

Regional Roundup

Air district incentive program starts today

By Jordan Guinn, staff writer

Lodi News Sentinel, Tuesday, Jan. 19, 2010

In an effort to reduce emissions from fireplaces around the county, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is starting its incentive program today. The program is aimed at getting residents to rid themselves of their free-standing wood stove or open fireplace for a cleaner burning wood/pellet/gas stove or insert.

The incentive program is offered on a first-come, first-served basis. Those who qualify can earn vouchers from \$100 to \$500 to assist them with the purchase.

Applications can be obtained on the district's Web site, www.valleyair.org, or by calling them at (559) 230-5800. Incentives for low-income families are available as well. To easily find the information, go to the district's Web site and click on the "Grants and Incentives" tab.

Custom Fireside Shops, Inc. in Elk Grove, located at 10461 Grant Line Road, Suite 100, and Stockton Screen Window & Door Co., located at 6852 N. Pacific Ave. in Stockton, are the closest contracted retailers that will be able to assist potential applicants with the process. Custom Fireside Shop's phone number is (916) 331-2423, and Stockton Screen Window & Door Co.'s number is 957-9700.

Air quality forecast and woodburning rules

Sun-Star Staff

Merced Sun-Star, Monday, Jan. 18, 2010

MERCED

AQI Forecast for 1/18/2010: 26 Good (PM2.5)

AQI Forecast for 1/19/2010: 26 Good (PM2.5)

School Flag color for 1/19/2010: Green

Fireplace/Wood Stove Burning Status for 1/18/2010: Please burn cleanly

Fireplace/Wood Stove Burning Status for 1/19/2010: 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>.

Rain, high winds. High 43, low 42

Staff Reports

Visalia Times-Delta & Tulare Advance-Register, Tuesday, January 19, 2010

The forecast doesn't show a break in the rain until at least Friday. Today's high is 53, with an overnight low of 42.

The National Weather Service has issued a high wind advisory in effect until 4 p.m. Winds may get up to 40 or 50 miles per hour in some areas.

Isolated thunderstorms may also hit the Valley this afternoon.

Today's air quality is good. It is a burn day for all parts of the San Joaquin Valley.

San Joaquin Valley Air Board forecast calls for 'good' air quality

Visalia Times-Delta & Tulare Advance-Register, Monday, January 18, 2010

Air quality today is expected to be good, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District announced.

The district issues a daily forecast regarding Valley air quality. It also issues fireplace/wood stove burn-status updates. Burning is permitted today.

Farmworker diabetes risk linked to bad air

By Mark Glover, staff writer

Sacramento Bee, Tuesday, Jan. 19, 2010

More than 1 million California farmworkers face a higher risk of diabetes as well as respiratory diseases related to poor air quality, according to articles in the latest issue of California Agriculture.

The journal is put out by the University of California.

In the articles, scientists affiliated with UC Western Center for Agricultural Health and Safety offer details of their research on the potential health effects of particulates in ambient air inhaled by laboratory animals in the San Joaquin Valley. They also reviewed factors such as the effect of pesticide exposure on diabetes rates among California farmworkers.

The articles note the Central Valley has the highest recorded levels of particulate matter in the country, resulting in increased rates of asthma and other respiratory illnesses.

The recent research points to possible environmental links between pesticide exposure and the risk of diabetes.

"California's hired farmworkers face increased risks of morbidity and mortality from respiratory disease, musculoskeletal problems, infectious diseases, stress-related mental health disorders and lifestyle-related diseases such as obesity," said UC Western Center Director Marc Schenker.

County's green efforts lagging Report does note some improvements

By Mike Lee, Staff Writer

San Diego Union-Tribune, Tues., Jan. 19, 2010

The amount of renewable energy used in San Diego County has almost doubled since 2003 to 6.1 percent, but it remains well below the state target of 20 percent.

County residents spend twice as much time in traffic as they did 20 years ago.

Despite an increase in recycling, people in the San Diego region dispose of more waste than Californians as a whole.

Businesses could compost or recycle about half of what they are throwing in the garbage.

Beach closures and advisories have declined since 2005. That may be a result of reduced water-quality monitoring and less rainfall, which cuts down on pollution from storm runoff.

Air quality has improved over the past decade, but some residents still are exposed to unhealthy levels of pollution at least 40 days per year.

An environmental report issued yesterday raised questions about why San Diego County lacks a comprehensive push to address concerns that have bubbled for decades, including lackluster recycling, coastal water pollution and greenhouse-gas emissions.

The Equinox Center in Encinitas, a nonpartisan think tank founded in 2008 with money from a former Microsoft executive and other local philanthropists, made its first foray into public policy with the Quality of Life Dashboard. The study is characterized as "a new lens" to look at 13 topics such as water use, transportation and green jobs.

Equinox's researchers synthesized information from dozens of sources, including the American Lung Association and the California Energy Commission. They noted improvements in several areas but problems in many others that will tend to worsen as the population grows.

Researchers showed that air quality, the number of green startup companies and some other environmental indicators have gotten better over the past decade. But they also found that county residents generate more trash each day than Californians as a whole, and that they spend an average of 52 hours a year stuck in traffic — twice as much as they did 20 years ago.

The think tank said San Diego County is struggling to hit benchmarks for renewable energy, not developing enough local sources of water and failing to tap the potential of public transit.

Environmental leaders around the region welcomed the assessment but also wondered when the string of similar reports will result in sweeping initiatives to increase ecological sustainability.

"It is the action step that is missing," said Bill Kuni, a businessman and philanthropist who helped develop "A Regional Wake-Up Call," a November 2008 report about climate change from The San Diego Foundation. "We have got the knowledge base here. We have got the corporate base here. We have got committed environmentalists. The question is, where is the catalyst that is going to activate this group?"

Kuni said the foundation's study initially drew lots of official support and eventually led to scattered efforts to deal with global warming. But local leaders mostly seized on basic projects rather than a sweeping green agenda that would transform the region into a national pacesetter.

"We had hoped that it might attract some higher-profile elected officials at the state level," Kuni said. "We had a relatively small amount of that."

At the Sierra Club's local chapter, chairwoman Carolyn Chase blamed the slow pace partly on San Diego's County's famously laid-back culture.

"I have seen these (studies) over the years. They come around and what is done? Nothing seems to happen," she said. "It may be that people look at the indicators and say, 'It's not so bad.' "

Chase hopes Equinox's assessment will provide a breakthrough.

So does Aaron Contorer, a former leader at Microsoft who helped raise \$800,000 — mainly from local foundations — to launch the Equinox Center.

The think tank is modeled after the Sightline Institute in Seattle, founded in 1993 to provide residents of the Northwest with research about top regional issues. San Diego has long trailed other major metropolitan areas when it comes to environmental assessment and advocacy, something conservation leaders have in part linked to the county's lack of "old money."

"We asked why there wasn't more progress being made improving our environment if it seems to be so important to so many people," Contorer said. "What people told us is there wasn't a place to turn for answers they could trust."

Equinox leaders plan to issue follow-up reports with action plans for some of the most pressing problems.

Mark Thiemens, dean of physical sciences at the University of California San Diego, was among those who reviewed the group's inaugural study for accuracy.

"Their hearts are in the right place and their approach is intellectually right," he said.

Port of L.A. in talks to purchase zero-emission trucks

The trucks, powered by hydrogen fuel cell hybrid technology, are to be built in Whittier by a Florida company and tested for possible use on short- or medium-distance cargo hauls.

By Ronald D. White, staff writer

L.A. Times, Sat., Jan. 16, 2010

The Port of Los Angeles, the nation's busiest container port, is negotiating with an alternative-fuel vehicle manufacturer to purchase and evaluate the company's heavy-duty, zero-emission trucks, which use a hydrogen fuel cell hybrid electric power system.

The company is Vision Industries Corp. of Florida, doing business as Vision Motor Corp. in California. Vision's research and development facility is in El Segundo and its manufacturing plant is in Whittier, said its president and chief executive, Martin Schuermann.

Port officials say the trucks will be tested for possible use on short- or medium-distance cargo hauls.

Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa said the effort was part of the port and the city's commitment to develop zero-emission trucks. He called it "another important strategy in our plan to grow Los Angeles green by being a catalyst in testing and bringing to market the most promising emission-reduction technologies."

Company documents say the trucks produce 450 horsepower and have a range of up to 400 miles. The company also produces a hydrogen fuel cell-powered car called the Cheetah, which it says has a top speed of 150 mph.

Smog leaves Utah coughing, sneezing and wheezing

By Mike Stark, Associated Press Writer

In the S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Friday, Jan. 15, 2010

Salt Lake City (AP) -- A thick layer of smog stubbornly lingering over parts of Utah has fouled the state's air so badly this week that health officials warned people not to exercise outside and some schools kept children inside for recess and sports.

The haze that has obscured Utah's picture-perfect mountain views for the last several days is blamed on a weather phenomenon called an inversion that pins pollution to the valley floors and doesn't relent until a storm blows through.

The smog spell has made Utah's air the dirtiest in the country for almost a week, and nearly 8 of 10 Utah residents are living under health advisories. Residents are being urged to drive less and prohibited from burning wood, and sometimes even the most fit have been urged not to exercise outside.

"It's a disgrace that we've got this," said Richard Middleton, 72, a retired consultant who was out walking in Salt Lake City on Thursday to rehab his knee after surgery.

Carol Werner said it still doesn't take long for the telltale signs to hit when she steps outside: sneezing, congestion, tightening throat.

"If I go out for a walk for an hour, I'm sorry I did," said Werner, a professor at the University of Utah.

Her friend, 72-year-old Donna Gelfand, has canceled her regular walks, at least until things clear up. She has lived in Utah for 48 years and said this winter "is one of the very worst."

The haze lingering around the base of the Wasatch Mountains is a potent cocktail of tailpipe exhaust, industrial pollution and emissions from homes and businesses. The geography of the region makes matters worse: Much of Utah's population resides in bowl-shaped valleys that cause the smog to get trapped overhead.

The state issues daily health advisories on the region's air quality between Nov. 1 and March 1. Already this season, 19 "red alerts" — the most severe ranking — have been issued for Salt Lake County, more than the previous two years combined and the third-most in the last decade, according to state records.

The state has made strides in cleaning up its act when it comes to pollution, including cracking down on large-scale polluters, limiting vehicle emissions and making a huge investment in light rail and other mass transit.

Cheryl Heying, director of the Utah Division of Air Quality, said the state's air is actually cleaner than it was just five years ago and nothing like the lung-clogging conditions from pollution heydays in the early 1990s.

What's changed in recent years, she said, is that the Environmental Protection Agency tightened its standards, including for tiny particulates called PM2.5 that is linked to premature death in people with heart and lung disease. The pollutant is also particularly tough on people who already have pre-existing respiratory problems such as asthma.

The tighter standards mean more frequent exceedances, and more health advisory notices to the public, Heying said.

But many believe that the smog is worse than most years.

Duane Harris with Intermountain Allergy and Asthma Clinic in Draper said this year "seems particularly bad" and patients are reporting unusual winter symptoms including burning eyes and irritated noses

"I've definitely seen an increase the last week or so" in terms of the number of patients and their complaints, Harris said.

Visitors coming to Utah this weekend to ski on its famous slopes will have to slog through the smog in the valleys but will find blue skies and clear air at higher elevations.

"It's just a completely different environment up there," said Jessica Kunzer, spokeswoman for Ski Utah.

Those who don't flee the valleys will have to make do — pollution is expected to linger at least through Saturday. The air quality slightly improved Friday.

Thirty-year-old Lisa Loomis of Salt Lake City was one of just a few people in popular Sugar House Park on Thursday as she walked her 4-month-old dog Zoey, a blur of puppy energy that requires exercise every day, no matter the gunk overhead.

"I wouldn't be out here if it wasn't for her," she said.

A Pacific Island Challenge to European Air Pollution

By James Kanter, staff writer

N.Y. Times and other papers, Monday, Jan. 18, 2010

BRUSSELS — A Pacific island nation has challenged plans by the Czech Republic to refit a coal-fired power station, in an appeal that environmental advocates on Monday described as the first of its kind.

The case focuses on efforts by a Czech utility, the CEZ Group, to prolong the life of the power plant in Prunerov, close to the German border. The Federated States of Micronesia maintains

that doing so would result in continued emissions of greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming, which it says threaten its existence.

“Climate change is real and it is happening on our shores,” Andrew Yatilman, the director of Micronesia’s office of environment and emergency management, told Reuters. “It’s a matter of survival for us. If you look at the map of the Pacific, we’re just dots in the middle of the ocean.”

Micronesia submitted its arguments to the Czech Ministry of Environment on Jan. 4.

Greenpeace, which is supporting the action by Micronesia, demanded last month that the Czech Republic decommission the plant by 2016.

The Czech authorities were scheduled to take Micronesia’s complaint into account this week in deciding whether the plant was environmentally acceptable, said Jan Rovensky, an energy and climate campaigner with Greenpeace Czech Republic.

Attempts to reach the ministry on Monday were not successful. But Eva Novakova, a press officer for the CEZ Group, said the project already had “obtained positive opinions” from the Czech environmental authorities.

Ms. Novakova said that the refit and a closure of one unit would cut emissions of carbon dioxide from the plant by 31 percent.

Pressure has increased against coal-fired power, putting obstacles in the way of new plants in the United States and Europe.

The failure of nations at the Copenhagen conference to agree to a timetable for a binding agreement on curbing climate change or to agree on a target for reducing emissions by midcentury appears to have lent new urgency to anti-coal campaigns.

Greenpeace said the Czech case put governments and companies “on notice that states vulnerable to climate change are keen to explore new avenues to challenge decisions on projects that contribute to climate change.”

Prunerov is among the largest coal-fired plants in the European Union and the largest single source of carbon dioxide emissions in the Czech Republic.

Without the refit, the plant would close in 2020, but with the refit the station would keep operating until about 2035, said Ms. Novakova.

Leaders of Micronesia, which consists of more than 600 islands grouped into four states, say they are especially vulnerable to phenomena linked to climate change, including a rising sea level, increasingly powerful storms and ocean acidification.

Fairbanks borough mayor promises air quality plan

The Associated Press

Contra Costa Times & Tri-Valley Herald, Friday, Jan. 15, 2010

FAIRBANKS, Alaska—The Fairbanks North Star Borough assembly approved an agreement with the state that designates the borough as the lead agency in the effort to clear the polluted winter sky.

Smoke from inefficient wood stoves is believed to be the No. 1 contributor to the problem that has put Fairbanks on the Environmental Protection Agency's list of communities violating fine particle pollution standards. Frequent winter temperature inversions in the Tanana Valley keep the pollution from scattering into the atmosphere.

Borough Mayor Luke Hopkins told the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner he will introduce an air quality plan in the coming months. He provided few hints about what the blueprint will contain, but said it will have an education component.

"We are discussing the plan now in the administration," Hopkins said. "We need to get moving on this."

Though talk of regulating wood burning caused a backlash last summer, there was little debate before Thursday's assembly vote. Only a handful of people testified and most were in favor.

Jerry Koerner of North Pole described for the panel how air pollution has soured neighborhood strolls with his wife.

"We were breathing through our jackets, trying to keep the pollution from getting into our lungs," Koerner said.

Meanwhile, former Assemblyman Mike Prax said something must be done to persuade wood burners to use seasoned or dried firewood. "We really need to focus on voluntary efforts to address our wood smoke problem," he said.

The temperature dipped to 40 degrees below zero in Fairbanks earlier this week. With the state's lack of affordable heat, officials say many residents use wood because they can't afford anything else.

Environmentalist: Richardson leaves green legacy

By Susan Montoya Bryan, Associated Press Writer

Contra Costa Times & Tri-Valley Herald, Friday, Jan. 15, 2010

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M.—Gov. Bill Richardson was committed to solving New Mexico's water problems. He wanted to make the Land of Enchantment the land of solar panels and wind turbines. He tried squeezing into a hybrid vehicle for a while and urged residents to go green.

With most of his two terms burned up, Richardson, a former energy secretary in the Clinton administration, has had seven years to set a course for how New Mexico would develop its energy resources and protect its environment.

So how has the governor fared?

It depends on whom you ask.

"I think he's probably been the greatest environmental champion that the state has had and perhaps ever will have. It's because environmental issues require risk, and he is willing to take risk and do battle with powerful adversaries," said John Horning of WildEarth Guardians, a group that pressures the state to restore its watersheds, clean its air and protect remote landscapes.

But some said the governor's policy work has made things worse for New Mexico's economy.

"He promised us heartache and he has delivered," said Bob Gallagher, president of the New Mexico Oil and Gas Association. "The regulatory arena during the past six, seven years has been unstable, inconsistent and it's been punitive."

Richardson has acknowledged the importance of oil and natural gas development to New Mexico's economy but said he established lines years ago that he would not cross in his effort to create jobs and build New Mexico into a pro-business state.

One of those lines was Otero Mesa.

Home to hundreds of species of plants, animals and insects, Otero Mesa is the largest publicly owned expanse of undisturbed Chihuahuan Desert grassland in the United States. The area has become a battleground for environmentalists and the oil and gas industry.

Richardson has weighed in on the fight and has helped keep drilling rigs off the expansive grasslands in southern New Mexico. In recognition of the effort, he stepped into an Albuquerque boxing ring this week to accept a ceremonial pair of golden gloves.

"It's a symbol, a good symbol of fighting for the environment," Richardson said. "I would say one of my strongest legacies will be protecting the environment, wildlife, places like Otero Mesa."

Otero Mesa has been just one of the environmental fights the big-time boxing fan has picked.

Richardson came out against a plan by the nation's largest American Indian tribe, the Navajos, to build a \$3 billion coal-fired power plant on tribal land in northwest New Mexico.

The tribe has said the plant would create jobs and provide much needed revenue. Critics argue it would only add to pollution emitted by the region's two existing coal-fired plants.

Richardson also pushed for tougher automobile emission standards and said this week he doesn't want to wait for Congress to pass comprehensive climate legislation that would limit greenhouse gas emissions, the pollution blamed for global warming.

"We have an obligation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and protect the environment, and I am prepared to do that," he said.

Environmentalists said the governor needs to make good on his promise and give the state tools needed to set standards to ensure air quality.

They also called him out on promises he made to do more to ensure the sustainability of New Mexico's limited water supplies. In 2007, Richardson proclaimed it "The Year of Water."

The governor has established a fund to restore river ecosystems and is trying to give special protections to thousands of miles of New Mexico's rivers and streams under the federal Clean Water Act. But environmentalists said not much has been done to address what they describe as New Mexico's "dysfunctional water policy."

Richardson maintains his administration has accomplished a lot on energy and the environment, but he acknowledged he has unfinished business.

He wishes he could have done more to establish transmission lines for exporting electricity generated by New Mexico's wind and solar resources. Transmission, he said, is the key to being ahead in the renewable energy race.

Richardson has one more legislative session—and a pair of golden gloves.

[S.F. Chronicle commentary, Monday, Jan. 18, 2010:](#)

Green firms balk at coalition's lobbying effort

By Ali Winston, California Watch

An organization representing some of California's biggest carbon polluters is working to alter the state's landmark law to curb global warming, while claiming to represent several "green" environmental companies that have since left the coalition after learning of its recent actions.

The coalition, calling itself the AB32 Implementation Group, says it represents a broad section of California interests focused on global-warming regulations. The group, which is being managed by a large public relations firm, Woodward & McDowell, features photographs of white clouds and a field of flowers on its Web site.

But the organization includes 22 of the state's biggest carbon polluters as ranked by the California Air Resources Board. Oil refiners, cement manufacturers, chemical companies and trucking firms figure prominently.

According to environmentalists and lawmakers, the Implementation Group has engaged in a steady campaign to undermine the Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006, which mandates a 25 percent reduction in the state's emissions by 2020.

California Watch found companies on the Implementation Group's membership list that no longer exist or whose executives were surprised to learn of the group's efforts to alter the global-warming law.

Many of the companies are environmental-technology firms that had added a green luster to the Implementation Group's big-business coalition, which includes more than 180 companies and associations.

The public relations firm running the group has a history of clashing with environmentalists. In the 1990s, Woodward & McDowell of Burlingame helped defeat Proposition 128, dubbed "Big Green," which mandated sweeping changes to environmental laws.

Building a juggernaut?

Company associate Dave Fogarty said that his firm helped the Implementation Group draft its mission statement and manages its public image but that the firm has promoted a variety of issues, from school bonds to transportation funding, over the years.

Environmentalists say the Implementation Group has yet to make major inroads into changing the law. But V. John White, the executive director of the Center for Energy Efficiency and Renewable

Technologies and a lobbyist for the Sierra Club, said the Implementation Group and its allies are "trying to create a political juggernaut they can use to beat CARB into the ground."

For the past several months, the powerful state air board has been writing detailed regulations that will set into motion the state's global-warming law, signed with fanfare by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger in 2006.

The law leaves many important decisions to the board, including the details of a first-in-the-nation "cap-and-trade" system that would require big polluters to limit their emissions while giving financial incentives to companies that make improvements.

The Air Resources Board's final product could dramatically alter the bottom line for businesses in the state and spur new industries designed to "capture," or clean up, global-warming emissions.

A pleasing public face

While the board is writing these regulations, the Implementation Group has acted as the public face for its members while pressuring the board to lessen the burden on businesses. The board has multiple deadlines through 2011 to finalize the regulations.

Although the AB32 Implementation Group says it wants "regulatory certainty" and wants to "ensure greenhouse-gas-emission reductions are achieved," a top official with the group has publicly supported legislative proposals that would delay the rollout of AB32, citing potential harm to the economy.

In April 2008, Dorothy Rothrock, who is the co-chair of the Implementation Group and vice president of government affairs for the California Manufacturing and Technology Association, told a legislative hearing she favored a plan that involved suspending AB32 for a year.

"We appreciate the Senate Republicans putting forth these ideas to help stimulate the economy," she said. "AB32 in particular will add significant costs to manufacturing, particularly in the electricity side."

Heavy hitters

In an interview, Rothrock said her support for the suspension of AB32 stemmed from her role as the vice president of the manufacturers' association, not her position with the Implementation Group. "There's a real difference between what I say as the vice president of CMTA and the co-chair of the Implementation Group," she said.

The chief sponsors of the Implementation Group are the California Manufacturers and Technology Association and the California Chamber of Commerce. One prominent member, the Western States Petroleum Association, is a trade organization for companies such as BP, Chevron, ExxonMobil, Shell, Tesoro and Valero.

Few groups are more active in monitoring the global-warming regulations than the Implementation Group. Since 2007, it has sent 41 letters to the Air Resources Board, the governor's office and local air quality districts. The most recent missive, sent Jan. 11, complained about the board's proposed cap-and-trade system.

The group and its sponsors have questioned an economic-impact study downplaying the financial effect on businesses, complained about the fairness of \$63 million in new fees imposed on large polluters, challenged the resources board in court for documentation of the board's spending and questioned the board's authority to conduct a carbon-offset program.

Despite the organization's name, at least one member of the AB32 Implementation Group said that "implementing" the global-warming law was not the group's actual goal.

"The title may be misleading," acknowledged James Duran, the legislative action chairman for the California Hispanic Chambers of Commerce and a member of the Implementation Group. The role of the group, Duran said, is "to provide a focused voice on how to ensure that business economic impact is quantified and minimized."

'Green' members balk

California Watch found five businesses listed as Implementation Group members that were unaware that a high-ranking member of the group had called for suspending AB32. All five are "green" enterprises that would benefit directly from AB32's emphasis on clean energy and sustainable practices.

"I knew that they had an agenda, but I didn't realize they were using people like me to further their goals," said Steve Coyle, principal of Town-Green, a sustainable architecture firm in Oakland.

Coyle's firm joined the group in hopes of bringing a "progressive voice" to its debate. He said he was dismayed that Rothrock, the group's co-chair and chief public representative, had called for suspending the law. He has since notified the group that he wants out.

Other companies were similarly surprised by the Implementation Group's connections to major polluters.

"I was completely unaware of that," said Jeff Cox, a senior policy adviser at FuelCell Energy, a Connecticut company that makes zero-emissions energy equipment. "We were of the belief that it was an ad hoc group of business interests - but it appears that the group has been shanghaied by a group of well-connected interests."

Another company listed as an Implementation Group member, Planktos, was sold in 2008 to a firm from Cyprus that plans to operate copper mines in British Columbia. Planktos once proposed creating algae blooms in the ocean to absorb carbon dioxide. Its phone number now connects to a Farmers Insurance office.

Carbon producers map

See a map locating the 100 largest carbon producers in the state. www.californiawatch.org.

California Watch is a project of the Center for Investigative Reporting with offices in the Bay Area and Sacramento.

[Fresno Bee Earth Blog, Thursday, Jan. 14, 2010:](#)

Fluttering out of existence

By Mark Grossi

Butterfly species are in decline in California, says a University of California, Davis, professor who has been studying this insect for 35 years.

The professor, Arthur Shapiro, says climate change and development are taking their toll on butterflies at sea level, though the insects are not losing ground as quickly in the mountains.

At the tree line in high elevations, butterfly diversity is actually going up as the lower-elevation species flee the warming climate, according to Shapiro. But higher-elevation butterflies have no where else to go -- so they are perishing.

The new analysis is scheduled to be published online this week in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. Shapiro's co-authors include three other UC Davis researchers and two former Shapiro graduate students, including lead analyst Matthew Forister, now an assistant professor of biology at the University of Nevada, Reno.

[Modesto Bee editorial, Saturday, Jan. 16, 2010:](#)

Random numbers to consider

We can't escape numbers. There are the grim ones, such as the 50,000- and-counting estimated death toll in Haiti or the 17.5 percent unemployment rate here in Stanislaus County. And there are the more enjoyable ones, such as 61, Wednesday's high temperature in Modesto.

So we end this week with numbers — some commendable, some disappointing and some just plain interesting.

- 23 — The number of applicants for four slots on Modesto's Comprehensive Fee Task Force. It's a great response, showing people's interest in the issue and their willingness to contribute to study and hash out recommendations to go to the City Council. Applicants will be interviewed next week, and the council make the choices.
- 8 — The number of times the Legislature has met in "extraordinary session" during this two-year session. The topic, no longer extraordinary, is the state budget mess.
- 10,594 — The number of freshman applications to University of California at Merced for fall 2010. The count is up 17 percent from 2009. Transfer applications are up even more.
- 23 — [The number of no-burn days in Stanislaus County since fireplace restrictions began Nov. 1. In San Joaquin County, it's been 20 days and in Merced, 13 days.](#)
- 41 — [The number of notices of violations issued for burning on no-burn days in Stanislaus County.](#)
- 20 — The estimated percentage of Stanislaus County residents who've gotten the H1N1 vaccination so far. More than 3,800 people were vaccinated at two public health clinics, and starting next week, county residents can walk in to the public health department, 830 Scenic Drive, any weekday but Tuesday and get a free shot. Public clinics are planned Thursday in Riverbank, Jan. 26 in Newman, Jan. 28 in Ceres, Feb. 2 in Salida and Feb. 4 in west Modesto. For hours and other information: www.stanemergency.com or 558-8872.

- 23 — Number of opportunities remaining for churches, families, work colleagues and other groups to serve dinners at The Salvation Army Berberian Homeless Shelter and Transitional Housing Center. The downtown Modesto center is open through April and is providing shelter for up to 130 people a night. To sign up or for more information, call the center at 525-8954.
- \$225 — Under the governor's budget proposal, the fine for speeding 15 mph or less over the limit. Fines for going more than 15 mph over the limit would rise to \$325. He should recommend a higher fine for talking on a hand-held cell phone while driving.
- 40 — The percent of regularly scheduled Hughson council meetings member Thom Crowder has missed in the past year.

[S.F. Chronicle editorial, Friday, Jan. 15, 2010:](#)

A cleaner future

Residents of San Francisco's Potrero Hill neighborhood got an early Thanksgiving treat this week. The California Independent System Operator has given the city clearance for a November shutdown of the

Mirant power plant in Potrero Hill, one of the dirtiest in California. It's been a long, hard battle to shut the 40-year-old plant, but we're finally at the finish line. And for the residents of Potrero Hill, the chance to breathe clean air can't come soon enough.

City Attorney Dennis Herrera reached an agreement with the Mirant Corporation to shutter the plant last summer, but the key was getting approval from the California Independent System Operator. The operator had to be convinced that the city had enough energy production to close the plant. The new transmission projects that are scheduled to come online this year convinced the operator, though president Yakout Mansour wrote in a letter to Mayor Gavin Newsom that "eliminating capacity available in the region ... creates significant concerns," especially in the event of a natural disaster.

Well, the Mirant power plant *was* a natural disaster. Residents of San Francisco's oft-neglected southeastern neighborhoods, including Potrero Hill, have long suffered from higher rates of pollution-related illnesses, such as asthma and respiratory disease. And California's last big experience with blackouts and unreliable service didn't come about as the result of a natural disaster, it came about as the result of the energy deregulation debacle of the mid-2000s. The entire state needs to find ways to provide its residents with cleaner power under all possible conditions, and it's right and proper for San Francisco to lead the way.

Naturally, the political wrangling behind this victory is a story in itself. Now that the plant is definitely closing, every city official wants to take credit for making it happen. But far too many of them were willing to trade the filthy plant for three others, known as "peaker" plants, that would have been merely dirty, and horribly expensive for the city in the bargain. Supervisor Michaela Alioto-Pier was the visionary here, insisting that the city could present an effective plan to the operator that didn't involve new plants. Mayor Gavin Newsom also deserves credit for holding firm against the members of the Board of Supervisors who thought otherwise.

[O.C. Register editorial, Mon. Jan. 18, 2010:](#)

Reacting to EPA extortion

The battle to combat global warming may face a significant setback in Washington this week. Moderate Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, wants the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to back off its threat to enforce greenhouse gas regulations. We hope she's successful. The EPA recently declared that greenhouse gases are a threat, giving the agency authority to regulate them.

Ms. Murkowski sees the EPA move for what it is, heavy-handed coercion to pressure Congress to pass cap-and-trade legislation by threatening an administrative fiat beyond lawmakers' control.

"That's a terrible way to pursue climate policy, and beyond that, a terrible way to govern this country," said Ms. Murkowski. She may introduce an amendment to pending climate-change legislation this week to strip the EPA of its greenhouse gas emissions regulation authority.

As opposing economic and scientific arguments mounted last year, cap-and-trade legislation in the Senate stalled. But legislative opposition isn't the only problem facing advocates of government intervention.

Citing the EPA's questionable scientific assumptions, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce declared it will sue to block administrative regulations, while a group of House representatives petitioned the agency to "convene a proceeding for reconsideration" of its finding. Recently leaked e-mails from a major U.K. climate research facility reveal "a serious lack of integrity in the underlying data and models, such that it is doubtful that any process can be trusted," says the petition by Rep. Dana Rohrabacher, R-Huntington Beach, and others.

Meanwhile, global warming skeptics have charged the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration similarly was "seriously complicit in data manipulation and fraud." Retired climatologist Joseph D'Aleo said in a report on KUSI television in San Diego that a computer analysis "found they systematically eliminated 75 percent of the world's (temperature measuring) stations with a clear bias" that resulted in misleadingly high temperature findings. That accusation is similar to one by a Russian think tank last month alleging U.K. climate scientists cherry-picked Russian temperature readings to arrive at false, high temperature readings they feed into computers to predict future temperatures.

Industry groups also are beginning to smell a rat. A major insurance industry trade group warned it is "exceedingly risky" for companies to blindly accept assertions about climate change, given "serious questions" about the extent to which humans cause warming, the New York Times reported. The National Cattlemen's Beef Association also has filed a court petition in Washington, D.C., to overturn the EPA endangerment ruling.

Increasingly, skeptics are being heard where they once were denied a voice when global warming zealots claimed there was a "consensus" that a threat existed. A public debate last week in conjunction with an auto industry conference featured skeptics and true believers arguing whether vehicle regulations are undermined by recent revelations, prompting the Detroit News to conclude that "the panel left no doubt that there is little consensus on global warming."

[Letter to the Contra Costa Times & Tri-Valley Herald, Mon., Jan. 18, 2010,](#)

Tax money wasted

Funding for the Air Quality District should be rescinded or at the very least dramatically reduced. Sixty inspectors, driving 60 cars around the Bay Area looking for a smoking fireplace and industry smoke stacks is a criminal waste of dollars when everyone is searching for ways to reduce a \$20 billion state shortfall.

These inspectors, managed by an overpaid director and his staff requiring office space, computers, faxes, phones, expense accounts, travel, etc., all require health, retirement and vacation benefits.

Wake up governor and Legislature and manage these programs or better yet terminate them. Enough of Big Brother.

Mike Roudnev, Lafayette

[Letter to the Lamorinda Sun, Friday, Jan. 15, 2010:](#)

Leaf blowers are a public health threat

I worked in Orinda as an adjunct professor of psychology for a decade during the 1980s at JFK University, when it was located there. I have been reading of the good work done by the Quiet Orinda group.

I now teach at Sonoma State University and live in small town Sebastopol, where we are also campaigning against leaf blowers and the damage they do to both people and the environment.

We have been inspired by the work of the Quiet Orinda group, which reaches beyond your good city. Here in Sebastopol, our vice mayor, Guy Wilson, on Nov. 17 proposed a leaf blower ban. It is being drafted and will be presented in February.

Leaf blowers are a public health threat, especially to vulnerable populations — pregnant women, young children, elders and people who work at home or at night and try to sleep by day.

Here is what the California State Health & Safety Code Section 41700 says: "No person shall discharge from any source whatsoever such quantities of air contaminants or other material which cause injury, detriment, nuisance or annoyance to any considerable number of persons or to the public, or which endanger the comfort, repose, health, or safety of any such persons or the public, or which cause, or have a natural tendency to cause, injury or damage to business or property."

Leaf blowers violate that code.

The California Air Resources Board's publication "Particulate Matter Air Pollution" adds the following: "Avoid using leaf blowers and other dust-producing equipment to cut down particulate matter."

Particulate matter is harmful particles containing chemicals, fungi, spores and animal fecal matter. Particulate matter breathed into the lungs can kill.

Good Web sites on leaf blowers include Zero Air Pollution at zapla.org, nonoise.org, and terranovalandscaping.com.

Dr. Shepherd Bliss, Sebastopol

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Tuesday, Jan. 19, 2010:](#)

Unwelcome smoky air

This is in response to several letter writers who complained about residential wood-burning restrictions. I am in favor of the wood-burning rules. These rules were put in place by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to protect residents from heart and lung damage that can result from exposure to small particles in wood smoke. Wood burning is restricted only when air quality is forecast to be unhealthy.

My husband and I do not appreciate breathing second-hand smoke from our upwind neighbors' wood burning. We are retired, at home most days, and never use our fireplace. Here's how our neighbors' wood burning impacts us.

Our garage fills with smoke.

The smoke in our yard causes us to delay yard work and outdoor exercise until the smoke clears.

Often the smoke is so thick that it gets into our house. To remove the smoke, we have to run our furnace (or at least the fan unit on our furnace) to filter the air.

Our neighbors may think they're saving money by burning wood, but their wood burning impacts our health, and increases our gas and electric bill.

Diane Merrill, Fresno

[Letter to the Sacramento Bee, Friday, Jan. 15, 2010](#)

Switch to local food production

Re "Pet hens run afoul of limitations in poultry ordinance" (Our Region, Jan. 11): Sacramento must legalize egg-laying hens in residential yards. Local food production is good for humanity.

On average in America, food travels 2,000 miles before it reaches our dinner plates. Transporting food across long distances consumes gas and exhausts the resulting pollution into the air. Food loses nutrition, taste and quality during transportation. Industrial agriculture is dependent upon massive water diversion, dams, synthetic fertilizer, pesticide, herbicide and genetic modification.

The solution is to produce food locally and organically on small farms, ranches and yards. Imagine the benefits to humanity if more people raised chickens and grew fruits and vegetables on their property.

Michael Lee, Roseville