

Head of EPA met with protest in Central Calif.

By The Associated Press

San Diego Union-Tribune, Thurs., March 24, 2011

FRESNO, Calif. — Environmental groups are urging the federal Environmental Protection Agency to better protect the health of residents in California's San Joaquin Valley, which is one of the most polluted regions in the nation.

With EPA administrator Lisa Jackson making her first trip to the state's farming regions, activists gathered in Fresno on Wednesday to protest her visit.

Environmentalists are hoping Jackson will reconsider some of her agency's recent decisions, such as granting a draft permit to a proposed fossil fuel power plant near Kettleman City and exempting it from national air quality standards.

Activists are also asking the EPA to deny a permit to expand an existing toxic waste dump, require San Joaquin Valley officials to meet ozone standards, and suspend all registrations for the soil fumigant methyl iodide.

Protesters blast EPA head

By Eiji Yamashita

Hanford Sentinel, Friday, March 24, 2011

FRESNO - A group of activists blasted U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson, calling her stance "pro-polluter" Wednesday, as she made an unprecedented visit to the Valley.

Jackson, head of the federal agency, came to meet with environmental justice activists and residents and listen to their concerns.

When she arrived at a church in southwest Fresno, what welcomed her was a raucous protest outside demanding her to make environmental justice her priority and protect the Valley from added pollution. The crowd denounced Jackson over a recent policy shift exempting the Avenal power plant from new air rules.

The press was barred from a meeting between the activists and Jackson and other high-ranking officials. Staffers told reporters trying to enter the meeting at Westside Church that it was private.

The meeting lasted about an hour, said Bradley Angel, executive director of San Francisco-based group Greenaction.

"She certainly got an earful. She said nothing concrete at all about any of the issues," Angel said after the meeting. "She got pressed on everything from the toxic waste in Kettleman [City] to EPA's continued failure to rule on many civil rights complaints about Kettleman and Avenal."

EPA officials issued a statement following the meeting saying Jackson is fully committed to working to ease concerns facing many impoverished communities in the Valley.

"Administrator Jackson was pleased today to meet with citizens of the San Joaquin Valley who are deeply concerned about air quality and environmental issues facing their community," said EPA spokesman Brendan Gilfillan. "The agency, for the first time in its history, has made environmental justice and the cause of disadvantaged communities a priority in policy making."

Like other protesters, Angel thanked Jackson for holding a meeting with them.

But Angel challenged Jackson to follow through on her promises with actions.

"We do appreciate that she came. Good news is she came and she brought a lot of high-level staff with her," Angel said. "Bad news is she brought nothing concrete, just more words. And so far her words have rung hollow."

U.S. EPA issued a policy shift in January grandfathering industrial projects like Avenal's natural gas-fired power plant from the requirements of the Clean Air Act, such as applying best controls for all regulated pollutants.

Activists are opposing the plans, saying they would add pollution in a region that is already among the nation's worst in air quality.

Among the activists were some from Lindsay and Delano. They urged the EPA to develop a new plan for the Valley air district to meet the federal ozone standard as quickly as possible. They also asked the agency to stop the use of the soil fumigant methyl iodide.

UC Merced hosts green energy trade conference

Six businesses inducted into group's hall of fame

By AMARO Yesenia Amaro

Sacramento Bee, Monday, March 28, 2011

Hundreds of green industry leaders gathered at UC Merced on Friday for the inaugural International Green Industry Hall of Fame conference.

Six green businesses were inducted into the Hall of Fame for their efforts to improve the quality of life by reducing their carbon footprint.

The six businesses are: the American Council on Renewable Energy; Duke Smart Home Program; Grundfos; Josh Dorfman, The Lazy Environmentalist; Drip Tech; and the city of Fresno's recycling program.

"To me, we are still right at the very beginning of it," Dorfman said of the green industry. "This is the starting moment."

He said leaders must be more creative and innovative to advance the green energy industry.

Rod Diridon, executive director for the Mineta Transportation Institute, was the keynote speaker. The United States, he said, has a long way to go to reduce its carbon dioxide emissions.

"America is way above other countries (in emissions)," he said. "We are not doing a lot better yet."

Diridon said it's going to be up to the current generation to fix the problem.

"Global warming is occurring seriously," he said, and used the Himalayas as an example. The mountain range has lost a significant percentage of its glaciers since 1950, he said.

Diridon said California has an opportunity to become more sustainable with its high-speed rail project. The first phase of the project will connect Borden and Corcoran in the San Joaquin Valley. "We've got to expand it quickly," he said.

If it becomes a reality, the rail line is expected to stretch 790 miles, will have 26 stations across the state, and trains that could reach speeds of 220 mph.

Diridon said it would be one of the largest projects to be built in the country.

He spoke of the Golden Gate Bridge and the many challenges that emerged during its construction, but its builders completed the work. "We built the Golden Gate Bridge," he said. "Now let's get that courage back again."

UC Merced is also on the right path to help the state become more sustainable, said Thomas Lollini, an architect at the university.

Lollini talked about the university's sustainable design, noting that buildings on campus are using 50 percent less energy compared with others of their type.

University officials plan to bring down campus use of electricity to 25 percent, he said.

Sam Geil, president and chief executive officer of Geil Enterprises Inc., was involved in organizing the conference. He said about 250 green industry leaders and students attended the event.

Geil said students were invited to the event to introduce them to the possibilities that exist in green careers.

Ray Anderson, founder and chairman of Interface Inc., received the Lifetime Achievement Award. Interface is one of the world's largest manufacturers of modular carpet for commercial and residential applications and a leading producer of commercial broadloom and commercial fabrics.