

Air apparent: Heat generates ozone woes

The Bakersfield Californian

April 28, 2004

By MICHELLE TERWILLEGER, Californian staff writer

If record-breaking April heat feels like a shock to your skin and sweat glands, imagine how your lungs feel. In the Central Valley, heat triggers higher levels of ground-level ozone, a toxic gas that can lead to breathing problems, wheezing chest pain, eye irritation and nausea. And this week's first heat wave of the year is no exception.

"Ozone season has begun," said Shawn Ferreria, a meteorologist for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The gas is formed when sunlight mixes with automobile emissions and other pollutants -- something Kern County has plenty of in the summertime.

Ozone is formed year-round, Ferreria said, but it is the biggest problem for Central Valley residents in the summer months. High-pressure systems keep the pollutants close to the ground.

"They get trapped and accumulate," he said. "The levels tend to climb."

That results in the brown haze valley residents are accustomed to.

"Ideally, we would be able to see a silhouette of the mountains, perhaps," said Daniel Harty, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service. "But we're not able to see anything. It's just kinda hazy."

Last week, air quality in Bakersfield went from good levels to unhealthy for sensitive groups by Saturday. The levels have fallen off a little since then, with levels reaching the moderate range on Tuesday. The air district predicted today's air to be about the same.

Temperatures in Bakersfield have been ranging 15 to 20 degrees above normal with record-breaking highs of 97 on Monday and 98 on Tuesday, according to the weather service.

With the weather service predicting a system from the Pacific Northwest expected to bring down temperatures today and Thursday, the air quality should improve somewhat, Ferreria said. As residents gear up for a long summer, one Kern County Health Department official advises people with respiratory problems to avoid the outdoor air.

"If you can stay indoors, try to do that," said Dr. Boyce Dulan, the county's director of disease control. "If you have to go outside, make it very brief."

People with lung-related diseases have the greatest risk of being affected by ozone, along with seniors, children and outdoor workers.

Elementary students in the Panama-Buena Vista School District have been able to break up their standardized testing this week with outdoor recesses, but when the weather gets hotter and the air becomes more hazy, that may change.

"Whenever it's a bad air day, our district notifies all the schools," said Mona Wilson, principal at Van Horn Elementary School.

In the meantime, teachers are encouraging their students to go to the water fountain or to carry bottles of water, Wilson said.

Revised ag burn rules set to begin

The Bakersfield Californian

April 28, 2004

By MARYLEE SHRIDER, Californian staff writer e-mail: mshrider@bakersfield.com

A new burn management program designed to aid farmers while reducing harmful smoke is set to begin valley-wide operations on May 18. San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District officials

say their new Smoke Management program will give farmers greater flexibility in scheduling ag burns, but will reduce the level of harmful smoke in the valley at any one time.

"It's a more effective way of allocating resources for burning ag waste," spokeswoman Janelle Schneider said. "It's a way of definitively targeting specific areas."

Under the old system, the district determined "burn" and "no-burn" days for each of the two large regions comprising the valley air basin. Under the new program, the air basin is divided into more than 100 smaller zones, with district staff tracking the emissions allotted to each zone.

A computer system will track those emissions and allow burning until the limit is reached in each zone for that day. That way, a no-burn day for one area would not necessarily mean a no-burn day for another, Schneider said.

"Before, a farmer could be affected by burns many miles away. Now his ability to burn will be based on the activity in his particular zone," she said.

That's good news for Richard Jelmini, owner of R&M Jelmini Farms, who said he and other small farming operators had a hard time getting enough burn days last year.

"So now, if they're burning in Wheeler Ridge, it's not going to affect me if I'm burning in Rosedale," he said. "Last year, if you didn't call in soon enough, all the burn days were gone."

The district divided the major regions into smaller zones based on factors like burn activity, geographical boundaries, proximity to metro areas and problem emission areas. Those districts will be monitored by the district's 70 field inspectors, Schneider said.

"We have those inspectors who do spot checks, to make sure people are doing what they say they're doing," she said.

With the new program, farmers will be able to request burn authorization from the district as early as 8 p.m. the day before their planned burn by contacting the district's automated voice-response system or by logging onto the district's Web site.

They may also call the district from 6 to 11 a.m., seven days a week, including holidays.

Tom Frantz, chairman of the Association of Irrigated Residents, with members in Kern, Tulare and Stanislaus counties, said his organization is pushing for a ban on all but essential ag burning, but is pleased with the district's efforts.

"They're making some pretty decent rules, but we still need to subsidize farmers so they can take prunings and things to cogen plants where they can be burned cleaner," he said.

Frantz, a former almond farmer, now a math teacher at Wasco High School, said the new program could result in improved air quality, but only if all program rules are strictly enforced.

"I question if the rules will be enforced, because there will be loopholes, but it's a definite improvement because people are discussing the program," he said.

US High Court Strikes Down Tougher Calif Anti-Smog Rules

The Wall Street Journal

April 28, 2004

WASHINGTON (AP)--The U.S. Supreme Court ruled Wednesday that a Southern California agency may have gone too far in imposing its own antismog rules for city buses, airport shuttles and other vehicles.

Justices, on a 8-1 vote, sided with oil companies and diesel engine manufacturers who claimed that local pollution rules conflict with national standards.

The San Francisco-based 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the tougher local rules, but the decision was voided by the high court. The Supreme Court sent the case back to California to consider the issues.

Justice Antonin Scalia, writing for the court, said that the emissions rules appear to be blocked by the federal Clean Air Act.

"If one state or political subdivision may enact such rules, then so may any other; and the end result would undo Congress's carefully calibrated regulatory scheme," he wrote.

Justice David H. Souter filed the only dissent. Souter, of New Hampshire, said he disagreed that the Clean Air Act "prohibits one of the most polluted regions in the United States from requiring private fleet operators to buy clean engines that are readily available on the commercial market."

The rules apply to Los Angeles, San Bernardino, Riverside and Orange counties, which together have the nation's worst air-quality problem. The restrictions were imposed in 2000 and apply to fleets of vehicles such as buses, waste haulers and others.

The Clean Air Act gives states some authority to set their own rules. At issue in Wednesday's case were local standards.

Hydrogen-powered Fords set for test-drive in capital

By Mark Glover -- Sacramento Bee Auto Editor

Published 2:15 am PDT Wednesday, April 28, 2004

Sacramento was again singled out as a hot spot for green vehicle development Tuesday when Ford Motor Co. and oil company BP announced a plan to bring a fleet of hydrogen-powered vehicles to the area and to build hydrogen fueling stations for them.

The initiative is part of a newly unveiled \$350 million project by the Department of Energy to fund a variety of hydrogen-related auto projects. The goal is to reduce dependence on foreign oil.

Private companies are expected to pour an additional \$225 million over the next five years into programs promoting hydrogen research.

Hydrogen-fueled cars and trucks have zero emissions, which makes them attractive in pollution-plagued California. However, while hydrogen is abundant there are some concerns about safely using it. It is a flammable gas, which some think is too great an explosive hazard if not properly contained during fueling or in traffic accidents.

While other automakers - including DaimlerChrysler, BMW, Toyota, Honda and Nissan - announced plans Tuesday to use federal money to introduce hydrogen-powered vehicles into the Golden State, Ford singled out Sacramento.

The nation's No. 2 automaker said it plans to distribute 10 Ford Focus FCVs - Focus passenger cars modified to run as hydrogen-powered fuel cell vehicles - throughout the Sacramento region. Vehicle assembly is scheduled to begin in the fourth quarter of this year, with road trials as early as first quarter 2005.

BP said it will build hydrogen fueling stations in the area for refueling the cars' hydrogen tanks. The timetable for building the stations and their locations have yet to be determined.

The West Sacramento-based California Fuel Cell Partnership, which has worked on fuel cell vehicles since 1999, said it will be happy to be involved in maintaining and fueling the Ford autos. "These vehicles are getting more exposure every day," said spokesman Joe Irvin.

In addition to the partnership, the Sacramento region is home to extensive alternative fuel research and development at the University of California, Davis, and the Sacramento Municipal Utility District.

Ford said its locally distributed Focus FCVs will be divided among three state agencies - the Air Resources Board, the California Energy Commission and the Department of General Services - as well as SMUD and the city of Davis.

Ford officials said they hope the FCVs will help local officials gain more experience with fuel cell vehicles and promote the use of hydrogen vehicles in the region.

The Sacramento region was one of three metropolitan areas designated to receive 10 vehicles each - and accompanying hydrogen fueling stations - under the Ford-BP initiative.

The other two were Detroit and Orlando, Fla.

"This demonstration and validation project will play a major role in moving us forward toward a hydrogen-fueled future," said Gerhard Schmidt, a Ford vice president.

Oil company ConocoPhillips also announced its intention to build hydrogen fueling stations in California.

The flurry of hydrogen news came just a week after Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger formally disclosed his plans for a "Hydrogen Highway" that would stretch the length of the state.

The governor's efforts are just one of the Sacramento region's claims to being a center for fuel cells, electric vehicles and alternative-fuel transportation.

* The California Fuel Cell Partnership develops and promotes fuel cell vehicles. It includes representatives from the automotive and energy industries, technology developers and government. Ford and BP are among the members.

Ford and BP officials said the partnership headquarters at 3300 Industrial Blvd. will handle most of the refueling and maintenance for the Focus FCVs delivered to the area.

* At UC Davis, the Institute of Transportation Studies has established an international reputation for cutting-edge research and testing of alternative-fuel vehicles.

* SMUD has tested a wide range of electric vehicles through its own programs and has electric vehicle recharging stations at its Sacramento headquarters.

While the exact distribution breakdown of the 10 Ford Focus FCVs has yet to be determined, SMUD electric transportation supervisor Bill Boyce said the utility was hoping to receive three.

"We would like to do high-mileage testing with one of the vehicles and use the other two for public outreach around the city," Boyce said.

Ford and BP said Focus FCVs going to state agencies and the city of Davis will likely produce more information on fuel cell vehicle operation, maintenance and consumer acceptance. In Davis, the vehicles will likely be used by the Police Department and various city agencies. There is a hydrogen refueling facility on the UC Davis campus.

The Ford Focus FCV uses an 85-kilowatt fuel cell stack manufactured by Ballard Power Systems and a nickel metal-hydride battery pack.

A regenerative braking system enables the vehicle to produce power on deceleration and braking.

By converting chemical energy into electrical energy to power the vehicle's electric motor, emissions are reduced to heat and water.

Most experts think it could be at least a decade before hydrogen fuel cell vehicles would be ready and affordable for the mainstream U.S. market.

Fuel-Cell Vehicles to Hit California Roads

By John O'Dell, Times Staff Writer

Los Angeles Times

April 28, 2004

California will get dozens of new hydrogen-powered fuel-cell vehicles and a string of hydrogen filling stations to help spur Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's "hydrogen highway" plan under a new grant program announced Tuesday by federal Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham.

The \$350 million in federal grants, plus \$220 million in private funding, will be divided among five automaker-energy partnerships nationwide in the five-year program.

Abraham is expected to reveal more details today about California's role in a speech at the National Hydrogen Assn. conference in Hollywood.

But interviews with various program participants suggest that automakers will place more than 150 hydrogen-fueled vehicles into service nationwide over the five-year program, with the majority of them used in California.

The grants are part of the \$1.2 billion the Bush administration has set aside to develop hydrogen-fueled vehicles and hydrogen filling stations in the next five years.

But many analysts say development of a hydrogen energy system will be a multi-decades project costing tens of billions of dollars. And critics claim that the difficulties in producing fuel-grade hydrogen make it less efficient and potentially more polluting than gasoline.

Michael Flynn, director of the Office for the Study of Automotive Transportation at the University of Michigan, says carmakers have used the Bush administration's support of hydrogen technology as an excuse to avoid catching up with Japanese carmakers in hybrid car technology. "The way we are approaching hydrogen development has distracted Detroit."

Ford Motor Co. and General Motors Corp. are introducing their first gasoline-electric-powered hybrid vehicles this year. Toyota Motor Corp. and Honda Motor Co. have been selling popular hybrid cars in the U.S. for four years. Hybrids combine internal combustion engines and electric motors to increase power and fuel economy. While cleaner than most standard gasoline- or diesel-fueled vehicles, hybrids still produce unhealthy emissions.

The federal hydrogen program outlined by Abraham in a speech at Wayne State University in Detroit is aimed at spurring development of "zero-emission" hydrogen-powered vehicles and of hydrogen fuel supplies to power the cars.

"The two go hand in glove," said Andreas Schell, senior manager of fuel-cell systems for DaimlerChrysler. Schell said DaimlerChrysler would build and place as many as 30 fuel-cell vehicles for use in California and Michigan.

Essentially, a fuel-cell vehicle is an electric car or truck with an onboard generator, or fuel cell, that produces electricity by combining hydrogen and oxygen. Distilled water is the only byproduct, so the autos are considered emission-free. But they must carry a supply of hydrogen to function.

Carmakers and fuel companies say their goal is to produce hydrogen using renewable energy sources such as wind and solar power. But most of it now is produced from natural gas or other fossil fuels in a process that consumes tremendous amounts of electricity.

Ford said Tuesday that it would build 30 fuel-cell-powered Focus sedans to be used in the test program, 10 each in California, Michigan and Florida. The cars will be used by government agencies, universities and private firms.

Energy company BP, partnered with Ford and DaimlerChrysler, will develop hydrogen fueling and production stations in California, said Michael Jones, general manager of BP's hydrogen program. He wouldn't disclose how many stations would be built.

A consortium that includes BMW, Toyota, Honda and Nissan Motor Corp. and their energy partner, Air Products & Chemicals Inc., said it would build 24 hydrogen fueling stations in California and put 65 hydrogen-fueled cars on the road. The partnership led by Chevron-Texaco and Hyundai Motor Corp. said it would build as many as six hydrogen fueling stations in California and place 32 fuel-cell-powered Hyundai sport utility vehicles into service.

GM, the nation's largest automaker, has been a leading proponent of fuel-cell development and plans "to be competitive with the other participants," said Tim Vail, business development director for GM's fuel-cell programs.

Environmental Education

By Cynthia J. Wright
Selma Enterprise staff

April 28, 2004

Environmental awareness and a pinch of controversy were in the air Saturday as Selma held its third annual Earth Day celebration in Lincoln Park.

There was fun for all ages, with a bounce house and "earth-friendly" crafts for the kids, and educational booths and speakers for the adults. Recycled artwork from several of Selma's elementary schools was on display.

Several speakers and entertainers took center stage and gave educational presentations.

Carolina Simunovich, from Fresno Metro Ministries, was the first speaker, and created a bit of controversy when some of her statements struck a chord with Janelle Schneider, an education specialist for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. Schneider was manning a booth for the SJVAPCD.

Fresno Metro Ministries is an ecumenical and interfaith, non-profit organization engaged in problem-solving, advocacy and community organizing around several primary community issues, according to the organization's Web site. It has a department that concentrates on environmental health and air quality issues.

Simunovich's presentation was good and educational for the most part, according to Schneider, but she took exception to some of the comments that were made toward the end of Simunovich's talk. Schneider also said she was disappointed the air district wasn't asked to speak, believing that they are the most qualified organization in the area to speak to issues of air quality.

Toward the end of Simunovich's presentation, she made several comments suggesting the air district was ineffective and made reference to lawsuits brought against the district by environmental organizations. Schneider said the implication was that the air district doesn't do anything unless they are "sued into it."

Schneider said such implications simply aren't true.

"We have a job to do and we are always doing it," said Schneider in a phone interview Monday morning. She said the air district is working hard on solutions to the air quality problem all the time, and pointed out the rule the district wrote last year on wood-burning curtailment.

"Not everyone is happy with that rule," said Schneider, "but it had to be done."

The SJVAPCD is currently addressing state lawmaker Dean Florez's package of bills that recently passed, according to Schneider.

Schneider admitted that lawsuits have been brought against the SJVAPCD, which accuse the district of not being proactive enough. But, she said, people don't understand what a complicated issue it is, and how much is involved in finding and implementing solutions.

"Her (Simunovich's) comments illustrate the need for heightened public awareness of the problems and their solutions," said Schneider. "We are all a part of the problem, and we all need to be part of the solution. The problem is multi-faceted, and everyone has a responsibility to contribute to the solution."

Other speakers and entertainers for the day included:

Bryan Odd, the magician so amazing he amazes himself, from the Fresno Metropolitan Flood District, who gave an educational magic show,

Michael Kunz, a biology professor from Fresno Pacific University,

Live music by Saltwater, a group made up of Fresno Pacific University alumni,

Selma Councilman Bob Allen, who read the Dr. Seuss book "The Lorax" to children, and

The Second Street Dancers.

Booths set up to educate the public included displays from:

The Selma Fire Department, which brought brochures and handouts for adults and "Sparky's Hazard House" to educate the kids. Sparky's house is an automated shadow box to show kids how to recognize and escape danger inside a house if it catches fire. This innovative educational tool was recently acquired by the department and funded by a grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency,

The Selma Police Department, which had a variety of literature available and gave out free gifts of Frisbees, pencils, key chains and magnets to everyone. They also distributed approximately 80 gun safety locks at the event, according to Lt. Bob Johnson of the Selma Police Department,

Tree Fresno,

Ecological Farming Association,

The University of California Cooperative Extension of Master Gardeners, and

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Prizes were awarded to the students who created recycled artwork which was displayed. First- and second-place awards were given in each grade level category.

Winners for the first-grade level were:

First place: Jesus Alvarado

Second place: Lilly Lal

Winners for the second-grade level were:

First place: Aaron Cancino

Second place: Nayeli (last name unknown)

Winners for the third-grade level were:

First place: Ryan Katayama

Second place: Stephanie Cantu

Winners for the fourth-grade level were:

First place: Paul Castanon

Second place: Nathan Morales

(No entries for the fifth-grade level)

Winners for the sixth-grade level were:

First place: Andy Cortez

Second place: Anthony DeLalsla

Also awarded were prizes for:

Most recyclable: Bryan Chronister, and

Highest CRV value: Anthony DeLalsla

Melissa Harding, a VISTA volunteer and Selma's recycling coordinator, put the Earth Day event together. Harding said she started making phone calls and scheduling speakers and booths in February.

She said that over the last several months, she's put about an hour a day into the event. But, she added, "For the last two weeks, I've done nothing but Earth Day."

Harding said she learned a lot from the experience and wants to make it bigger and better next year. She estimates about 250 Selmans attended the event.

State Seeks Rehearing on LNG Projects

By William Wan, Times staff writer

Los Angeles Times

April 28, 2004

California officials wrangling with federal regulators over who has the power to approve the building of controversial energy terminals in the state are trying to force that fight into the courts.

In a petition filed with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, state officials said the agency erred when it gave itself sole authority over the construction of liquefied natural gas terminals. The petition, filed Friday, asked the commission for a rehearing.

If the rehearing is denied, that would clear the way for the state's Public Utilities Commission to sue FERC in federal court.

In addition, the PUC approved a measure last week that may give it a way to bring the issue before state courts.

For months, the fight between federal and state agencies has raged on paper, spawning reams of memos and procedural filings. The bickering paused last month, when FERC declared itself the sole authority over the siting and construction of LNG terminals, including a proposed facility in Long Beach.

"FERC's ruling was basically a power grab" for state gas operations, said PUC Commissioner and former president Loretta Lynch. By filing for a rehearing on the Long Beach proposal, PUC resumed the fight.

But PUC officials feared FERC would simply sit on their request for rehearing, Lynch said.

Such a move would prevent California officials from taking the issue before a federal court.

So, PUC members voted last week to force the company behind the Long Beach project to apply for a state permit. If the company — Sound Energy Solutions, a Mitsubishi subsidiary — refuses, PUC could sue for compliance in a state Superior Court.

Either way, the PUC wants the issue before a judge, Lynch said, noting several previous court cases led to rulings in her agency's favor on a variety of energy-related issues.

FERC officials responded Tuesday, saying their agency would seriously and quickly consider the PUC's request for a rehearing.

Four LNG plants exist in eastern and southern states. Companies have proposed three in California — in Long Beach, Humboldt Bay and off the Ventura coast.

Companies want to build more because the fuel cuts cost and increases capacity. When chilled at minus 260 degrees Fahrenheit, natural gas turns into liquid and shrinks to a fraction of its original size. Companies then can easily haul large quantities by ship.

But critics say the highly flammable liquid makes an LNG terminal at Long Beach a dangerous proposition. In January, an explosion at an Algerian LNG plant killed 27 people. Last month, safety concerns crushed plans for LNG terminals in Eureka, Calif., and Harpswell, Maine.

Since FERC's March 24 declaration of sole authority over LNG plants, several other groups have entered the brawl, laying their own claims to authority over the Long Beach project.

Agencies — regulating areas from fish and game to water quality — have filed petitions with the federal government, asking for a rehearing or clarification of FERC's ruling.

One of them, South Coast Air Quality Management District, recently filed a report, stating that the LNG plant in Long Beach could worsen pollution, adding 15 tons of microscopic particles to the air each year.

Sound Energy has fought its critics with a study of its own, releasing a poll this month that says a majority of Long Beach registered voters — 56% — want the LNG project.

But opponents, including environmental activists, raised doubts about the poll.

"This poll looks like what you would use to sell this project to the people of Long Beach," said Susan Jordan, director of the California Coastal Protection Network. "My interpretation of their numbers is that the majority of people in Long Beach simply don't know anything about this project."

Despite months of wrangling between government agencies, she said, ignorance among Californians about the project remained the biggest problem in the debate. "California should be in the driver's seat. It should be up to Californians if, where and when we have LNG plants."

Energy Department announces \$350 million in research grants for hydrogen fuel technology

Sarah Karush, Associated Press Writer

Published in the S.F. Chronicle

Tuesday, April 27, 2004

(04-27) 13:26 PDT DETROIT (AP) --

The Energy Department announced \$350 million in grants Tuesday to more than 130 research institutions and companies, including the Big Three automakers, to put hydrogen-fueled cars on the road by 2015.

The projects -- which are worth \$575 million with private funding -- are aimed at removing some of the obstacles to developing the cleaner-burning technology for widespread use.

Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham said the projects will address problems such as how to store hydrogen and how to make hydrogen fuel cells that are durable and affordable.

"It's a very comprehensive program that has brought together for the first time the major energy and the major automotive companies of the world to work on this extremely important challenge," Abraham said.

Hydrogen does not create any pollution or greenhouse gases. But unlike oil or coal, hydrogen must be produced -- there are no natural stores of it waiting to be pumped or dug out of the ground.

Detroit's Big Three automakers -- General Motors, Ford and DaimlerChrysler -- each will lead research teams, as will Texaco Energy Systems LLC and Air Products and Chemicals Inc.

Other companies chosen to take part in the projects include Shell Oil Products, BP and foreign automakers.

The grants represent nearly one-third of \$1.2 billion that President Bush has pledged for hydrogen research. Most of the money will be distributed over five years.

"I think we can use technology and innovation to go beyond the false choices of the past," Bush said Monday during a campaign stop in Minneapolis.

Davis firm reports ethanol advance

But cheaper output of the gas additive may not be felt at the pump.

By Dale Kasler -- Sacramento Bee Staff Writer
Published 2:15 am PDT Tuesday, April 27, 2004

With gasoline prices at record or near-record levels, a Davis biotech company said Monday it has achieved a breakthrough in reducing the cost of ethanol, a key additive in the gas sold in California and elsewhere.

But the progress announced by Novozymes won't bring any quick relief to motorists. It'll be a few years before cheaper ethanol would be commercially available - and an oil-industry analyst says cheaper ethanol might not make much of a dent in gas prices anyway. Novozymes, a Danish biotech company working on industrial enzymes, said most of the ethanol research is being performed at its Davis-based Novozymes Biotech Inc. subsidiary.

The subsidiary, working with the National Renewable Energy Laboratory, has been researching methods of turning biomass - or crop residue - into ethanol.

Most ethanol now comes from corn. The laboratory is part of the U.S. Department of Energy, which is financing the research.

Despite the breakthrough, a commercial product is "a couple of years away," said Glenn Nedwin, president of the Davis subsidiary.

Cheaper ethanol "would be cool" but wouldn't solve all of California's gas problems, said David Hackett, an oil-industry consultant in Irvine.

Under a federal mandate to clean the air, California refiners have been using ethanol as a substitute for MTBE, an additive that's been banned for environmental reasons. Because it takes up less volume than MTBE, ethanol tightens gas supplies and adds to the cost.

Even if ethanol becomes cheaper, the "lost volume" problem will continue to put upward pressure on the price of gas blended with ethanol, Hackett said. California officials have been badgering the U.S. government for years for a waiver so the state can do without ethanol.

AAA said Monday that U.S. gas prices are at an all-time high, an average of \$1.81 a gallon for self-serve regular. The California average is about \$2.18, or about three cents shy of the record. Sacramentans are paying an average of \$2.08, or about nine cents below the record from March 2003.

Blair Warns on Climate Change As Threat

By The Associated Press

The New York Times

April 27, 2004

LONDON (AP) -- Prime Minister Tony Blair said Tuesday that the threat of climate change was the most pressing long term issue facing the world and reaffirmed Britain's commitment to the Kyoto Protocol on global warming.

"We have to act and we have to act now," said Blair, at the launch of a new organization that aims to speed up cuts in greenhouse gas emissions.

The prime minister said it was important the issue of global warming was discussed at the forthcoming G8 summit in the United States.

The 1997 Kyoto Protocol sets the target of bringing emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases worldwide eight percent below the 1990 level by 2010.

Washington has drawn fire from other countries for rejecting the protocol as based on flimsy evidence and harmful to the economy.

Blair was speaking at the launch of the Climate Change Group, which brings together leading corporations, financial institutions, civil organizations and state, city and national governments to accelerate greenhouse gas emission reductions.

"I think that there is a fair recognition around the world that something is happening to our climate," he said.

But there was also a debate "that there's some kind of trade off between economic growth and environmental protection and that if we improve the protection of the environment we may inhibit our ability to grow and enjoy rising living standards. Each of these issues has to be confronted," Blair added.

"We believe in the Kyoto Protocol and we believe it is essential that we have it implemented."

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, April 26, 2004:](#)

Good start

I am proud of the Fresno City Council for taking the innovative step of granting free parking to drivers of low-emission cars, especially at a time when the Bush administration is doing everything it can to roll back our environmental protections. This is certainly a start.

What is nice about these vehicles is that if enough people drove them, it would not only virtually eliminate our pollution, but would also get rid of our need for foreign oil. Then we could regulate the price we pay at the pump, and we would no longer have a need to search for weapons of mass destruction hiding in the oil fields of the Middle East.

The next step is to figure out a way to make people conserve water (as in water meters) and electricity (solar panels, perhaps), and to recycle whatever is possible.

Anything extra we pay now will be much more costly in a few years. And at what price? Too many of our children are suffering from asthma and other diseases because the adults don't care enough to spend a little extra time and money to protect them. You can't wait for the other guy to do it for you.

Bill Rovin Fresno