

## **Doctor at Front of Asthma Battle** **UC Merced professor discusses his latest research**

By Carol Reiter

[September 15, 2004, Merced Sun-Star](#)

For Dr. Henry Forman, asthma is personal.

The 57-year-old University of California, Merced, professor has only been in the Central Valley for about a year, since starting his job at the newest UC campus. And after years of excellent health, Forman experienced his first asthma attack.

However, Forman is at the forefront of the battle against the air-stealing disease, doing research into how the human body reacts to air pollution.

Forman spoke at the monthly meeting of the Merced/Mariposa County Asthma Coalition on Tuesday, bringing members up to date on his latest research.

The coalition works to fight asthma through education and awareness, said environmental specialist Mary-Michal Rawling.

Asthma is a chronic inflammatory lung disease characterized by recurrent episodes of breathlessness, wheezing, coughing or tightness in the chest. Symptoms can range from mild to life-threatening.

Forman will continue the research he started while working as a professor at the University of Alabama, Birmingham, and the University of Southern California. He has received grants to study how lungs react to air pollution and how they adapt to tissue changes caused by asthma.

In California, children in the Central Valley have a higher incidence of asthma than other areas of the state. Rawling said about 12 percent of the county's population has the disease.

"That's double the national average," she said.

And, like what happened to Forman, adult-onset asthma is becoming more common in the Valley, Rawling said.

Forman told the audience that despite increasingly strict pollution laws, the Central Valley is a perfect place for smog and bad air.

"Those beautiful Sierras that you can see sometimes keep all the bad air right here in the Valley," he said.

Forman has been researching how lungs react to allergens and pollutants since the 1980s. Trying to find an acceptable level of particulates, the main component of pollution, has proven difficult, Forman said.

"Unfortunately, we haven't found a magic pill to make asthma go away," he said.

## **County OKs hundreds of homes in Rosedale**

### **Homeowners on large lots object to plans for many small lots in 'rural' area**

By GRETCHEN WENNER, Californian staff writer

[Wednesday Sept. 15, 2004, Bakersfield Californian](#)

A controversial residential development in western Rosedale won mixed approval from county supervisors Tuesday.

Supervisors voted 4-1 for a project that will set more than 380 homes at the southeast corner of Hageman and Heath roads.

Supervisor Don Maben voted against the project, calling it a premature move into agricultural land that will create a large county island.

Most homes in the 160-acre project will go on quarter-acre lots. Half-acre lots will ring the outer edge of the walled community, a project of developer Hageman Northwest, LP.

County planners called for traffic impact fees that will total about \$2.2 million.

Planners also imposed requirements for cutting an estimated 5.7 tons of air emissions annually from other sources such as diesel generators or vehicle fleets to offset air pollution.

Residents west and south of the project, who live on 2.5-acre lots that allow them to keep horses, say the development doesn't fit in with the rural setting.

Some spoke against the development, saying it would clog roads, crowd schools, pollute air and destroy the rural environment.

"If you vote for this project, you vote for more smog in our atmosphere," said Michael Elliott, a nearby homeowner.

Elliott said the development could bring another 1,000 students to Rosedale's already overcrowded school system.

It also means more than 1,500 car trips per day on dangerous roadways, he said, referring to three recent fatal car crashes in the area.

"You pad the coffers, the families will have to purchase coffins," he said.

Mike Pitcher, who wrote a letter complaining about a napping commissioner when the project passed the Planning Commission last month, told supervisors he was "surprised" they were considering the matter at all.

Supervisor Ray Watson, whose district covers the development, said he fully supported the project.

Watson praised sewer plans, smaller lot sizes and air pollution mitigation measures in what he called a "first class" development.

"I don't think it's right to require your neighbor to have a large lot just because you have a large lot," he said.

## **Safety protest scares some students away**

### **Fresno High offers reassurance amid talk of asbestos.**

By Erin Kennedy

[Sept. 15, 2004, The Fresno Bee](#)

About 75 Fresno High School students either walked out or refused to go to school Tuesday morning after union officials picketed and handed out leaflets accusing a subcontractor working at the school of past safety violations.

The hot-pink fliers blazoned with "Warning! Danger! Asbestos, Lead, Lime and Toxic Waste" scared some students and parents. Out-of-town officials from the Laborers International Union of North America shouted that the Fresno Unified School District high school was "unsafe."

The school is undergoing renovations.

"I heard 'asbestos,' so I grabbed my child and ran," said Katherine Kearn, who said she has respiratory problems because of exposure to asbestos as a teenager. She kept her freshman daughter out of school.

An afternoon tour of the construction site and reassurances by inspectors from Hazard Management Services Inc. convinced Kearn that all was well.

"Seeing this and hearing this, I'm fully confident she'll be safe," said Kearn, gesturing to classroom walls and ceilings covered in plastic to seal them from contamination once floor tiles containing asbestos are removed.

Fresno Unified interim Superintendent Walt Buster characterized the uproar as "a dispute between adults over labor issues" that eventually involved students.

"It's been a difficult day at Fresno High," he said. "Fresno Unified's first priority is student achievement and student safety."

Buster said union officials refused to meet with him Tuesday morning before picketing. He added that he supports freedom of speech but not at the expense of students' safety. Before the first bell rang, campus safety assistants were called in from nearby high schools. More than a dozen police officers blocked off streets leading to the school and tried to round up truants. Some students were put into police cruisers or vans, but there were no arrests connected to the protest, said Fresno police Capt. Sharon Shaffer.

Principal Bob Reyes said consequences for the walkout will vary depending on a student's history of behavior problems. He said most students returned to class by midday.

Two mothers said they were concerned about the union's charges. But they were more upset that the protesters had disrupted the school. They rushed to the school after their sons called them about being rounded up in the protest.

"This doesn't speak well for the union to be involving our children," said Cynthia Rivera. "Our children are getting mixed messages. My son is in football, and he can't afford to get in trouble."

Mindy Bettencourt bristled at the idea of her freshman son, James St. Aubin, being detained by police and accused of protesting.

"He just wanted to get away," she said. "I do realize there are kids who will take any chance to get out of school. Not my son."

St. Aubin said he and his buddy saw the commotion blocking the front entrance and decided to head away from the trouble and call home. Police officers stopped them a few blocks from the school.

"I didn't want to go in because of what they were saying," St. Aubin said. "I didn't want to breathe any of that stuff."

The two mothers, who both work in health care, said they know well the dangers of asbestos.

But they said more evidence is needed before they make a decision on whether their children have been exposed.

"The school is saying it is safe," Bettencourt said. "But last year, kids were protesting about rats and cockroaches at the school. I'm not sure who to trust."

More than 500 Fresno High students walked out last fall protesting crowded classrooms, insufficient textbooks and rats and cockroaches on campus.

Laborers International officials said Fresno Unified had not done due diligence before hiring contractors to renovate the school.

David Bush Construction and its subcontractor Brunna Enterprises have both been fined by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control Board.

According to the board's records, Brunna, which is doing the asbestos removal at Fresno High, was fined more than \$18,000 over the past 10 years. In one 1999 incident, Brunna was fined \$7,500 for not completely removing asbestos before a building was demolished.

David Bush declined to comment but sent a letter to the district apologizing for the situation. Brunna, Bush wrote, has appropriate insurance and no complaints filed against its California contractors license.

Fresno Unified project manager Bert Contreras said he believed Brunna had been bought by another company three years ago, after the last air pollution violation fine.

Jerry Morales, a union organizer from Sacramento, said the picket was about safety, not about the district using nonunion workers.

"Those are our valuable assets on the other side of that wall," he said about students.

Reyes said that students are kept away from construction areas by a chain-link fence topped with barbed wire.

## **Blair Warns of Climate Change's Threat**

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

[Wednesday, Sept. 15, in the NEW YORK TIMES](#)

LONDON (AP) -- Prime Minister Tony Blair warned on Tuesday of the threat posed by climate change and urged support for the principles of the Kyoto accord on global warming, a treaty rejected by President Bush as unfair toward U.S. industry.

Blair promised to make global warming a focal point of Britain's presidency of the Group of Eight summit next year and said he will push for greater international commitment to cut greenhouse gases.

In a keynote environment speech in central London, Blair noted that the United States had refused to sign the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which aims to cut carbon dioxide emissions. But he suggested Washington's position was softening and that it now accepts the scientific arguments behind climate change.

"Climate change will be a top priority for our G-8 presidency next year," Blair said. "This remains an issue of high and fraught politics for many countries. But it is imperative we try."

The prime minister said he would seek agreement among the G-8, of which the United States is a member, on the threat posed by climate change and a "process to speed up the science, technology, and other measures necessary to meet the threat."

The world needs a "new green industrial revolution" to tackle the crisis that is seeing temperatures rise, glaciers melt, and sea levels rise, he said.

Blair said he would also seek a commitment from countries outside the G-8, notably India and China, to cut greenhouse gases and said he was encouraging Beijing to take a leading role in addressing the issue.

Britain's energy strategy unit has advised ministers that nuclear power must play a major role if Britain is to meet the requirements of the Kyoto Protocol. Blair said his government has not ruled out building new nuclear power stations but knows it must reassure people about costs and safety.

Washington rejects the Kyoto accord, which aims to cut carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions worldwide to 8 percent below the 1990 level by 2010. The United States says the cuts would be harmful to the economy. It has also questioned the science behind the restrictions proposed in Kyoto, and called for more studies.

But Blair said Britain had proved it can have a growing economy while addressing environmental issues.

“Between 1990 and 2002 the U.K. economy grew by 36 percent, while greenhouse gas emissions fell by around 15 percent,” he said.

## **Groups Warn Against Michigan Exemption From Ozone Rule**

DOW JONES NEWSWIRES

[Wednesday, Sept. 15, The WALL STREET JOURNAL](#)

NEW YORK -- Environmentalists are urging the Bush administration to deny a request by the state of Michigan for an exemption from stricter requirements to reduce ozone-forming pollution from industrial facilities and automobiles.

In a letter sent Tuesday to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, six environment and public health groups contend that granting the exemption would violate the Clean Air Act and set a bad precedent for the agency's policy towards other areas seeking exemptions.

The EPA earlier this year designated much of southeastern Michigan in "moderate" violation of new air quality standards for ground level ozone. Counties in these non-attainment areas must take steps to reduce emissions of nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds - which combine to form ozone in the atmosphere.

Michigan had petitioned the EPA this summer to have its non-attainment status upgraded from moderate to "marginal," which would require less burdensome reductions in pollution from the state's affected counties. The agency has told Michigan state officials that it will decide on the petition this week.

Southeastern Michigan, the environmental groups acknowledge, is close to being a marginal non-attainment area, but its ozone air concentration levels place it squarely in the moderate non-attainment category.

"In this context, close is not enough," the letter states.

"If the EPA takes that route, it opens the road to other places making the same argument," said David Gard of the Michigan Environmental Council, an environmental group that signed the letter.

Vince Hellwig, chief of the air division at the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, said the state simply wants the choice about whether to take some of these steps that it would be required to do if it receives a more stringent classification. The state may ultimately take those steps on its own, Hellwig said.

## **Port's Effort to Cut Smog Is Criticized**

**Some Long Beach council members react after residents say that a report on an expansion project underestimates emissions.**

By Deborah Schoch, Times Staff Writer

[Wednesday, Sept. 15, Los Angeles Times](#)

Amid growing concerns from residents about air quality, some Long Beach City Council members Tuesday chastised the city's port for what they called an insufficient effort to reduce air pollution.

Their comments came after residents and clean-air activists pleaded with the council to reject the environmental documents the port has prepared and approved, supporting an 115-acre expansion project. The council voted to put off a final decision on the expansion until November, saying that they hope the two sides can work out their differences.

Port officials defended those documents and urged the council to let them stand. Port representatives said their plan came after a thorough, four-year-long review and would help rein in air pollution.

Critics dismissed that review as a deliberate effort to underestimate the project's emissions, which they said put the port's economic growth over people's health.

"Shame on you guys for coming in here with the 'minimum legal' rather than taking the high road," Councilman Val Lerch told port officials.

The debate over the Pier J expansion has escalated sharply into what some are labeling a referendum on the benefits and problems of international trade in the Los Angeles area.

While many laud port trade for creating thousands of [jobs](#), a growing number of residents blame the port for increased air pollution and traffic congestion.

The Los Angeles-Long Beach port complex has grown swiftly in the last two decades to become the busiest in the United States, largely because of imports from Asia. Today the ports handle more than 43% of the nation's seaborne cargo, with about 15% being transported by truck on the Long Beach Freeway.

In the process, the port complex has become the single largest air polluter in the five-county South Coast region, responsible for 24% of the region's diesel emissions. Diesel, a probable carcinogen, comes mostly from the mammoth container ships serving the ports, along with big-rig trucks, trains and port yard equipment.

The Pier J expansion would involve creating more landfill around the current Pier J directly south of the Queen Mary and the central downtown area of Long Beach. Construction would be done in phases, with the first phase opening in the year 2007, and the final phase in 2015. The major tenant would be China Ocean Shipping Lines, or Cosco.

Port officials say their plans include an assortment of measures to reduce air pollutants, including requiring ships to use cleaner-burning fuels, adding "cold

ironing" for certain ships and requiring the terminal operator to use only diesel-powered equipment that meets federal standards.

But the Pier J environmental documents state that even with those measurements, emissions of key air contaminants — including a kind of particulate matter contained in diesel exhaust — would still be considered significant.

Critics call those plans woefully inadequate. In fact, two large environmental groups — the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Coalition for Clean Air — have fought the project with a barrage of letters and reports.

The same two groups sued the city and port of Los Angeles in 2001, alleging an inadequate environmental review of the new China Shipping pier.

### **A classic argument over smog**

**With old cars often the worst polluters, plans to drive them off the road gain support -- and the wrath of aficionados.**

By Ralph Vartabedian, Times Staff Writer,  
[September 14, 2004, Los Angeles Times, Editorial](#)

You can't argue with 1,200 tons of pollution, the approximate amount of ozone-forming gases that comes from the dirtiest cars every day in California.

The vast majority of these cars are more than 10 years old and they are kept on the road by a mix of people who cannot afford anything newer and hobbyists who have fought politically for an exemption from pollution laws.

These cars are so dirty that they produce 30 to 50 times the emissions per mile that new cars put out. They are so dirty that they account for about 45% of all the auto pollution occurring in the state. Oddly enough, cars more than 30 years old are exempt from smog tests.

But two important developments could help reduce the pollution burden imposed by obsolete emissions technology in these older cars.

After a two-year lapse, the Bureau of Automotive Repair has reinstated a program to buy and crush grossly polluting vehicles, the ones that fail their biennial smog test.

Second, as reported in The Times on Tuesday, the Legislature has approved and sent to Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger a bill that would repeal the smog test exemption on cars more than 30 years old - an exemption won by the auto parts industry under the leadership of the Specialty Equipment Market Assn. in Diamond Bar. Schwarzenegger is being heavily lobbied by SEMA to veto the bill.

In 2002, Gov. Gray Davis canceled the gross polluter vehicle retirement program to save money during the budget crisis, but legislators restored funding in the current budget and Bureau of Automotive Repair officials have decided to reopen for business.

"We have a gross amount of \$4.5 million, so we'll be able to buy 8,000 vehicles," said Richard Ross, the bureau's new director.

It might not sound like a lot, but those 8,000 vehicles are putting out more pollution than a quarter-million new vehicles, according to figures by the California Air Resources Board. Although many people are concerned about the pollution released by sport utility vehicles, a single vintage Volkswagen bug puts out more pollutants than a huge fleet of SUVs.

Under the current program, the state will pay \$500 to retire a car that has failed the smog test but still operates. The state was paying \$1,000 prior to 2002, so the current program will probably not appeal to as many people, but it will still help a lot, Ross said.

When an older car fails its smog test it often doesn't make economic sense to fix it. The owner cannot legally sell or register the vehicle. So the \$500 payment is a legal escape route for the owner, Ross said. To get more information about the program, you can visit the Bureau of Automotive Repair's website at <http://www.smogcheck.ca.gov> or [http://www.smogcheck.ca.gov/ftp/pdf/forms/cap\\_app.pdf](http://www.smogcheck.ca.gov/ftp/pdf/forms/cap_app.pdf).

The second important development involves getting a long-term handle on the classic car industry. Under the current law, cars 30 years or older are exempt from smog testing. That means that this year a model 1974 car is exempt and next year a model 1975 will become exempt.

The proposed legislation would freeze the exemption with the 1976 model, meaning that as years go by the pool of older grossly polluting vehicles would no longer continue to grow. It does not change the status of any currently exempt vehicle.

What's more, cars newer than 1976 are already passing their smog tests and the emission rules for these vehicles will be frozen in time. In other words, a 1977 vehicle will only have to pass the 1977 smog test for as long as it is on the road, according to the bill's author, Assemblywoman Sally J. Lieber (D-Mountain View).

"I am from Detroit and consider myself a car enthusiast," Lieber said. "We want to get the benefits of better air quality without hurting people who are trying to preserve a part of American history."

But SEMA is strongly opposed to the measure, apparently because it could put a crimp on people who specifically want to tear off all the emissions and exhaust equipment once they reach the 30-year exempted age, Lieber said.

"If you search the Internet for 'emissions crap' you see a lot of discussion about this," she added.

SEMA officials did not respond to a Times request for an interview.

It's great fun to admire or drive a classic car, but not enough to justify lung damage. Indeed, the American Lung Assn. has endorsed the bill, AB 2683. If the owners of these cars have the money to restore the paint and upholstery, they should also have the resources and intelligence to maintain functioning emission systems.

Will the governor sign the bill? It seems likely, but it's not a sure bet. Schwarzenegger's pal Jay Leno has come out against the bill, so it's possible that state environmental policies are being influenced by a television comedian.

That's not so funny, Jay.

The air board estimates that all vehicles in the state put out 2,500 tons of pollution every day and the dirtiest 10% of the vehicles account for 1,200 tons of it. The dirtiest vehicles are invariably older cars with either broken or obsolete emission systems. And classic cars are a big part of the problem, according to the agency.

"They are a significant factor," said board spokesman Jerry Martin. "While they may be driven

only one-fourth as much as new cars, they are putting out 30 to 50 times the pollution doing it."

Although SEMA officials declined to comment, the organization's website indicates that it is conducting a major lobbying effort to get the governor to veto the bill. "The amendments do not protect car collectors and are being opposed by SEMA and the major car clubs and organizations in California," according to the website, <http://www.sema.org> .

It also calls on its members to call the governor directly. If you would like to express your opinion, one way or the other, you can call the governor at the same number listed on the SEMA website: (916) 445-2841 or leave a note at <http://www.govmail.ca.gov> .

Also, if you see a vehicle smoking, you can report it to the California Air Resources Board at (800) END-SMOG. The board will send a letter to the vehicle owner, requesting the problem be fixed. The board says half of vehicle owners contacted actually make repairs.

## **Slow burn over no-burn**

[Bakersfield Californian, Editorial, Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2004](#)

Balance is the critical ingredient in protecting and cleaning up the valley's polluted air.

But the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has lost that balance in its dispute with Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Parks.

This summer, regulators issued a citation to park officials for ignoring the district's ban on burning. Park officials could end up facing a \$75,000 fine just for taking prudent steps to protect two of America's premiere national parks.

Ironically, the steps taken help protect the valley's air clearing away overgrowth of brush, snags and small trees that fuel such conflagrations as the 150,000-acre McNally fire two years ago. This summer park officials planned a five-day control burn.

To be "controlled," such burns must occur in meteorological "windows" that provide proper wind, temperature and other climactic conditions. One such window became available in June.

June 30 was the third of five days selected to clear 257 acres in Giant Forest. According to *The Fresno Bee*, air pollution officials ordered park officials to stop the burn because the valley air was too "gunky."

Park officials refused to obey, complaining about the vague, unscientific basis for the "gunky" designation and no-burn order. To stop would cost thousands of dollars and idle crews. They wanted to reduce the fire hazard and make fire crews available for the dangerous July 4th holiday.

Fires control burns, as well as the spectacular blazes that wreak havoc on forests release smoke and gases that can form smog in the valley.

The choice is to allow smaller control burns to release smaller amounts of pollution, or have us choke on clouds of thick smoke that pour from major fires.

The no-burn order stunned environmental groups. With Wilderness Society representative Jay Watson calling the district a "rogue agency," the Sierra Club and Sierra Nevada Forest Protection Campaign also criticized attempts to halt the burn.

While the air district says it cooperates with forest protection efforts, David Crow, the district's executive director, told *The Bee* its primary mission is to protect 3.5 million people in the valley.

Air district and park officials are negotiating a settlement of the dispute, which may determine the outcome of the citation.

This bullheaded, narrow-minded dispute also could wind up in court if the two sides do not agree.

Air district officials should spend less time huffing and puffing about their "rules" and more time working together with other agencies, such as the national parks, to protect all aspects of the environment, not just the air.

### **Cowboys, come back**

[Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2004](#)

Gene Autry and Roy Rogers, where are you when we need you?

The money and power boys from the big city want to bring in 200,000 dairy cows to our fair land. The local citizens do not have the means to stop them.

Our elected officials will put on their "dog and pony show," about air and water pollution, fly control and on and on, but eventually will bend to the power and influence of the money boys from the big city.

Can you help us or are the days of the good guys winning over?

-- KENNETH M. CANNON, Bakersfield