

[Bakersfield Californian, Commentary, Thursday, Feb. 4, 2010:](#)

Chamber invites CARB, air district leaders to expo

By Debbie Moreno, Contributing columnist

As you have seen or heard by now, the Greater Bakersfield Chamber of Commerce has secured two key speakers for our Energy and Clean Air Expo set for Tuesday, Feb. 16 at the Marriott/Convention Center. They are: Mary Nichols, Chair of the California Air Resources Board as a luncheon speaker, and Seyed Sadredin, director, San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, as the morning kickoff speaker.

Some may think that these are "interesting" choices. We feel this event is an opportunity for both the Air District and the Air Resources Board to spend some time with business people. They will be able to educate business on pending regulations that will impact business, and it will be an opportunity for the business community to provide feedback to regulators. Communication between these two groups is important to all of us. We also anticipate having a business panel to address how they can or will work to still be successful with pending regulation as well as sharing their concerns about those same regulations.

Kern County is a remarkable place when it comes to energy and environment. We are known across the country for being a "hotbed" for both renewable and non-renewable energy. As leaders in the business community we know that working with both will continue to be our future. It's not a question of "either/or." We are an organization that has and will continue to work tirelessly to help businesses and the economy so that we can all enjoy a positive quality of life.

Energy and Clean Air Business Exposition

7:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Feb. 16, Bakersfield Marriott at the Convention Center

Agenda

Kickoff presentation/awards 8 a.m. Free, but RSVP for seating.

Trade show: 9 a.m. to noon. Lunch registration begins: 11:30 a.m.

Keynote luncheon/business panel: noon to 1:30 p.m. \$40 per person

Register and pay online at bakersfieldchamber.org or call 327-4421 to RSVP

Trade show/prizes: 1:30 to 2:30 p.m.

Plus: e-waste recycling provided by BARC, hybrid car test drives and more.

Debbie Moreno is CEO of the Greater Bakersfield Chamber of Commerce. This column first appeared in the February issue of the chamber's Metro Business Journal.

EPA visits Kettleman City

Hanford Sentinel, Thursday, Feb. 4, 2010

KETTLEMAN CITY (AP) — After nearly two years of pleading for someone to listen to their concerns about an abnormally high number of birth defects, Kettleman City residents got an audience with an EPA official today.

Jared Blumenfeld, newly appointed regional director of the EPA's Pacific Southwest division, sat as mothers of modest means hugged sons born with cleft palates.

The mothers say they believe six children were born in the area with defects during an 18-month period because they live three miles downwind from the biggest hazardous waste landfill west of the Mississippi River.

Blumenfeld has promised to determine what his agency has done to analyze whether the problem is linked to the Chemical Waste Management Inc. landfill, which wants to expand.

Bob Henry, manager of the waste facility, maintains the operation is safe and hopes the scrutiny will improve lives in the community.

EPA official visits Kettleman families, landfill

He hears from families affected by birth defects.

By Lewis Griswold / The Fresno Bee

Wed., Feb. 4, 2010

KETTLEMAN CITY -- The regional administrator for the federal Environmental Protection Agency said he "learned a lot" after talking Wednesday with residents of this poor farmworker community about a cluster of birth defect cases.

But Jared Blumenfeld, administrator for the Pacific Southwest region, declined to discuss what the mothers told him about their babies.

"These are very emotional things to talk about. I want to respect that privacy," he said after leaving one home and before entering another.

During a 15-month period that ended in November 2008, five babies were born with cleft palates, and three of them died.

Kings County health officials revealed this week that another baby was born with a birth defect that was not a cleft palate, and environmental activists are now saying a seventh child was stillborn with birth defects in August 2009.

Residents in this community of 1,500 have been clamoring for an investigation for months, but it was not until last week that state and federal officials said they'd act.

Blumenfeld promised an internal investigation to see whether the EPA properly handled complaints about the operation of a nearby hazardous waste landfill that is the largest west of the Mississippi, and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger ordered state health and environmental officials to investigate the birth defect cases.

Also Wednesday, Blumenfeld toured the landfill owned and operated by Waste Management Inc. that's in the process of expanding.

Waste Management officials said in a statement that they discussed with Blumenfeld environmental issues in the area, such a truck traffic on Interstate 5 and local drinking water quality.

Residents say they believe the landfill is the source of chemical contamination causing the birth defects, a claim that's denied by Waste Management.

Blumenfeld met with four of the families. "They gave us very good hope after what's happened here in the community," said Magdalena Romero, whose daughter was born with a cleft palate and later died. "They made a promise they're going to do an investigation and help us out."

Romero, speaking in Spanish, said she showed Blumenfeld pictures of her baby's birth defects and also of her daughter lying in her casket to counter denials that no babies have died.

Ana Martinez, an activist with the San Francisco-based Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice, one of the groups working with the Kettleman City community, was with the mothers when they told Blumenfeld their stories.

"It was very emotional," she said. "He couldn't help but be overwhelmed."

Martinez said Blumenfeld told the group "he's going to have someone like a real health expert, someone who is not biased" come to Kettleman City and be available as a medical resource for residents.

EPA official visits Kettleman City, meets mothers whose babies had birth defects

Jared Blumenfeld, regional director of the federal agency, also toured a toxic waste dump that residents suspect is causing the defects and adding to toxins in the community's air, water and soil.

By Louis Sahagun, staff writer

L.A. Times, Thursday, Feb. 4, 2010

The regional director of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency ventured into the dusty farming town of Kettleman City, Calif., on Wednesday for a three-hour tour that included a trip to a nearby toxic waste dump and emotional private meetings with mothers whose babies had birth defects.

The rare diplomatic foray by Jared Blumenfeld came less than a week after he ordered an internal investigation of his agency's oversight of the waste dump and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger directed the state Department of Public Health to conduct a comprehensive study of the community's environmental and health issues. Kettleman City residents and activists who have conducted health surveys say at least five of the 20 babies born in the community between September 2007 and November 2009 suffered serious [birth defects](#), among them cleft palates and lips. Kings County authorities say 64 babies were born during that period, and six had birth defects of various kinds.

Many residents of Kettleman City, located just off Interstate 5 about halfway between Los Angeles and San Francisco, suspect the landfill is causing the defects and adding toxins to the community's air, water and soil.

Blumenfeld stopped first at the modest peach-colored stucco home of Maura Alatorre, whose 20-month-old son, Emmanuel, was born with a cleft palate and missing part of his brain. With her was Lizbeth Canales, who told the administrator that her female fetus died in August and had heart problems and clubbed feet and hands.

"I am happy about this meeting today," Canales said before the talks with Blumenfeld. "All we want is an investigation. If they had investigated earlier, maybe this wouldn't have happened to all these mothers."

Blumenfeld declined to comment about his conversations with the women except to say, "It was a really good meeting. They were able to show their feelings."

Maria Salcedo, whose daughter Ashley was born with cleft palate and related problems and died in January 2009, said she was delighted that Blumenfeld had offered to "help us all he can." She also said Blumenfeld had suggested the possibility of having "an independent doctor" meet with residents with health problems.

Later, Blumenfeld and half a dozen associates visited Magdalena Romero, whose daughter, America, died 4 1/2 months after she was born with a cleft palate and other health problems.

Earlier in the day, Romero said, "I'm nervous about meeting this important man. But the first thing I'm going to do when he gets here is show him pictures of America," and a living room shrine composed of porcelain angels, candles, fresh roses and all of her daughter's toys.

Political tensions have been on the rise in the impoverished community of 1,500 mostly Spanish-

speaking farmworkers since the Kings County Board of Supervisors in December dismissed calls for a full investigation into the reported birth defects before approving a proposal to expand the Chemical Waste Management landfill.

Company officials said the landfill, the largest hazardous waste facility in the western United States and the only one in the state permitted to accept cancer-causing PCBs, is expected to run out of room in 2011. Nonetheless, community activists are calling on local, state and federal officials to declare a moratorium on the project pending the completion of the ongoing investigations.

A week ago, Kings County authorities warned Kettleman City residents that their water supply has levels of arsenic above federal drinking water standards of 10 micrograms per liter. County officials say the arsenic is naturally occurring.

"This is not an emergency," health officials said in a letter released Jan. 29. "However, some people who drink water containing arsenic in excess of the maximum contaminant level over the years may experience skin damage or circulatory system problems, and may have an increased risk of getting cancer."

On Tuesday, the state Department of Public Health is expected to release the results of its own comprehensive review of birth defects in the area.

In Texas, Resistance Over Stricter U.S. Smog Limits

By James C. McKinley Jr., staff writer
N.Y. Times, Wed., Feb. 3, 2010

HOUSTON — Environmentalists squared off against business groups and Texas state officials on Thursday at a hearing on the Obama administration's proposal to tighten standards for smog-producing pollutants, a change that could improve the health of millions but would impose burdensome costs on industry and local governments.

The hearing, before a panel of federal environmental officials, was one of three being held around the country on the proposed new standards, which would replace those set by the Bush administration in March 2008. Those standards, which set the limit for ozone at 75 parts per billion, ignored the advice of a panel of scientists advising the Environmental Protection Agency and have been challenged in court as too weak.

But the Obama administration's proposal to reduce the acceptable level of ground-level ozone to from 60 to 70 parts per billion ran into stiff opposition here, where the oil and gas industry is king and the state environmental agency under Gov Rick Perry, a conservative Republican, has been generally unwilling to crack down on polluters if it means sacrificing jobs.

The members of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, appointed by Mr. Perry, have made it plain they will fight the stricter standards and have called them arbitrary, unnecessary and unachievable.

At the hearing in a hotel ballroom, Michael Honeycutt, the director of toxicology for the Texas commission, questioned the evidence that a higher level of ozone is linked to more hospital admissions for lung problems. Mr. Honeycutt also declared that no ruling would fly in Texas if it required people to drive less or change their daily habits.

"Programs that require lifestyle changes are unacceptable to the public," he said.

The proposed lower standards also drew fire from manufacturers and oil and gas companies, who fear they will bear the brunt of the costs of cutting down the volatile organic compounds and nitrogen oxides that cause smog. Some issued dire warnings of jobs being cut to pay for it.

"It will have a devastating impact on the chemical industry," said Christina Wisdom, of the Texas Chemical Council.

Debbie Hastings, a spokeswoman for the Texas Oil and Gas Association, said that refineries lacked the technology to reach the new goals solely through scrubbing the pollution coming out of smokestacks. Ms. Hastings pointed out that emissions from cars and trucks would have to be drastically cut, too.

"At this point, I really don't think we think we can meet the standard," she said. But environmentalists and health groups, who generally applaud the proposed rule, scoffed at assertions that the petrochemical industry would be forced to slash jobs to meet the requirements. It was an empty threat, they said, pointing out that the federal government has steadily tightened air quality standards for decades without slowing economic growth.

"Historically, the benefits of cleaning up outweigh the costs three to one," said Janice Nolen, of the American Lung Association. The hearings were the first step in a process that will eventually produce a plan in each state for putting a new standard in place. A second hearing was held in Arlington, Va., on Tuesday and a third was planned in Sacramento on Wednesday.

Mayor Annise Parker of Houston said that she supported the stricter rules to protect the health of city dwellers, though she cautioned that the city would need years to reach the goal.

Obama's energy policy: more corn ethanol, clean' coal

By Renee Schoof - McClatchy Newspapers
Modesto Bee, Wednesday, February 3, 2010

WASHINGTON -- The Obama administration Wednesday announced plans to boost the use of biofuels - including more ethanol from corn - and speed up work on a plan to capture carbon dioxide from coal, now the biggest source of global warming pollution.

The White House declared the moves were part of a plan to decrease dependence on foreign oil and create a clean-energy economy that will support many new jobs. Administration officials said the new moves were based on sound scientific research that now gives a green light for coal-based electricity and corn-based fuel.

President Barack Obama told a bipartisan group of governors he was following a "non-ideological approach" to energy that included clean energy and efficiency but also offshore drilling for oil and gas, new nuclear power plants and new technology that would allow for continued use of coal without emissions of heat-trapping gases.

Emphasis on all those forms of energy - plus an expansion of energy from wood chips in the Southeast and fuel from corn in the Midwest - seemed aimed at pulling in support for a broader measure to limit greenhouse gas emissions and gradually raise prices on fossil fuels. So far, there's been no bipartisan approach to such a plan that could pass in the Senate.

Obama also told the governors his "clean energy agenda" would advance two hugely popular goals - reduced dependence on foreign oil and more jobs.

"I happen to believe that climate change is one of the reasons why we've got to pursue a clean energy agenda, but it's not the only reason," Obama said.

He made the remarks in a meeting with 11 governors: Republicans Jim Douglas of Vermont, Bob Riley of Alabama and Mike Rounds of South Dakota; and Democrats Joe Manchin of West Virginia, Steve Beshear of Kentucky, Dave Freudenthal of Wyoming, Brian Schweitzer of Montana, John Baldacci of Maine, Phil Bredesen of Tennessee, Christine Gregoire of Washington and Ted Strickland of Ohio.

Part of the announcement Wednesday was a new rule by the Environmental Protection Agency on standards for renewable fuels. Under a 2007 energy law, the nation was to have 36 billion gallons of renewable fuels by 2022, including 21 billion gallons from "advanced biofuels."

EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson said new scientific studies concluded corn ethanol, when produced with energy-efficient means, could have 20 percent lower greenhouse gas emissions than gasoline.

Much of past criticism of corn-based ethanol focused on corn's heavy requirements for land, fertilizer, pesticides and water. Some reports found corn ethanol resulted in large amounts of greenhouse gases throughout its production and use, especially when land use changes - such as cutting forests, which store carbon dioxide, to make room for corn - were taken into account.

Jackson said the new study also looked at land-use changes, but considered examples from a greater number of countries. They also looked at new data on crop yields and more efficient production methods.

"When we used updated numbers we got different results," she said.

Not everyone is pushing corn-based ethanol. Brazil, for instance, requires ethanol for all its vehicles and is now an exporter of ethanol. It uses sugar cane rather than corn, however. Studies have found ethanol made from sugar produces less carbon dioxide than corn-based ethanol.

The Agriculture Department also proposed a new plan to provide financing for the conversion of biomass, or material made from plants or animals, to energy. The White House announced that the President's Biofuels Interagency Working Group produced a report, "Growing America's Fuel," written by Jackson, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and Energy Secretary Steven Chu.

Environmental groups offered a mixed reaction.

Nathanael Greene, the director of renewable energy policy at the Natural Resources Defense Council, said the new EPA rule confirmed some biofuels reduce global warming pollution and other types pollute more than gasoline and diesel.

Growth Energy, an ethanol trade group, said the new EPA rule is an improvement over its approach last year, when it calculated a higher level of global warming pollution from corn-based ethanol.

The Clean Air Task Force, a non-profit environmental group, said in a statement that the EPA was right to continue to calculate how changes in land use around the world contribute to global warming.

The rule "relies on some very optimistic assumptions about how biofuels will be produced more than a decade from now" and "overstates the actual environmental benefits of many biofuels, including corn ethanol," it said.

The administration announced its creating a task force to speed up the development of a system to capture the carbon dioxide from coal combustion and store it permanently underground. The system is the only method to reduce greenhouse gas pollution from coal use, but it isn't commercially used in any coal-fired power plants in the world.

The task force has 180 days to produce a plan to reduce the costs of carbon capture and storage and make it what Chu called "an affordable solution" in 10 years. It calls for five to 10 commercial demonstration projects by 2016.

The Energy Department is investing more than \$4 billion in carbon capture and storage, and it expects industry to contribute an additional \$7 billion for research and developing and testing at nine sites, he said.

EPA biofuels guidelines could spur production of ethanol from corn

By Steven Mufson, Washington Post Staff Writer

Washington Post Thursday, February 4, 2010

The nation's farmers got a big boost Wednesday when the Obama administration issued new biofuels guidelines that could open the way for large increases in the production of corn-based ethanol.

The Environmental Protection Agency said new data showed that, even after taking into account increased fertilizer and land use, corn-based ethanol can yield significant climate benefits by displacing conventional gasoline or diesel fuel.

The new renewable-fuel standard issued by the EPA drew criticism from some environmentalists as well as oil industry representatives, who accused the Obama administration of catering to farm interests. In an earlier draft of the standard, the administration had said that corn-based ethanol output should be limited because its direct and indirect greenhouse gas emissions exceeded renewable fuel standards.

"The numbers are inconsistent with the great bulk of analyses by others, which consistently find that emissions from indirect land-use change for crops grown on productive land cancel out the bulk or all of the greenhouse gas reductions, but I will have to study the results," said Tim Searchinger, a research scholar at Princeton University and an author of articles critical of corn-based ethanol.

EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson defended the new guidelines, saying that she was "confident" that "we weren't dumbing down the standard to favor any particular industry or . . . outcome." She said revised projections about crop yields and land productivity helped drive the new guidelines.

The biofuels announcement added to growing tension in the coalition of environmental, climate and renewable-energy groups that has supported President Obama's push for a comprehensive climate bill. On Wednesday, Obama again tried to promote such a bill and discourage lawmakers who favor simpler energy legislation instead.

"I don't want us to just say the easy way out is for us to just give a bunch of tax credits to clean-energy companies," Obama said. "The market works best when it responds to price. And if they start seeing that, you know what, dirty energy is a little pricier, clean energy is a little cheaper, they will . . . think things through in all kinds of innovative ways."

With the climate legislation stalled in Congress, however, many of Obama's allies find themselves divided by the president's push for new offshore drilling, his budget's tripling of loan guarantees for nuclear power plants, and his repeated use of the phrase "clean coal," which the coal industry uses as shorthand for still unproven and uneconomic technologies that could limit carbon-dioxide emissions from coal-burning power plants.

"While we stand wholeheartedly behind President Obama's overall vision, there are some areas of disagreement," the Sierra Club's executive director, Carl Pope, said in a statement. "We believe that there is no such thing as 'clean coal.' "

Other energy proposals

The renewable-fuel standard was part of a package of energy announcements made Wednesday. The administration established an interagency task force to come up with a plan to bring about, by 2016, the construction of five to 10 commercial-size coal plants that would capture and store carbon-dioxide emissions. It issued a new guideline for subsidizing the gathering of biomass from farmers for use in cellulosic-ethanol plants. And it announced an effective penalty that motor fuel refiners would have to pay if they fail to meet legal requirements for buying cellulosic ethanol.

But many firms that produce cellulosic ethanol are impatient with the pace of loan guarantees issued by the Energy Department. On Tuesday, 11 chief executives of cellulosic-ethanol companies sent a letter to Energy Secretary Steven Chu complaining about the method the department was using when considering whether a guarantee had "reasonable prospect of repayment."

Arnie Klann, chief executive of Blue Fire Ethanol, which received an \$88 million grant for a project in Mississippi, complained that a proposed plant in California "has been ready to go since April last year and despite our best efforts, [we] have not gotten traction with DOE."

Ethanol opponents

Congress and many experts have long taken a wary view of corn-based ethanol, because of concerns that it might drive up food prices and because it could be counterproductive to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Existing legislation sets a target of 36 billion gallons of ethanol use by 2022, but corn-based ethanol is slated to account for less than half that total while cellulosic ethanol is slated to account for much more.

For this year, Congress had set a target of 100 million gallons of ethanol made from cellulosic raw materials such as switchgrass, corn cobs or wood chips. But the EPA said Wednesday that cellulosic production will amount to 6.5 million gallons, equal to a few pilot projects.

Some critics noted that the EPA's own documentation on the biofuels standards issued Wednesday acknowledged that higher ethanol use could worsen smog in some regions and cause "245 cases of adult premature mortality."

"The thing that makes me happy is that we finally have an accounting tool. It's not perfect, but it will get better over time," said Nathanael Greene, director of renewable-energy policy at the Natural Resources Defense Council. "There are better biofuels and worse biofuels. We need to encourage the better ones and discourage the worse ones."

President Touts His Alternative Fuels Plan

By John M. Broder, staff writer
N.Y. Times, Wed., Feb. 3, 2010

WASHINGTON – President Obama moved on Wednesday to bolster the nation's production of corn-based ethanol and other alternative liquid fuels and ordered the rapid development of technology to capture carbon dioxide emissions from the burning of coal.

The president is trying to expand the portfolio of American energy sources to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, a factor in global warming, and spur advances in alternative technologies. Last week he expressed support in his State of the Union address for increased generation of nuclear power and offshore drilling for oil and gas.

Mr. Obama's motives are environmental, economic and political. He is trying to address climate change by replacing dirty fuels with cleaner sources, jump-start an American clean-energy industry, reduce dependence on foreign oil and attract Republican votes for legislation to do all three.

Efforts to pass a broad energy and climate bill remain mired in the Senate, with some senators challenging the notion that the earth is warming.

"Now, there's no reason that we shouldn't be able to work together in a bipartisan way to get this done," Mr. Obama said after opening a meeting with several cabinet officers and a bipartisan group of about a dozen governors to discuss his energy agenda.

"I know that there is some concern about how energy fits together with climate change," he said. "I happen to believe that climate change is one of the reasons why we've got to pursue a clean energy agenda, but it's not the only reason."

"So even if you don't believe in the severity of climate change, as I do, you still should want to pursue this agenda. It's good for our national security and reducing our dependence on foreign oil. It's good for our economy because it will produce jobs."

To that end, the administration announced that it was completing a rule to try to meet a mandate in a 2007 energy bill to produce 36 billion gallons of ethanol and advanced biofuels a year by 2022. The

United States now produces 12 billion gallons of biofuels, mostly corn-based ethanol. The country does not have the capacity to triple that production.

The Environmental Protection Agency said that meeting the 2022 standard would reduce oil use by 328 billion barrels a year. To qualify under the biofuels program, the agency said, producers must demonstrate that their fuels produce fewer greenhouse gas emissions than oil does throughout the life cycle — growing, processing, transport and burning.

The Agriculture Department said it would provide financing to farmers, ranchers and foresters to convert biomass — farm and forest waste, sugar cane, switch grass and other materials — into liquid fuels for land, air and sea transportation.

And the Energy Department said it would try to build five to 10 projects by 2016 to capture and store carbon dioxide emissions from the burning of coal.

"Our nation's economy will continue to rely on the availability and affordability of domestic coal for decades to meet its energy needs, and these advances are necessary to reduce pollution in the meantime," said Steven Chu, the energy secretary.

Representatives of the biofuels industry generally welcomed the announcement. But they expressed concern about whether adequate federal support would be available to ensure financing for the plants and pipelines needed to make biofuels competitive with oil. They said that rules on life cycle emissions might be so strict as to favor oil.

EPA faces lawsuit over pesticide use

By Seth Nidever

Hanford Sentinel, Thursday, Feb. 4, 2010

An environmental group's attempt to force the Environmental Protection Agency to further evaluate how pesticides affect endangered species could have major implications for Kings County agriculture.

The Arizona-based Center for Biological Diversity sent a letter last week announcing that it will sue EPA unless the agency corrects the alleged violations within 60 days. The center claims that nearly 400 pesticides may be harming as many as 887 species, including the California condor and the coho salmon.

The center also claims that the pesticides get into water, drift over long distances and may harm human health -- although the threatened lawsuit doesn't cover human health issues.

"Basically, the EPA needs to study ... how the pesticide applications may affect those [endangered] species," said Justin Augustine, a staff attorney at the center.

Pesticide use is an important part of agricultural production in the San Joaquin Valley. A recent report from the California Department of Pesticide Regulation reported that Kings County farmers applied 6.2 million pounds to their fields in 2008.

That ranks Kings County as the ninth-highest user of pesticides in the state. The biggest was Fresno County at 27.5 million pounds. Kern County was second at 25.4 million pounds, with Tulare County third at 14.3 million pounds.

Sulfur was the most highly used pesticide in both pounds applied and acres treated. It is favored because it is a naturally occurring substance that kills mildew on wine grapes and tomatoes grown for processing.

Processed tomatoes grossed more than \$100 million for Kings County growers in 2008.

Agricultural interests ridiculed the environmental group's threat.

There is no way the EPA can review the impact of 400 pesticides on 887 species in 60 days, said Kings County farmer Tony Azevedo.

"The Endangered Species Act is one of those laws that was passed for probably a legitimate reason, and it is being misused," Azevedo said.

Azevedo said that pesticides are used in "95 percent" of farming and are a necessary part of the food production process.

"It's a heck of a lot cheaper for us to spray than not to spray," he said.

At the same time, he said that pesticide use today is different from 15 years ago.

Azevedo said that pesticides are much more targeted now to specific insects and situations. For example, some are designed to kill pest insects but leave beneficial insects unharmed. Others mess with the bad bugs' digestive process.

Azevedo said that he follows the University of California's recommendations for integrated pest management, meaning that pesticides are only applied at certain times.

Statewide, pesticide use dropped in 2008 by 6 percent, according to the Department of Pesticide Regulation.

But some crops saw increased applications. Among those were carrots, processing tomatoes and fresh market tomatoes. Public health applications such as mosquito control also increased.

The department said that even though pesticide use declined, growers treated more acres. This "reflects more growers shifting from broad-based insecticides to newer products more specific to the pest and less toxic to people and the environment," a department press release stated. Augustine said he "applauds" less toxic and more targeted pesticides but said it "doesn't change the fundamental question of what pesticides are we using, what are the impacts and how can we avoid the impacts?" A more intensive EPA analysis is needed to better understand the possible health effects of pesticide use, he said.

The Associated Press contributed to this story.

NM House panel stalls natural resources bill

By Susan Montoya Bryan, Associated Press Writer

Contra Costa Times & Tri-Valley Herald, Thursday, Feb. 4, 2010

SANTA FE, N.M.—A state House committee on Wednesday stalled legislation that would allow New Mexico's natural resources trustee to pursue damages from polluters that have compromised groundwater or other natural resources.

Business and industry representatives, ranchers and dairymen have criticized the legislation for going too far and essentially transferring power from the Legislature to the trustee, an unelected position without public oversight.

The bill's sponsor, Rep. Brian Egolf, D-Santa Fe, tried to address concerns by amending the bill to limit the discretion of the trustee and protect property rights. However, the committee split along party lines on efforts to both approve the measure and table it.

The bill's fate is now uncertain, but supporters said they will try to advance the legislation because it would establish the means for the state to recover damages that could be used to pay for costly cleanup of polluted groundwater plumes and other contamination.

"This is about making sure that the contamination price tag is not put on the backs of the people of the state of New Mexico but instead is put on the companies, the entities, the people that made the contamination in the first place," Egolf said.

Despite party line votes, Rep. Jeff Steinborn, D-Las Cruces, tried to bridge the gap by arguing that the measure supports conservative values that center on "doing the right thing."

He also dismissed claims that going after polluters would have a negative impact on the state's economy and jobs, claiming studies have shown communities that protect their resources and quality of life do better economically.

"People want to live in places with a rich quality of life. They don't want to move to a place that has polluted air or polluted water," he said.

Critics contend the legislation opens the door for the natural resources trustee to make decisions that could impact private property rights, and sidesteps the Legislature's duty to make laws.

Rep. Candy Spence Ezzell, R-Roswell, said she was concerned because the trustee is appointed by the governor and does not answer to voters.

"To me, it's very important that our citizens' voice be heard up here, especially whenever it comes to rules and regulations. Different agencies are just taking it upon themselves to do what they see fit," she said.

Supporters of the bill, including Environment Secretary Ron Curry, have argued that the trustee would not be making new regulations, only going after those who are responsible for polluting natural resources.

Curry, the interim natural resources trustee, likened the power of the trustee's office to that of a rental car company. Entities could use New Mexico's resources, but if they are returned with any dents or scratches, the trustee could seek compensation for repairs.

State officials said the trustee's office has collected \$8.4 million from settlements over the past 12 years. Those funds have been used for groundwater and habitat restoration.

[Fresno Bee Earth Blog, Thursday, Feb. 3-4, 2010:](#)

3 meetings on new ozone standard; none in Valley or LA

By Mark Grossi

There will be three hearings on the proposed new ozone standard -- one in Virginia, one in Houston and one in Sacramento.

No hearings will be held in the nation's two most ozone-troubled places, the San Joaquin Valley and the South Coast Air Basin. Between the two, there were more than 200 ozone violations last year.

No two air basins outside of California even come close to that total. Yet, Valley and Southern California residents will have to drive for hours to speak with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The meeting will be from 9:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Thursday at the Four Points by Sheraton at Sacramento International Airport, 4900 Duckhorn Drive.

Childhood ear infections decline as air quality improves

A UCLA study connects improving air quality with a downturn in frequent ear infections among children in the United States.

But the study had a second conclusion that might surprise some people: Childhood respiratory allergy did not seem to be associated with air quality improvements.

I've heard many health experts talk about the possible connection between allergies and pollution. I haven't read many studies that looked at the possible link.

[Air quality improvement and the prevalence of frequent ear infections in children.pdf](#)