

## **Ag burning alternative aim of bill - Lawmaker wants to help farmers.**

By Jennifer M. Fitzenberger  
Bee Capitol Bureau

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SACRAMENTO -- Assembly Member Dave Cogdill wants to expand a bill that would help farmers find affordable alternatives to agricultural burning.

The Modesto Republican met Wednesday with about 30 agriculture, energy, air and waste management officials intent on helping farmers with the expensive prospect of phasing out open-field burning by 2010.

Senate Bill 705 -- one in a series of clean-air legislation by Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, signed into law in the fall -- phases out burning over five years, beginning in June 2005 with field crops and prunings.

Now, farmers must find a speedy and affordable alternative, which so far has eluded lawmakers and industry leaders.

"I think it is going to end up being a significant problem," said Fresno farmer Richard Kalashian, who attended the meeting. Concern over the issue is rising in Sacramento and on central San Joaquin Valley farms as the clock ticks down for growers who burn their prunings and uprooted orchards.

"I think everyone realizes the problem and honestly wants to find a solution that makes sense," Cogdill said after the Wednesday meeting.

Cogdill last week introduced a shell of a bill that declares the intent of the Legislature to ease the farmers' problem. He hopes the body of Assembly Bill 2077 will result from meetings like Wednesday's, the second in a series focused on the issue.

Cogdill said he is interested in using a portion of existing or soon-to-come fees to subsidize the use of biomass plants, which turn wood waste into electricity.

Biomass burning is much cleaner than open-field burning, but it is expensive to ship waste to the plant. Also, biomass operators get a better deal on urban waste from construction and demolition sites, so they often limit the amount of agricultural waste they take in.

Peter Weiner, a lobbyist for the biomass industry, suggested helping farmers by giving them a portion of fees collected by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. SB 709, signed into law last year, allows the district to levy fees for pollution from traffic at new developments.

"It seems to me it is almost a perfect fit," Weiner said of the proposal.

Jim Boyd, who serves on the California Energy Commission, expressed interest in Weiner's suggestion. "It's an interesting, provocative thought," he said.

Cogdill said he will look into it. He also will research the possibility of using a surcharge on electricity to subsidize the biomass industry.

The Public Goods Charge accounts for about 1% of customers' electricity bills, amounting to about \$540 million statewide. Electricity companies use the money to pay for research and low-income assistance programs.

Florez also hopes to glean a piece of the surcharge to encourage farmers to use cleaner electric pumps instead of dirtier diesel models.

Opponents, however, have argued that it is unfair for all electricity users to pay for an agriculture subsidy and are against any increase to the charge.

Nevertheless, Cogdill said his options are encouraging.

"I've learned an awful lot," Cogdill said. "We'll sit down and do a little more brainstorming and see what is the best way to proceed."

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### **Some starts to take fuel-efficient cars, not limos, to Oscars**

The Associated Press

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LOS ANGELES (AP) - The young Oscar nominee Keisha Castle-Hughes says she'll pass on taking a stretch limousine to her first Academy Awards.

The 13-year-old "Whale Rider" star and best actress contender is one of a handful of celebrities who will be chauffeured to the gala in a Toyota Prius to help promote the use of hybrid cars powered by both gasoline and electricity.

"Even though I am not old enough to drive, I am old enough to know that the environment is in danger," Castle-Hughes said in a statement. "By taking a hybrid car to the Oscars, I can show my support for helping the environment."

Charlize Theron, Sting, Robin Williams, Jack Black, Tim Robbins and Will Ferrell were among those committed to arriving at the red carpet in a hybrid car, courtesy of environmental group Global Green USA.

"In addition to being obviously economical and environmentally friendly, they drive great and are just plain sexy," said Ferrell, who owns a Prius. Alternative fuel vehicles are "the right thing to do to reduce air and greenhouse gas emissions," said Matt Petersen of Global Green USA, an affiliate of Green Cross International.

### **Governor's 'hydrogen highway' realistic by 2010, official says**

By DON THOMPSON, Associated Press Writer

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SACRAMENTO (AP) - Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's top environmental aide told state lawmakers Wednesday the new governor's vision of a "hydrogen highway" to spur the ultimate replacement of the internal combustion engine is realistic by 2010, and won't even cost the state much money.

Schwarzenegger pledged to build hydrogen fueling stations every 20 miles along major highways, allowing motorists to buy clean-burning hydrogen-fueled vehicles without fear they will run out of gas.

He chose 2010 because that's when automakers have said such vehicles will be readily and affordably available, said Environmental Protection Secretary Terry Tamminen, who advised Schwarzenegger before he made his campaign promise during last fall's recall election.

Tamminen equated the effort to putting a man on the moon, and joined other witnesses in urging that California lead the way.

"California does invent the future," Tamminen said. Though there are plenty of unknowns, "There are no show-stoppers. The only area where some of us disagree is on timing." The cost is still too high, warned California Energy Commission member Jim Boyd.

And Toyota Motor Co.'s Bill Reinert said that despite a decade of research and development, any promises are premature. The automotive industry still is years away from developing the smaller, cheaper, more efficient and longer lasting fuel cells that are needed before consumers will buy many hydrogen-fueled vehicles, Reinert said.

"We're not even close to solving storage technology issues yet," Reinert said. Though he expects technology will develop "dramatically" over the next few years, "We still have significant challenges along the way."

Other witnesses before the Assembly Select Committee on Air and Water Quality said the so-called "hydrogen revolution" won't happen without a strong push by the state and federal governments.

"We need a sense of mission about this," said S. David Freeman, a top energy aide to former Gov. Gray Davis who now heads a company doing aftermarket hydrogen vehicle conversions.

Moreover, that hydrogen must come from biomass, solar or other renewable energy, not fossil fuels, Freeman said, "otherwise we're just putting coal in the tank." He said the state should consider floating more long-term debt to pay for additional technological and infrastructure development.

But Tamminen said the cost to the state could be minimal.

Schwarzenegger's proposed network amounts to about 200 fueling stations, a fraction of California's 10,000 retail gasoline stations, Tamminen said.

Twenty-five of those stations will soon be available, and Tamminen projected more can be built by universities, waste conversion stations and automakers at little cost to the state. If California can win \$20 million to \$30 million of the \$1.7 billion President Bush promised for hydrogen research, Tamminen said the combination will pay most of the estimated \$100 million cost of Schwarzenegger's proposal.

Even if those stations serve a million hydrogen vehicles, he acknowledged they alone won't make a significant dent in the air pollution caused by the projected 30 million vehicles that will crowd California highways by 2010.

But it's a good step, Tamminen said, along with more mass transit and retiring the heaviest polluting diesel and gas-powered engines.

"California is uniquely positioned to be a national leader in the hydrogen revolution," urged Dan Sperling, director of the Institute of Transportation Studies at the University of California, Davis, because of its existing edge in technology and experts. "California needs to think big here."