

## Farmers have until year's end to turn in plans to clean the air

Juliana Barbasa, Associated Press Writer

in the Bakersfield Californian, S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Wednesday, December 22, 2004

FRESNO, Calif. (AP) -- The Central Valley's dairy, cotton, fruit and vegetable farms are the newest front in the fight to clean up one of the nation's dirtiest air basins.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is requiring farmers with more than 100 contiguous acres and dairies with more than 500 cows to submit plans by the end of the year showing what they're doing to reduce the microscopic particles of dust, chemicals or other substances that come from their land.

More than 6,400 farms and dairies in the 270-mile-long valley between San Francisco and Los Angeles meet the requirements to participate in the plan. The farmers can choose from dozens of dust-fighting options. They include measures many already practice, such as watering unpaved roads, switching to organic farming and working at night when winds are lighter.

Some environmental activists lauded the new requirements, saying it was about time farmers joined local governments and other industries in controlling dust. But critics said the requirement asks for too little and gives farmers too much room to count measures they already were taking as part of their improvement package.

The requirements are "really just a sham," said Brent Newell, an attorney with the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment.

Farmers are turning in plans in which they give themselves credit for actions they might have been taking for decades, he said. That would include growing permanent crops such as almonds and peaches.

Some farmers also have been critical of the program, although for different reasons. They say air regulators are focusing on agriculture because it's an easy target, while the other big source of particulate matter -- vehicle emissions -- goes unchecked on the local level.

"We have less land in agriculture today than we had 40, 50 years ago, and the pollution is worse," said San Joaquin Farm Bureau program manager Joe Petersen, who farms 50 acres of cherries and wine grapes in San Joaquin County. "That says for me that ag isn't the problem."

Despite the concerns, more than two-thirds of farmers with enough land or cows to fall under the new rules had complied and submitted their two-year plans by early December, said Rick McVaigh, the regional air board's permit services manager.

Health advocates said asking farmers to do their part is an important step in addressing the region's pollution problem. Farms raise 51 percent of the tiny specks of dust that help give the valley one of the nation's highest asthma rates.

Farmer John Pucheu said the requirement has raised farmers' awareness of the need to keep dust down. Like many farmers, however, he said the air among the cotton fields where he lives feels a lot cleaner to him than what he sees when he goes into Fresno, the valley's largest city.

"In these urban areas, you have hundreds of thousands of cars," said Pucheu, who farms 3,500 acres in the west Fresno County town of Tranquillity. "Out here, most days the fields are just sitting there, growing."

The latest cleanup plan proposes reducing particulate pollution by 23 percent, or 34 tons a day, by 2010. To date, the region has missed a series of federal deadlines to reduce pollution -- and residents in the area are paying for it with the nation's highest asthma rate.

Medical research has shown that the particles that concern the air regulators and health workers, called PM10 because they are under 10 micrometers, or one-seventh of a human hair in width -- can lead to chronic respiratory problems.

According to the American Lung Association, the tiniest particles -- those smaller than 2.5 micrometers -- can lodge themselves deep inside lung tissue. They have been linked to heart attacks, strokes and a shorter life expectancy.

The particles can consist of diesel exhaust, soot, ash and organic compounds from dairies such as ammonia, in addition to the dust that can rise from fields during harvest or tilling.

"No one likes to get regulated," said Josette Merced Bello, chief executive officer of the American Lung Association of Central California. "Ag is not the only source, and this is not the only solution. But it's important for everyone to get involved."

## **Hahn, rivals spar over environmental issues**

Michael R. Blood, Associated Press Writer

in the Bakersfield Californian, S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Wednesday, December 22, 2004

LOS ANGELES (AP) -- A debate between Mayor James Hahn and his four rivals centered on whether Hahn has made progress in cleaning up the city's air, port and parks, or allowed unresolved environmental problems to fester.

The incumbent mayor said in a 90-minute debate on environmental issues Tuesday that Los Angeles has become a healthier place because of his efforts to curb pollution, cut commuter travel time and encourage the development of wind and solar power.

But other candidates depicted the city as a noxious stewpot of environmental problems, from smog to trash dumping.

"According to the American Lung Association, L.A. earns the distinction of having the worst air quality in the nation," said former Assembly Speaker Bob Hertzberg, who promised to stop road construction during rush hours and get trucks off the freeways in the mornings and evenings.

Councilman Antonio Villaraigosa called Los Angeles "the most polluted city in America."

"When you look at the issue of leadership in this city, there is none," he added.

As in the first mayoral debate earlier this month, Hahn was targeted almost from the beginning. He was criticized on issues from alleged City Hall corruption to his stewardship on water quality to the \$11 billion remodeling plan for the Los Angeles International Airport, which Hahn supported.

Hahn said his program to improve intersections had sped up commutes for 1 million drivers, but Councilman Bernard Parks said it would take the mayor 400 years at the current pace to get the city's roadways moving.

The mayor repeatedly faulted Sacramento, saying the Legislature shortchanged the city on vital environmental funding. The remarks were clearly aimed at three of his four rivals who have collectively spent years at the statehouse -- Villaraigosa, a former Assembly speaker, state Sen. Richard Alarcon, D-Sun Valley, and Hertzberg, also former Assembly speaker.

"I'm tired of these of these guys from Sacramento telling us how much money they gave us, after they've taken \$150-\$175 million a year. We are getting back pennies on the dollar," Hahn said.

Tuesday's taped debate, although sponsored by the Los Angeles League of Conservation Voters and intended to focus on environmental concerns, did not provide a respite for Hahn from questions about suspect fund-raising and other accusations of ethical lapses at City Hall.

A panel of environmental activists questioned the candidates, a first step in the vetting process that is expected to end with an endorsement by the group next year. The league, founded in 1976, is the only environmental political action committee in Los Angeles County.

The candidates are all Democrats.

On the question of diesel pollution at the city's port, Alarcon faulted the mayor for failing to stand up to the shipping industry and the pollution it's producing. Villaraigosa said Hahn had only acted when threatened with legal action.

In response, Hahn argued that more ships than ever are plugging in and using electricity instead of using their own diesel power while docked at port.

When asked about plans to get more residents to use public transportation, Parks said Hahn had failed to work with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority to find solutions. Instead, Parks said Hahn devoted money to improving a mere fraction of the city's congested intersections.

Hahn, however, said that 1 million drivers had an easier commute because of road improvements under his watch.

Although the debate was intended to focus on environmental issues, Hahn's rivals attempted to steer the discussions to allegations of wrongdoing at City Hall that have clouded his administration.

Federal prosecutors and the Los Angeles County district attorney's office have been conducting parallel investigations into city practices. Federal prosecutors have been collecting contracting documents involving the airports and harbor departments and the Department of Water and Power, and District Attorney Steve Cooley has said he is looking into whether city contracts were tied to political contributions.

Hahn argued said voters would have to decide what direction Los Angeles would head.

"We can continue to move forward with results ... or choose the path of a screeching halt," Hahn said. "I'm proud of what we've done to clean up the environment."

## **District drops no-burn tickets**

### **Some violations thrown out because heat sensors may have been used illegally**

By Stephanie Tavares, Californian staff writer  
Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, Dec. 22, 2004

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has decided to put away their infrared thermometer sensors amid questions about their effectiveness and the legality of using the heat detectors to find illegal fires on no-burn days.

The district stopped using the sensing devices on homes a few weeks ago after the district realized they weren't particularly useful and were possibly being used illegally. The infrared sensors will continue to be used by the district for other purposes.

Bakersfield City Councilman Mike Maggard and 3rd District Supervisor Barbara Patrick, who both sit on the air board, had asked the district staff at the last air board meeting to evaluate the use of the infrared scanners.

"I'm pleased that they have reached that conclusion," Maggard said of the decision to stop using the scanners. "I was very concerned about the perception that that was an inappropriate invasion of privacy."

The Kern County office is also throwing out 10 of the 17 violations issued in Kern County on the two designated no-burn days this season, some because of technical mistakes.

Tickets, which can range from \$50 to \$1,000, are given only on designated no-burn days when air pollution is expected to reach unhealthy levels.

The district's Kern County outreach representative, Brenda Turner, said the district will only issue fines against those violators who have smoke visibly emanating from their chimneys when the violations are issued.

The decision is based, in part, on concerns about the legality of using an infrared sensor to detect illegal fires in homes. The use of similar infrared heat detectors by police is illegal without a warrant.

The district's director of compliance, Bob Kard, said the district was already evaluating the effectiveness of the devices, which cannot discern between heat from a natural gas fire and that from a wood fire, before the legal questions popped up.

He said the district stopped using them on fireplaces a couple of weeks ago.

"About the same time that the legal issues came out we decided that (using the sensors) was pretty pointless," Kard said.

From now on, district inspectors will not write tickets if they cannot see smoke.

"That (visible smoke) was the primary thing they were looking for in the first place, but we had been using temperature and the smell of smoke as secondary indicators," Turner said. "We feel like the most reliable criteria is visible smoke."

The district is still looking for other uses for the sensors.

"We're going to use them on other sources where temperature is important to us, but those would be industrial sources, not homes," Kard said.

"They are cutting-edge technology, so we're still exploring those other uses."

## **Rivals Fire at Hahn's Record**

By Noam N. Levey, Times Staff Writer

L.A. Times, Wednesday, December 22, 2004

Challengers accuse incumbent of only protecting environment when forced to do so.

Los Angeles Mayor James K. Hahn came under fire for dragging his feet on everything from cleaning up the port to fixing intersections as the five leading mayoral candidates squared off Tuesday at a rambunctious environmental debate.

"Cars are idling on the freeways. Planes are idling at the airports. Ships are idling in the harbor. City Hall is just plain idling," state Sen. Richard Alarcon (D-Sun Valley) said as he and the other challengers accused the incumbent of acting late or not at all to confront the city's major environmental challenges.

Hahn, in turn, defended his efforts to reduce traffic, modernize the airport and transform the departments overseeing the polluting harbor and water and power. And he sought to turn the tables on his opponents: one former Los Angeles police chief and three veterans of the state Legislature.

"The choice is clear. We can continue the momentum we've got right now or have the failed leadership that we see at LAPD and in Sacramento," said Hahn, who is seeking a second term in the March 8 election.

The five candidates — also including former Police Chief Bernard C. Parks and two former Assembly speakers, Bob Hertzberg and Antonio Villaraigosa — took questions for an hour and a half Tuesday at an auditorium at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. The Los Angeles League of Conservation Voters sponsored the second debate to feature the top five mayoral candidates.

Historically, the environment has not been featured as prominently in mayoral politics as some other bread-and-butter issues, such as crime, schools and traffic.

But efforts to clean up polluted air and water have gained a higher profile in Los Angeles in recent years at the same time that local elected officials have raised the city's commitment to battling pollution.

And on Tuesday evening, environmental stewardship became a potent vehicle for the mayoral candidates to debate who has shown more leadership in his political life.

Hahn repeatedly took credit for efforts to curb pollution from diesel-powered ships docked at the port, to cut the Department of Water and Power's reliance on fossil fuels and to reduce smog by

cutting traffic.

"We're changing the direction of the Port of Los Angeles and the Department of Water and Power," the mayor said.

But his opponents hit back, arguing that much of the environmental progress on Hahn's watch came only after he was pressured to act.

Indeed, ships only began to turn off their polluting engines at the port because of a lawsuit filed by environmental groups in 2001.

And though environmentalists give the mayor credit for pushing the DWP to expand its use of renewable sources of energy, such as wind and solar power, several of Hahn's efforts came only after years of lobbying by clean-air advocates and indications the City Council might act without him.

In August, Hahn halted the city's involvement in a massive and highly controversial coal-fired power plant under construction in Utah, but only after pressure from environmentalists.

On other environmental issues, meanwhile, the mayor took less of a lead than other city leaders, according to many environmentalists.

City Council members led the successful drive to win voters' support for a historic \$500-million bond measure in November to pay for storm water cleanup. Proposition O passed with 76% of the vote.

Earlier this year, the council and the city attorney pushed the city to settle a long-running lawsuit brought by Santa Monica BayKeeper alleging that raw sewage leaking from dilapidated municipal sewer pipes was polluting waterways.

The city finally agreed to fix its aging sewer lines.

"He only acts when he's sued," Villaraigosa said, charging the mayor with trying to take credit for things done by others. "His record is shameful."

Hertzberg, Parks and Villaraigosa also went after Hahn for trying to eliminate the Environmental Affairs Department in his 2004-05 budget, a move the City Council blocked.

Parks, who repeatedly criticized Hahn for missing meetings of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, questioned how the mayor could claim credit for addressing traffic problems when he is only fixing 25 intersections a year.

Hahn responded that he was focusing on some of the busiest intersections in the city, which are used by millions of drivers.

At another point in the debate, Parks quipped: "The mayor has an answer to everything, but a solution to nothing," drawing guffaws from a crowd of campaign supporters and environmentalists.

And all the challengers attacked Hahn's \$11-billion Los Angeles International Airport modernization plan for failing to advance a regional airport plan that would shift traffic to other airports in Southern California, such as the city's airports in Palmdale and Ontario.

The mayor fired back that his plan to increase public transit to and from the airport would relieve traffic and improve air quality, and he said that he still would like to see a regional plan.

Hahn said he would even like to revisit the highly controversial idea of turning the former military airfield at El Toro in Orange County into a commercial airport.

To further reduce traffic at the port, Hahn said Tuesday that he favors taxing trucks leaving the harbor to encourage shippers to put more cargo on trains. After the debate, he clarified that he wants to tax shippers who use trucks rather than rail.

Though focused on environmental issues, Tuesday's debate also provided several major candidates with the opportunity to emphasize familiar campaign themes. Alarcon continued to attack Hahn for catering to campaign contributors, and Hahn tried to tout his record on reducing crime and increasing housing.

The testiest exchanges of a debate filled with rhetorical jabs and counterpunches came over the question of City Hall's relationship with the state Legislature, where three of Hahn's opponents served.

Hahn, as he has done repeatedly on the campaign trail, accused Hertzberg and Villaraigosa of taking local property taxes when they drew up state budgets as the Assembly speakers in Sacramento.

"I'm tired of these guys from Sacramento telling us how much money they gave us after they've been taking it," the mayor said at one point. "We're getting back pennies on the dollar, and they want credit for it."

Hertzberg responded that he was looking out for Los Angeles in Sacramento. "I guess you didn't want the \$145 million for the Orange line or the \$250 million for the Expo line," Hertzberg shot back, reminding the mayor of state support for a dedicated bus line and a light-rail line. And he attacked Hahn for his "radio silence" when Hertzberg was Assembly speaker, arguing that the mayor was not an effective advocate for the city.

Hertzberg, Villaraigosa and Alarcon — who have earned high marks from environmental groups — sought to remind voters of their support for the environment while they were in the Legislature.

When he was Assembly speaker, Villaraigosa played a pivotal role in passing a \$2.1-billion park bond measure that voters approved in 2000.

Two years later, when he was speaker, Hertzberg gave important support to an even bigger \$2.6-billion bond for parkland acquisition, though he did not author the legislation, as he claimed Tuesday.

*Times staff writers Jessica Garrison, Jeffrey L. Rabin and Patrick McGreevy contributed to this report.*

## **Cleaner air fuels power switch for Ripon fleet**

By Jason Campbell  
Manteca Bulletin, Wednesday, December 22, 2004

RIPON -- It's only a matter of time until almost half of Ripon's city fleet will be powered by compressed natural gas.

On Tuesday, the Ripon City Council authorized staff to proceed with the purchase and installation of a CNG back-up for the City Hall filling station -- taking the pressure off of the only device currently being used to gas up two garbage trucks, two police cars, two building department cars, and two public works trucks.

Two more garbage trucks that run off of the clean-burning and economical fuel are expected soon.

"The need for the reliability of the current station is becoming quite critical," said Ripon City Engineer Matt Machado, who has spearheaded the city effort surrounding the alternative fuel.

According to Machado, Ripon's main CNG station along Doak Boulevard, which will serve regular vehicles as well as the city fleet once completed, is expected to go out to bid in the early spring months with construction expected to take about a year.

Ripon received a \$480,000 grant back in 2000 to help fund the large CNG station that is currently in the planning stages with the stipulation that they would convert half of their city fleet -- a goal that they are in the process of reaching.

But even though the fuel is clean-burning and inexpensive, not all vehicles operate well with it in their tanks.

According to Ripon Police Chief Richard Bull, the two 2001 Ford police cruisers that they purchased have been nothing but a huge problem for the department -- forcing his staff to contact Ford to attempt to resolve the issues.

The models that Ripon purchased have since been discontinued.

But the problems that the police department had with their vehicles hasn't been the common trend for the city.

Ripon's Building Department just took delivery of two Honda Civics just days ago -- and get the same mileage and performance as a traditional model but on fuel that costs half as much.

Machado estimates that Ripon pays roughly 55 cents-a-gallon for the raw fuel, which becomes more like 80 cents-a-gallon after the overhead and infrastructure that it takes to actually fill the tanks.

Even after the construction of the new station, the CNG fuel will still cost the city less than one dollar-a-gallon.

The approval Tuesday gave city staffers the authorization to spend up to \$50,000 for the second compressor -- which will likely remain a back-up even after the larger complex is completed.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Wednesday, December 22, 2004:](#)

## **Automakers blow it**

### **Lawsuit against new state air rules is bad for business and the planet.**

The California Public Employees' Retirement System board sent letters to the nation's automakers this month asking them to explain how their stockholders benefit from their suing California to invalidate the state's historic measure to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

That's a very good question, particularly coming from a board that holds some \$838 million in auto industry stock.

The Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, representing General Motors, Ford and Toyota, among others, sued on Dec. 6 to stop California from enforcing still tentative rules intended to slow the devastating effects of global warming.

California's greenhouse gas rules, the alliance lawsuit claims, are a backdoor attempt by the state to influence fuel economy standards, in other words, another way to thwart the federal prohibition against states' setting such standards.

The automakers' claims are wrong. Their lawsuit ignores key facts. California's measure encompasses more than carbon dioxide, the greenhouse gas formed when gasoline is burned. It also includes methane and HFCs, gases emitted from air conditioners, radiators, fertilizers, power plants and even rotting vegetable matter in landfills. These pollutants contribute to global

warming, which has serious public health consequences. When temperatures rise, ground-level ozone increases, trapping soot and ash particles that can damage lungs and aggravate asthma, bronchitis, heart and lung ailments.

The evidence of global warming is overwhelming. Over the last century, average temperatures in Fresno have increased from 61.9 degrees to 63.3 degrees.

Sea levels along California's coastline have risen 3 to 8 inches. The frequency of droughts, floods and associated fire and pest outbreaks have intensified.

Under California's rule, automakers must reduce average greenhouse gas emissions in cars and light-duty trucks sold in California beginning with model year 2009. The regulation requires a 30% reduction by 2016.

California has company in pursuing policies to combat global warming. Many other states and countries around the world are considering similar actions.

State Controller Steve Westly, who along with former CalPERS board president Sean Harrigan, has taken a lead role in urging car companies to drop their lawsuit, thinks litigation is bad for business.

"We have strongly urged [automakers]," Westly said, "to invest in technologies that will result in cleaner cars rather than expensive legal strategies that merely postpone the inevitable."

That's good advice. Car companies would be wise to heed it.

[Modesto Bee editorial, Wednesday, December 22, 2004:](#)

### **CalPERS right about clean air standards**

California has taken historic measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and automakers don't like it. They've sued to stop California from enforcing its still tentative rules intended to slow the emission of harmful pollutants.

Now a major stockholder in those car companies is supporting the state, and we're glad of it. The California Public Employees Retirement System board sent letters to the nation's automakers this month asking them to explain how their stockholders benefit from a lawsuit to invalidate the state's efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

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The Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, representing General Motors, Ford, Toyota and others, sued Dec. 6 to stop California from enforcing rules intended to slow the devastating effects of global warming. The lawsuit claims that California's rules are a back-door attempt to influence fuel economy standards - or yet another way to thwart the federal prohibition against states setting such standards.

The automakers are wrong.

Their lawsuit ignores key facts. California's measure encompasses more than carbon dioxide, the greenhouse gas formed when gasoline is burned. It also includes methane and HFCs, gases emitted from air conditioners, radiators, fertilizers, power plants and even rotting vegetable matter in landfills.

These pollutants have serious public health consequences. When temperatures rise, ground-level ozone increases, trapping soot and ash particles that can damage lungs and aggravate asthma, bronchitis, and heart and lung ailments. If the automakers haven't noticed, many Californians breathe the worst air in the nation. It's especially true in our valley.

These gases also contribute to global warming. Over the past century, average temperatures in Fresno have increased from 61.9 degrees to 63.3. Sea levels along California's coastline have risen 3 to 8 inches. The frequency of droughts, floods and associated fire and pest outbreaks has intensified.



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California is not alone in fighting global warming. Many other states and countries are considering similar actions.

State Controller Steve Westly and former CalPERS board President Sean Harrigan have taken a lead role in urging car companies to drop their lawsuit. Westly thinks litigation is bad for business: "We have strongly urged (automakers) to invest in technologies that will result in cleaner cars rather than expensive legal strategies that merely postpone the inevitable."

That's good advice. Car companies should heed it.

[Letter to the Modesto Bee, Wednesday, December 22, 2004:](#)

### **Fine cheesemakers retroactively**

Instead of another fee on car registrations, how about a retroactive fine to Hilmar Cheese for polluting our valley? After all, it sold \$455 million worth of cheese last year alone. A mere \$4.5 million would be a drop in the bucket to them.

Gary Wade

Ceres

[S.F. Chronicle commentary, Wednesday, December 22, 2004:](#)

### **Thinking Globally, Acting Locally In 2004: Maybe It Was A Great Year After All**

by Gregory Dicum, Special to the Chronicle

The late Rene Dubos was a radical optimist. The Pulitzer Prize-winning environmental philosopher believed that with our capacity for thought, humans could understand the consequences of our actions and change our behavior accordingly. Dubos was also a great sloganeer, summing it all up in just four words: "Think Globally, Act Locally."

In 1972, when Dubos made his contribution to the bumper-sticker canon, the Bay Area was a smoldering cauldron of smog, the Bay itself more reminiscent of an open sewer than an ecosystem. In that year, efforts to curtail the worst of this pollution began as virtual emergency measures. Thirty years later, these local actions have plainly paid off, and we're moving into a new phase. We are beginning to have the experience and expertise to come up with creative solutions that don't just solve problems -- they actually advance our society in a new, more tenable direction.

MTBE is a case in point. As recently as 2002, this toxic chemical composed 10 percent of the fluid in our gas tanks. It was getting into our groundwater and poisoning us. But, thanks to work in the late '90s by determined global thinkers and local actors such as Oakland's [Communities for a Better Environment <http://www.cbecal.org>](http://www.cbecal.org), 2004 was the first year that gas sold in California contained no MTBE. It's completely gone -- replaced with ethanol, a biodegradable and renewable agricultural product, not a petrochemical.

But it gets even better. Remember why MTBE was in our gas in the first place? It's an oxygenator, the key element in "cleaner-burning gasoline." It helped reduce smog. But in October, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District announced that 2004's summer air quality was the best it had ever been since federal standards were set in 1969.

Although that kind of win-win is gratifying, more needs to be done than just responding to toxic crises. It is necessary to set up positive-feedback loops that will engender whole new ways of living on Earth. And in 2004, one such system began to coalesce.

In April, the City of San Francisco announced that recycling there has hit an all-time high, well ahead of state and city targets. Sixty-three percent of waste that would have gone to landfills was diverted, much of it through the City's ambitious municipal composting program. The most

successful of its kind in the nation, the program collects food scraps and yard trimmings from 75,000 homes and more than 2,000 businesses for composting at a facility in Solano County.

San Francisco is now a major [supplier of organic compost <http://www.fourcourse.com>](http://www.fourcourse.com), selling everything it can produce to regional farms and vineyards. In turn, these farms put food on our tables through the Bay Area's growing collection of [farmers' markets <http://www.cafarmersmarkets.com/findMarkets>](http://www.cafarmersmarkets.com/findMarkets): 77 of them by year's end. Farmers' markets facilitate direct sales between hundreds of small family farms -- many of them producing organic crops -- and tens of thousands of discerning Bay Area shoppers.

The wins inherent in closing the food loop like this are manifold: this system simultaneously keeps material out of the landfill, provides much-needed compost for organic farms, gives shoppers great food at reasonable prices, helps small family farmers stay in business, gives agricultural open space a fighting chance against suburban sprawl and reduces the agricultural chemicals tainting our water. Yet it was not centrally planned: it is evolving organically, as uncounted thousands in the Bay Area think globally and act locally.

This principle of not taking from the planet what we can't give back was also extended in 2004 to other major resources. San Francisco's ambitious 2001 solar bond measures bore their first fruits: a solar array on top of the Moscone Center went online in March and, soon after, work began on a second array atop the City's largest sewage-treatment plant. These installations' combined output could power more than a thousand homes -- a portentous drop in the region's energy bucket.

At the same time, the way we are using energy is getting smarter. Besides 2004's promising developments in [hybrid cars <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/gate/archive/2004/12/08/gree.DTL>](http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/gate/archive/2004/12/08/gree.DTL), the year saw new creativity in our regional transportation picture. [City Car Share <http://www.citycarshare.org>](http://www.citycarshare.org), in its third year, continued its 20 percent annual growth rate (limited only -- no surprise -- by the availability of parking spaces). The membership organization gives 3,500 people access to cars for short trips around the Bay Area from "pods" sprinkled throughout San Francisco, Oakland and Berkeley. Because each car has more than 60 users, the initiative keeps thousands of cars off the road.

Meanwhile, in June, Caltrain opened its [Baby Bullet <http://www.caltrain.com/info\\_baby\\_bullet.html>](http://www.caltrain.com/info_baby_bullet.html) service between San Francisco and San Jose. The culmination of two years' construction and \$163 million in infrastructure costs, this new, faster train cuts the commute between the Bay Area's two largest nodes to just one hour, making the train competitive with cars at all hours of the day, and, with its 98 percent on-time record, the hands-down rush-hour winner. When the Baby Bullet opened, Caltrain, which already carried 6 million passengers each year, saw weekday ridership shoot up 11 percent.

The more efficient we can make our transportation, the healthier our ecosystems will be. More than in most urban areas, highly developed parts of the Bay Area are interspersed with very significant natural areas. In 2004, the first steps were taken toward helping a key one recover: the [South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project <http://www.southbayrestoration.org>](http://www.southbayrestoration.org) finally got under way after years of planning and wheeling and dealing between state and federal agencies and foundations and corporations. The largest coastal restoration project in the West, this \$110 million, multiyear effort will restore 25 square miles of rare habitat stretching from Hayward all the way around the South Bay to Redwood City.

These things don't just happen -- they take decades of work by dedicated people. The Bay Area has long been home to some of the most global of environmental organizations, and this activism has been trickling down into all sorts of local actions. People who cut their teeth working on the biggest of big issues -- climate change, deforestation, nuclear policy -- have been moving into positions in governments, agencies and companies throughout the region where this global thinking can inform local action.

And in 2004, this trend came out into the open as Oakland Mayor Jerry Brown appointed Randy Hayes, the firebrand founder of the San Francisco-based [Rainforest Action Network](#),

<http://www.ran.org> as the City of Oakland's first sustainability director. Now there's someone whose job it is to think about how the city can sustain itself on millennial timelines.

But it's the efforts of the thousands of unsung global thinkers and local actors here that are going to make the Bay Area worth living in for centuries to come. In the face of relentlessly bad news from what seems like every corner of the planet, uncountable local actions justify our radical optimism.

These people are all around us. In 2004 they included, for me, Mary Brown, who gave nature a hand in symbolically reclaiming an abandoned gas station in the Mission by covering the site at Valencia and 20th streets with a flowing garland of fall leaves. Or the Berkeley Marina residents I saw one Sunday picking up flotsam near their sailboat homes. Everyone who brings his or her own cup to the café or his or her own bag to the grocery store. The urban [permies](http://www.OpenPermaculture.org/home.html) <http://www.OpenPermaculture.org/home.html> who are creating a living landscape of ecological design in the nooks and crannies of our cities. The people who are celebrating the holidays [without buying anything](http://www.buynothingchristmas.org) <http://www.buynothingchristmas.org>. Every one of you who bikes to work. All the people who stopped eating meat. Everyone who went for the organic tomato instead of the cheaper, yuckier one. Anyone who got his or her hands dirty in a community garden. Your neighbor who installed the compact fluorescents. And everyone who can read the deep truths in a simple bumper sticker.

*Gregory Dicum, author of [Window Seat: Reading the Landscape from the Air](http://www.windowseat.info/) <http://www.windowseat.info/>, writes about the natural world from San Francisco. A forester by training, Gregory has worked at the front lines of some of the world's most urgent environmental crises.*

[LA Times commentary, Wednesday, December 22, 2004:](#)

## **City, airport not coming clean with deal details**

A perception is growing daily in Burbank that our local government officials are not leveling with their constituents about plans for a major expansion of the Bob Hope Airport. Are we at war here in Burbank? Do residents of this fair city concerned about traffic gridlock, additional air and noise pollution, and massive over development destroying their quality of life comprise the enemy?

Well, after viewing the Planning Board's virtual rubber-stamping of the latest airport development deal on Dec. 6, which will permit the airport's acquisition of thousands of additional parking spaces, it is becoming increasingly difficult to pretend that our elected government officials are really looking out for the safety and welfare of the public.

Let's take a closer look at what happened and did not happen leading up to the Planning Board's unanimous approval of the airport development deal. On Dec. 16, 1975, the then-City Council of Burbank voted unanimously for a resolution (No. 17,390) stating in part, "no expansion of existing facilities at the Hollywood-Burbank Airport shall take place without an exhaustive determination of their potentially adverse environmental effects on our community, without a detailed plan to minimize such potentially adverse effects."

On Aug. 31, 1999, Burbank's airport special counsel, Peter Kirsch, in discussing the B-6 property at the airport said, "Again, the issue becomes whether parking is related to expansion of the airport. If they were to build additional parking for another several thousand cars I think that is a pretty easy situation. That would be related to expansion or enlargement of the airport."

The new airport development deal does just that, expanding the airport-owned parking capacity by thousands of spaces. And the citizens are supposed to believe all this legal maneuvering and millions of dollars in new airport expenditures have nothing to do with the building of an expanded new terminal as soon as the relatively short-lived agreement ends.

Meanwhile, at the Planning Board recently, city staff, after a cursory review at the beginning of the meeting, discounted much of the voluminous written opposition submitted by the public about

the airport development deal as not being relevant to the matter at hand or not within the purview of the Planning Board.

Even worse, the city's legal counsel advised the Planning Board members that they did not have to consider the submitted written testimony prior to taking a vote. The city's legal representative opined that since the 1975 Council Resolution protecting the residents occurred a long time ago and conditions had changed, it no longer needed to be adhered to.

After the city staff got finished eviscerating the validity and relevance of all the public's written and oral testimony and essentially vetoing a prior city council's resolution (the law of the land), the Planning Board voted unanimously for the deal.

Those members of the Planning Board present just could not find the slightest reason to object to or modify any component of this new airport development deal. With one fell swoop, the public's outcry against approval was dismissed.

The reason for Vice Chairman Mitchell Thomas' absence was not entirely clear. But, Chairwoman Margaret Taylor did indicate Thomas would be submitting his comments to the council, with or without having read or heard the public testimony was not discernible.

In offering a few closing comments, Taylor asserted that she saw enormous benefits from the development deal, that she felt the additional parking at the airport would reduce traffic on Hollywood Way and that adding an additional taxiway would increase airport safety rather than simply provide for immediate increased airport capacity.

Finally Taylor described the motives of those citizens protesting the deal as follows: "Skeptics want to keep planes needing to land in the air."

Something is wrong with this new airport development deal. Why is the truth about how the deal is going to benefit the residents of Burbank so obscure to all but the City Council, Planning Board and their staff? Exactly how does this deal protect the residents of Burbank?

What is the truth behind the council's apparent lock step rush to judgment to ramrod this deal through without adequately addressing future impacts that this new airport development will surely bring? What is the truth behind our government officials belittling and dismissing the public's concerns about the almost certain degradation of their quality of life following construction of a much larger, expanded airport terminal not too far down the road?

What truth underlies a city staff member's confidence that she can dismiss an unrescinded City Council resolution's validity and applicability to large-scale restructuring at the airport? Will the City Council restage this same sort of performance at its upcoming hearing of this new airport development deal in January?

Will the truth be told to the good people of Burbank? Will their elected officials reveal the truth about this new airport development deal? Or is the truth really being concealed from the public?

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