases."

That's not how Whitman sees it. The law, she says, "will lead to higher energy costs at a time when we can least afford them. [It] will discourage job creation and could kill any recovery." Schwarzenegger, who encouraged the measure, answered Whitman's statements with sharp criticism for all those who assert a conflict between the economy and the environment:

"I think there are people that just don't believe in fixing and working on the environment," he said. "They don't believe there is such a thing as global warming; they're still living in the Stone Age."

Whether the measure is the best approach to reducing greenhouse gases -- about which there is considerable debate -- Whitman's stance against it flies in the face of California political trends in recent decades. Like abortion rights, environmental protection is strongly favored by independent, decline-to-state voters as well as by large majorities of Democrats. As with the issue of choice, taking a stance in opposition to popular opinion can kill the general election chances of a statewide candidate.

Already, the liberal Courage Campaign has attacked Whitman in a radio ad, comparing her position on carbon reduction targets to that of Sarah Palin. Significantly, Whitman used the ad by the leftist grassroots organization as a fundraising tool, positioning herself as a free market champion under attack.

As a political matter, the candidate's opposition to AB 32 may make some short-term tactical sense. Her first challenge is to win the Republican primary contest, in which right-wing voters dominate, and where she faces Insurance Commissioner Steve Poizner and former Rep. Tom Campbell. The Public Policy Institute of California recently reported that, among Republicans, support for AB 32 has fallen in recent years, from 65% to 20% in favor in 2006 when it was passed to 43% to 46% against the measure in 2009.

As an aside in the GOP primary, but a harbinger for the general election, Democrats in the state stand 78% to 12% in favor of the law, and independents are 67% to 23% in favor of it.

And while 89% of California Democrats and 75% of independents say "it is necessary to counter the effects of global warming right away," Republicans are split on that issue, with 44% favoring immediate action and 46% saying it isn't necessary to take steps yet.

Whitman's strategy could ultimately backfire. It is difficult to see the environment as a determining issue in the GOP primary, where Poizner more quietly takes the same position as Whitman while Campbell favors AB 32. Republicans historically have not picked candidates according to their positions on the environment

But Democrats and independents do, and they will be voting in the general election.

The Public Policy Institute reported that about nine in 10 California Democrats and eight in 10 independents say the government should regulate greenhouse gases from sources such as power plants, cars and factories to reduce global warming. Whitman might call that a "job killer," but she would do so at her political peril: Even 54% of Republicans favor such measures, according to the institute's polling.

It's not hard to envision an anti-Whitman ad quoting Schwarzenegger:

"Some have challenged whether AB 32 is good for businesses. I say unquestionably it is good for businesses. Not only large, well-established businesses, but small businesses that will harness their entrepreneurial spirit to help us achieve our climate goals."

At the same time Whitman has been raising the issue's profile, the governor's Office of Planning and Research has been instructed to promulgate guidelines by which cities and counties can evaluate the effects on global warming of new development -- a result of lawsuits brought by Atty. Gen. Jerry Brown. The presumptive Democratic candidate for governor, Brown with his actions has forced consideration of global warming into local planning decisions.

Whitman may please Republican conservatives on the issue, but she is up against broader political forces that favor policies to slow climate change, including a huge portion of general election voters who want California to lead the way.

Phil Trounstine and Jerry Roberts report regularly on California politics at calbuzz.com.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses Obama wants to make the country energy independent and create thousands of jobs in a short period of time. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Obama quiere independizar energéticamente al país y crear 17 mil empleos a corto plazo

Manuel Ocaño
Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingue, Tuesday, January 12, 2010

El presidente Barack Obama presentó este fin de semana un plan de inversión de dos mil 300 millones de dólares en el sector de tecnología para generar energía limpia, y aseguró que ayudará a crear empleos en lo inmediato al garantizar la independencia energética del país. Obama dijo también que los proyectos de adecuación climática y de eficiencia energética prometen crear empleos en lo inmediato en el sector de la llamada tecnología limpia. Agregó que con apego a las patentes, Estados Unidos puede también comenzar a exportar cierta tecnología que sirve para reducir contaminación y gasto energético. El mandatario comentó que la inversión en tecnología limpia abre el camino a la autosuficiencia energética y se autofinancia a largo plazo. Como objetivo más cercano proporcionaría unos 17 mil empleos, calculó el presidente.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses US strengthens the norms against smog.](#)

Estados Unidos endurece normas contra el smog

DINA CAPPIELLO/Associated Press

La Opinión 2010-01-10

WASHINGTON (AP).- La Agencia Protectora del Medio Ambiente, EPA por sus siglas en inglés, propuso endurecer los límites a las emisiones de smog, una forma de contaminación originada a partir de la combinación del aire con contaminantes, reemplazando los establecidos por el anterior gobierno, adoptados pese a ciertas recomendaciones científicas.

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.

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 smog, 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.