

Air woes also homegrown, farm valley is discovering

By Steve Schmidt
San Diego Union Tribune

Tuesday, Feb. 22, 2005

FRESNO – Lauro Roberto doesn't need to look outside to know trouble is brewing. He only needs his stethoscope.

Several days a week, the veteran doctor treats a stream of wheezing, coughing, gasping children, a medical problem that is linked to some of the foulest skies in the nation.

As more strip malls and tract homes take root in California's farm belt, residents of the San Joaquin Valley are exposed to long periods of dirty air.

Small wonder then, Roberto said, that Fresno County has had the highest childhood asthma rate in the state for several years.

"We have worse air now than Los Angeles County, and that's just amazing," said the pulmonologist at Children's Hospital Central California near Fresno.

Alarmed by the increase in pollution, government regulators this winter enforced an occasional ban on the use of fireplaces and cracked down on agricultural practices that create dust and soot.

On many days, a thick soup of smog and chemical clusters hangs over the sprawling valley, seeping into lungs, stunting crop growth and feeding a debate over who is at fault.

Part of the blame lies with Bessie.

One leading organic source of smog-making gas in the valley is cow belches, according to a University of California Davis study released last month. Dairy pollution is a long-running concern in the region, but until the UC study, little detailed research had been done on the subject.

There are 2.4 million cattle in the valley, up 20 percent since 2000.

The number of residents also is rising as Southern California-style sprawl gets a foothold in Modesto, Stockton and other cities. More than 3.3 million people live in the eight San Joaquin Valley counties. The population has increased 22 percent since 1990.

"I came here hoping to get away from it all," said Lauren Eldred, 37, who moved to the Fresno area in 2003 from Los Angeles. "But this whole valley is growing like crazy."

The leading source of smog in the booming valley is exhaust from cars and trucks, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The federal government has established an eight-hour ozone pollution standard to determine when air quality in an area is hazardous.

Last year, San Diego County exceeded the level seven times. The Los Angeles area exceeded it on 87 days.

The San Joaquin Valley violated it 108 times.

The region's bathtub topography, with coastal mountains to the west and the Sierra to the east, traps airborne pollutants. The area's slow-blowing winds don't help.

"The stuff just doesn't leave the valley," said David Jones, planning director with the air pollution district.

Studies show the problem is largely homegrown. Air pollution from the San Francisco Bay Area, to the northwest, accounts for a small share of the valley's dirty skies.

Regulators say the valley's expanding dairy industry is a significant contributor to the poor air quality. The UC study released last month noted that cow belches and other organic gases common at dairies, including emissions from manure piles and feed lots, contribute to smog.

The same study, however, concluded that dairy cows produce less air pollution than previously believed. The research indicates that each cow and its waste products produce about 6.4 pounds of volatile organic compounds released into the air each year, compared with an earlier figure of 12.8 pounds.

Although there is no solution for reducing bovine belches, regulators have begun cracking down on other forms of air pollution tied to agriculture.

Thousands of regional growers and dairy operators were required starting last month to modify their farming practices under a new program administered by the air pollution district.

Many farmers agreed to grind seasonal prunings rather than burn them, water unpaved roads to tamp down dust and take other steps to help reduce smog.

Scientists say agricultural pollution includes diesel soot, ash and ammonia. These pollutants split into particles that hang in the air – particularly in winter, when the air is more dense – and can get into lungs.

Grower Paul Betancourt of Kerman said many of the requirements aren't new to his 765-acre farm.

"We've been doing a lot of it already," said the 45-year-old former San Diegan.

But he said many older growers are resistant.

"A lot of them just don't see the point," he said. "I don't think the case has been sufficiently made that we're the problem."

There is widespread grumbling within the agricultural community that government regulators are zeroing in on the wrong part of the economy. They say the valley's biggest pollution headache these days is growth, not farming.

"It's people, cars, trucks, growth," said Manuel Cunha, president of the Fresno-based Nisei Farmers League. All the development, he says, threatens to "destroy the most fertile place in the world."

Vehicle traffic continues to balloon as more farm towns morph into cities. Some commuters live in the valley and work in the San Francisco Bay Area, adding to the congestion. Commuter arteries such as Interstate 205, in the Tracy area, are snarled on many workdays, but state budget cuts have stalled plans to widen these bottlenecks.

Truck traffic in the region also is up due to relaxed trade laws with Mexico and a drop in the use of freight trains that carry produce and manufactured goods through the valley, officials say.

The air pollution district recently levied a \$2 annual fee on valley vehicles to pay for pollution-reducing programs. Starting in April, drivers will be required to pay the fee when they register their vehicle each year.

The district also is considering slapping fees on new strip malls, houses and other development to offset their effect on valley air.

Meanwhile, the district is enforcing a year-old ban on the use of wood-burning fireplaces on the valley's most polluted winter days. Those found burning logs or kindling in their fireplaces on no-burn days are cited and must pay a nominal fine.

The recent moves come after years of indifference – some say neglect – among government agencies to tackle the valley's complex pollution problems.

Jones, with the air pollution district, said that for years, the federal Environmental Protection Agency didn't consider valley pollution a high priority.

Now that the problem has gone from bad to worse, he said, "they pay attention to us."

Perhaps nowhere is the effect of the pollution more obvious than at Children's Hospital Central California in Madera County, just north of Fresno.

About 16 percent of children in the Fresno area have asthma, the highest rate in California and about triple the national figure.

A recent health report issued by California State University Fresno labeled it an epidemic. The asthma rate in Fresno County has been among the highest in the nation for at least several years.

More than 300,000 valley residents – roughly 10 percent of the region's population – suffer from some type of breathing disorder, and researchers say the primary reason is pollution.

Roberto, who treats many asthma-stricken children, counts himself among the ailing.

The 45-year-old physician, who treats children diagnosed with lung conditions and diseases, had asthma as a boy. Since moving to the valley a decade ago from Los Angeles, his symptoms have come back.

"I was doing well – until I moved here," he said.

Nissan's Smart Cars Return to Lanes

By YURI KAGEYAMA, AP Business Writer

S.F. Chronicle, Tuesday, Feb. 22, 2005

YOKOSUKA, Japan (AP) -- A car that swerves back into lanes on its own and a video system that makes parking a breeze were part of technological features on display by the Japanese automaker Nissan Motor Co.

The technology that reporters tried out in test drives Monday at a research center outside Tokyo is part of Nissan's efforts to make driving safer. Similar smart-car features are in the works at most of the world's top automakers, including Japanese rivals Toyota Motor Corp. and Honda Motor Co., as well as General Motors Corp. of the United States and others.

One of the features shown was a more sophisticated version of an existing warning system _ already available in Nissan luxury cars in the United States and Japan _ that buzzes when the car veers out of the lane.

Lane Departure Prevention combines a camera and computerized devices that control braking for front and rear wheels that nudge the car in the right direction. No decision has been made on when the new system will be available.

The feature turns off when you hit the turn signal, so you will be able to change lanes or make turns without the system kicking in.

Takao Kubozuka, general manager at the research center, said the problem with such safety features is making sure the driver doesn't rely on them too much and start driving recklessly.

"We have to strike the balance between making driving safe and letting people get away with no-hands driving," he said.

Nissan also showed a system to make squeezing into parking spots easier. No more running over kitty or smashing into fences while you back up as four cameras in the front, back and side-mirrors relay live video.

Nissan's Around View Monitor shows what's surrounding the car on a display attached to the dashboard. Images from all sides are shown the way they appear from above _ with the vehicle displayed as a computer graphic in the middle of the screen.

Vehicles that use a monitor to show images of a driver's blind spots taken on cameras aren't new, but Nissan's system puts together the images to create the aerial view.

Nissan hasn't decided when to offer the feature, although Kubozuka said it will probably be more attractive in Japan, where streets and parking spaces are narrow, than in the United States.

Among other new technologies Nissan displayed was a fuel-cell stack _ the key component for pollution-free fuel-cell vehicles, which run on the energy produced when hydrogen, stored as fuel in a tank in the car, combines with oxygen in the air to make water.

Nissan had fallen behind other automakers in developing fuel cells, but officials said the company was catching up. Although all the world's automakers are working on fuel cells, the vehicles are still expensive and are only on the streets on an experimental basis.

Nissan also showed a computerized system that controls the steering of front and rear wheels to stabilize driving when a car switches directions quickly.

A Little Engine That Could Make Gasoline Obsolete **Pollution-free vehicle is powered by compressed air. Critics say it has had trouble reaching its range projections.**

By Dan Weikel

L.A. Times, Monday, Feb. 22, 2005

You could say that Guy Negre, a French automotive engineer and former race car designer, is full of hot air. Or at least his latest invention is.

Negre's Luxembourg-based company, Moteur Developpement International, is developing a line of cars, vans and pickups powered exclusively by compressed air. There's no gasoline, no costly service schedules and no polluting exhaust.

The prototype vehicles are so clean, the company says, that the air coming out of them is often cleaner than when it goes in.

"This represents something truly revolutionary in the automobile industry," said Shiva Vencat, the company's representative in the United States. "We are talking about changing the way we make cars, how we buy cars, and, more importantly, we are talking about a clean car."

MDI claims that its air-powered automobiles will eventually render the internal combustion engine "as obsolete as the black-and-white television."

The company plans to produce vans, family sedans, taxis, small trucks and three-passenger runabouts called the MiniCat.

All are prototypes. Their bodies are made of aluminum tubing, fiberglass and injected foam. Prices are expected to range from less than \$10,000 for the MiniCat to \$16,000 for a six-seat sedan called the CitiCat.

These are no ordinary cars. Power comes from fresh air stored in reinforced carbon-fiber tanks beneath the chassis. Air is compressed to 4,500 pounds per square inch - about 150 times the pressure of the typical car tire. The air is fed into four cylinders where it expands, driving specially designed pistons. About 25 horsepower is generated.

Though technical problems are being worked out, company officials say the car is capable of 70 mph and a 120-mile range under normal city conditions, performance that is comparable to electric cars.

Critics say the car has had trouble living up to its range projections. But company officials say they are trying to overcome that by warming the stored air.

Recharging the onboard tanks takes about four hours using the car's small compressor, which can be plugged into any wall outlet. Gas stations equipped with special air pumps can replenish the tanks in about three minutes. Company officials say the oil only needs to be changed every 31,000 miles.

The idea of using compressed air isn't new. Writer Jules Verne predicted in the 1860s that the technology would be used to power cars in Paris by the late 20th century. Some primitive engines

date to the early 1900s, and compressed air has been used for years to start race cars.

Negre, who designed engines for Formula One cars, founded MDI in 1991 to further develop compressed-air technology. The company's factory is in Nice, France, and employs about 40.

MDI hopes to raise money by selling hundreds of franchises to investors who will be licensed to produce and sell air cars regionally. Only the Nice plant will remain under direct MDI control.

At least 40 franchises have been sold in France, Spain, South Africa and New Zealand, company officials say. The money has helped develop prototypes, but it has not been enough to build production models - something that has been delayed several times.

Vencat says the company has been trying to sell licenses in the United States, but MDI has not had any success, though he says there is some interest.

Jean-Pierre Maeder, the chief executive officer of ZevCat, a small company in San Francisco, says he is interested in becoming America's first distributor of air cars.

Maeder, a Swiss native with experience in factory production and alternative car technology, would like a franchise to build and sell MDI vehicles in Northern California. He says he needs about \$20 million to do it.

But capital has been hard to come by. A few years ago, Maeder's company made a public offering of 250,000 shares of stock at \$2 a share to raise money for an MDI license. There were no takers.

"It's a Catch-22 situation," Maeder said. "Investors want to see the product and drive it. They think it's too good to be true. But there are no production models here yet."

Vencat estimates that the company needs an additional \$5 million to \$10 million to start producing cars in Nice and to meet vehicle requirements in MDI's franchise areas.

Company officials say they are optimistic the car will sell if they can only get it into production. There is a surging demand, they say, for more eco-friendly transportation, such as electric cars and hybrid vehicles that combine electric motors with internal combustion engines.

"Once we have the cars out there, we have won the battle," Vencat said. "For now, we are just surviving."

Urban air pollution may affect babies' genes

By Karen Matthews, Associated Press

in the L.A. Times, Monday, Feb. 21, 2005

New findings from a study of New York City newborns suggests that prenatal exposure to air pollution may be linked to genetic changes associated with an increased risk of cancer.

The study by researchers at Columbia University followed 60 newborns and their nonsmoking mothers in low-income neighborhoods, primarily in Harlem and the Bronx. The exposure to combustion-related pollutants caused primarily by vehicles was measured by backpack air monitors worn by the women during the third trimester of their pregnancies.

When the babies were born, genetic alterations were measured. Researchers found about a 50% increase in the level of persistent genetic abnormalities in the infants who had the higher levels of exposure, said Dr. Frederica Perera, director of the center and author of the study.

"We already knew that air pollutants significantly reduced fetal growth, but this is the first time we've seen evidence that they can change chromosomes in utero," Perera said.

She said the kind of genetic changes that occurred had been linked in other studies to increased risk of cancer.

The study, published in the February issue of the journal *Cancer Epidemiology Biomarkers and Prevention*, is part of a broader multiyear research project started in 1998 that examines the health effects of exposure of pregnant women and babies to air pollutants, pesticides and tobacco smoking.

Senator seeks records from groups critical of Bush clean-air plan

The Associated Press

Fresno Bee, Saturday, Feb. 19, 2005

The Republican head of the Senate's environment committee directed two national organizations to turn over their financial records after they criticized President Bush's plan for cutting air pollution.

Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla., also requested membership lists and tax returns in a letter to the groups' representative who told a Senate subcommittee last month that Bush's Clear Skies Initiative was too lenient and undermined state efforts to regulate emissions.

The organizations said the action was meant to intimidate opponents.

The request appeared to be "some sort of retaliation against some very legitimate criticism of (Bush's) Clear Skies proposal," said William Becker, executive director of the State and Territorial Air Pollution Program Administrators and the Association of Local Air Pollution Control Officials.

The two groups represent the views of state and local regulators before the Environmental Protection Agency and Congress. Andrew Wheeler, majority staff director for the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, defended the request. He said the panel had an oversight responsibility and wanted to determine if the organizations got funding from environmentalists and other outside interests.

"It has nothing to do with Clear Skies," Wheeler said. "If we wanted to intimidate them, we would have done it before they testified, not after."

Becker said neither association receives money from private interests.

"We have a limited constituency - the 50 states and local agencies," he said. "These are the only ones for whom we can work."

A stalemate with Democrats this week forced Inhofe, leading sponsor of the administration bill, to delay a committee vote on the proposal for two weeks.

The initiative would give power plants, factories and refineries more time to cut emissions, amending the 1970 Clean Air Act by letting companies trade pollution rights among themselves, within overall caps set by the government.

Proponents say it would reduce sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide and mercury pollution. Opponents say reductions could be achieved faster through tighter restrictions or other measures, including existing Clean Air Act regulations.

New global warming evidence presented Scientists say their observations prove industry is to blame

David Perlman, Chronicle Science Editor

S.F. Chronicle, Saturday, Feb. 19, 2005

Washington -- Scientists reported Friday they have detected the clearest evidence yet that global warming is real -- and that human industrial activity is largely responsible for it.

Researchers at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science cited a range of evidence that the Earth's temperatures are rising:

- The Arctic regions are losing ice cover.
- The populations of whales and walrus that Alaskan Eskimo communities depend on for food are crashing.
- Fresh water draining from ice and snow on land is decreasing the salinity of far northern oceans.
- Many species of plankton -- the microscopic plants that form the crucial base of the entire marine food web -- are moving north to escape the warming water on the ocean surface off Greenland and Alaska.

Ice ages come and go over millennia, and for the past 8,000 years, the gradual end of the last ice age has seen a natural increase in worldwide temperatures, all scientists agree. Skeptics have expressed doubt that industrial activity is to blame for world's rapidly rising temperatures.

But records show that for the past 50 years or so, the warming trend has sped up -- due, researchers said, to the atmospheric burden of greenhouse gases produced by everything industrial, from power plants burning fossil fuels to gas-guzzling cars -- and the effects are clear.

"We were stunned by the similarities between the observations that have been recorded at sea worldwide and the models that climatologists made," said Tim Barnett of the University of California's Scripps Institution of Oceanography. "The debate is over, at least for rational people. And for those who insist that the uncertainties remain too great, their argument is no longer tenable. We've nailed it."

Barnett and other experts marshaled their evidence and presented it to their colleagues for the first time at a symposium here.

For the past 40 years, Barnett said, observations by seaborne instruments have shown that the increased warming has penetrated the oceans of the world -- observations, he said, that have proved identical to computer predictions whose accuracy has been challenged by global-warming skeptics.

The most recent temperature observations, he said, fit those models with extraordinary accuracy.

But a spokesman for the Bush administration -- which has been criticized for not taking global warming seriously -- was unfazed by the latest news.

"Our position has been the same for a long time," said Bill Holbrook, spokesman for the White House Council on Environmental Quality. "The science of global climate change is uncertain."

"Ice is in decline everywhere on the planet, and especially in the Arctic," said Ruth Curry, a physical oceanographer at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, "and there is large-scale drying throughout the Northern Hemisphere."

Ice cores drilled deep into the Greenland ice cap show that salinity of the ice at the upper layers of the cores has decreased sharply due to the incursion of fresh water draining from melting snows on the surface, she reported, and land ice and permafrost are in decline all around the Arctic. In the meantime, she said, measurements show that salinity of the ocean waters nearer the equator has increased as the rate of evaporation of warmer tropical and subtropical oceans quickens.

It may take several centuries for all the ice that covers Greenland to melt, Curry said, "but its release of fresh water will make sea-level rise a very significant issue in this century." In fact, she said, changes in the freshwater balance of the oceans has already caused severe drought conditions in America's Western states and many parts of China and other Asian countries.

Already, the physics of increased warming and the changes in ocean circulation that result are strongly affecting the entire ecology of the Arctic regions, according to Sharon L. Smith, an oceanographer and marine biologist at the University of Miami.

Last summer, on an expedition ranging from Alaska's Aleutian islands to the Arctic Ocean above the state's oil-rich North Slope, Smith said she encountered the leading elder of an Eskimo community on Little Diomedede island who told her that ice conditions offshore were changing rapidly year by year; that the ice was breaking up and retreating earlier and earlier; and that in the previous year the men of his community were able to kill only 10 walrus for their crucial food supplies, compared to past harvests of 200 or more.

Populations of bowhead whales, which the Eskimo people of Barrow on the North Slope are permitted to hunt, are declining too, Smith said. The organisms essential to the diet of Eider ducks living on St. Lawrence Island have been in rapid decline, while both the plants and ducks have moved 100 miles north to colder climates -- a migration, she said, that obviously was induced by the warming of the waters off the island.

Another piece of evidence Smith cited for the ecological impact of warming in the Arctic emerged in the Bering Sea, where there was a huge die-off in 1997 of a single species of seabirds called short-tailed shearwaters.

Hundreds of thousands of birds died, she said, and the common plankton plants on which they depend totally for food was replaced by inedible plants covered with calcite mineral plates. Those plants thrive in warmer waters and require higher-than-normal levels of carbon dioxide -- the major greenhouse gas -- to reproduce, Smith said.

"What more convincing evidence do we need that warming is real?" Smith asked.

Senator seeks records from groups critical of Bush clean-air plan

Associated Press

in the S.F. Chronicle, Saturday, Feb. 19, 2005

The Republican head of the Senate's environment committee directed two national organizations to turn over their financial records after they criticized President Bush's plan for cutting air pollution.

Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla., also requested membership lists and tax returns in a letter to the groups' representative who told a Senate subcommittee last month that Bush's Clear Skies Initiative was too lenient and undermined state efforts to regulate emissions.

The organizations said the action was meant to intimidate opponents.

The request appeared to be "some sort of retaliation against some very legitimate criticism of (Bush's) Clear Skies proposal," said William Becker, executive director of the State and Territorial Air Pollution Program Administrators and the Association of Local Air Pollution Control Officials.

The two groups represent the views of state and local regulators before the Environmental Protection Agency and Congress.

Andrew Wheeler, majority staff director for the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, defended the request. He said the panel had an oversight responsibility and wanted to determine if the organizations got funding from environmentalists and other outside interests.

"It has nothing to do with Clear Skies," Wheeler said. "If we wanted to intimidate them, we would have done it before they testified, not after."

Becker said neither association receives money from private interests.

"We have a limited constituency _ the 50 states and local agencies," he said. "These are the only ones for whom we can work."

A stalemate with Democrats this week forced Inhofe, leading sponsor of the administration bill, to delay a committee vote on the proposal for two weeks.

The initiative would give power plants, factories and refineries more time to cut emissions, amending the 1970 Clean Air Act by letting companies trade pollution rights among themselves, within overall caps set by the government.

Proponents say it would reduce sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide and mercury pollution. Opponents say reductions could be achieved faster through tighter restrictions or other measures, including existing Clean Air Act regulations.

Opponents of 'Clear Skies' Bill Examined

The GOP sponsor of legislation championed by Bush asks two groups to turn over financial records. One official calls it intimidation.

By Alan C. Miller and Tom Hamburger

L.A. Times, Sat., Feb. 19, 2005

WASHINGTON - The chairman of a Senate committee that oversees environmental issues has directed two national organizations that oppose President Bush's major clean-air initiative to turn over their financial and tax records to the Senate.

Sen. James M. Inhofe (R-Okla.), who heads the Environment and Public Works Committee, asked for the documents 10 days after a representative of the two groups criticized Bush's "Clear Skies" proposal before a Senate subcommittee. Inhofe is the leading sponsor of the administration bill, which is deadlocked in his panel.

The executive director of the two organizations, which represent state and local air pollution control agencies and officials, charged that the request was an attempt to intimidate critics of the measure.

Democratic senators on Inhofe's committee also were dismayed by his action, but declined to say so publicly because they were in the midst of sensitive negotiations with the chairman on the legislation, staffers said.

The committee's majority staff director, Andrew Wheeler, said the request for the groups' documents did not stem from their criticism of the legislation. He said the panel wanted to determine whether the groups represented only regulators' views or whether they also were subsidized by outside interests, including environmentalists or foundations.

The funding, Wheeler said, "goes to who they're speaking for."

William Becker, the executive director of both groups - the State and Territorial Air Pollution Program Administrators, which represents 48 state air pollution control agencies, and the Assn. of Local Air Pollution Control Officials, which represents more than 165 local agencies - said they received no money from environmental activists or other private interests.

The administration has proposed the "Clear Skies" initiative as part of its effort to overhaul the way the Clean Air Act forces power plants to cut emissions.

The measure would set new emission standards for three major pollutants and introduce a market-based approach favored by industry. Proponents say it would reduce sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide and mercury emissions by 70%. Opponents say reductions could be achieved faster through tighter restrictions or other approaches, including existing Clean Air Act regulations.

Inhofe delayed a vote on the bill this week after he determined that he did not have the numbers to send it to the full Senate. The panel's 18 members are split, largely along party lines.

On Jan. 26, John Paul, an environmental regulator from Ohio, testified on behalf of both pollution control organizations. He told the Senate subcommittee that "Clear Skies" "fails on every one of our associations' core principals," was "far too lenient" on polluters and would undermine "states' abilities to protect air quality."

After the testimony, several senators sent a letter to Paul with follow-up questions; Inhofe included a request for financial statements, membership lists and tax returns for the last six years for both groups. Paul is the vice president and incoming president of the local air pollution group. Inhofe's request was first disclosed by Cox News Service on Friday.

The Senate committee asked for the information because it had long-standing concerns about the decision-making process of the state air pollution group, and was pursuing those questions as part of its oversight responsibility, Wheeler said.

"It has nothing to do with 'Clear Skies,' " he said. "If we wanted to intimidate them, we would have done it before they testified, not after."

Wheeler said there also were concerns about whether the state group purported to speak for all its members when some disagreed with its positions.

The two groups represent the views of the state and local regulators before the Environmental Protection Agency and Congress. They also do training, surveys and publish newsletters.

"We have a limited constituency - the 50 states and local agencies," Becker said. "These are the only ones for whom we can work."

Becker said Inhofe's request appeared to be "some sort of retaliation against some very legitimate criticism of [Bush's] 'Clear Skies' proposal."

Although the membership often is not unanimous on the state group's positions, Becker said, "We go to great pains to try to reach an overwhelming majority, not just a simple majority, and we succeed."

Rep. Henry A. Waxman of Los Angeles, the senior Democrat on the House Government Reform Committee, said: "There is not even any subtlety about this. This is a blatant attempt at intimidation and bullying so that experts will be afraid to speak out about a bill that rolls back air pollution protections for all Americans."

A Republican who voted for Bush in 2000 and 2004, Paul gained prominence in March 2004 when he told the Los Angeles Times that an EPA advisory committee he co-chaired had been abruptly shelved after it requested comparative data on the administration's proposal to control mercury emissions from power plants. The EPA never produced the information.

He said he was "deeply disappointed" by Inhofe's request.

Put your walking shoes on, help raise money

Staff reports

Tulare Advance-Register, Saturday, Feb. 19, 2005

Several hundred Tulare-area residents will walk together March 5 to raise awareness and money for asthma programs in Tulare County.

The second annual Asthma Walk will proceed down the Santa Fe Trail, through the heart of Tulare, ending at Live Oak Park.

At the park, the Kiwanis Club will serve a free pancake breakfast to the first 200 walkers to finish the route.

Asthma is a chronic lung condition that disproportionately affects children and minorities, said Josette Merced Bello with the American Lung Association of Central California.

Asthma is the No. 1 cause of school absenteeism and disease-related emergency room visits, she said. In the past 10 years, asthma incidence has risen 160 percent for children younger than

5. In Tulare County, the rate for children younger than 18 is 10.5 percent, higher than both the state and national averages, according to the American Lung Association of Central California.

Individual walkers and teams can register for the walk. Once they are registered, family members, friends and business associates can make pledges through the Web site to support efforts to increase awareness of and funding for asthma issues in Tulare County.

Walkers can also turn in collected pledges at the event. All walkers will receive a souvenir whistle and anyone raising \$25 or more will receive a commemorative event T-shirt.

In Tulare, the Asthma Coalition has sponsored the placing of flags at all elementary schools, Tulare District Hospital and at City Hall that identify the air quality for that day.

The walk is sponsored by Tulare District Hospital, Southern California Gas Company, the Happy Cookers and the International Agri-Center.

Court finds fault with EPA haze program for parks, wilderness

By JOHN HEILPRIN, Associated Press Writer

Fresno Bee, Friday, Feb. 18, 2005

WASHINGTON (AP) - A federal appeals court on Friday rejected a government-approved program used by five Western states to improve their air quality and visibility in national parks and wilderness areas.

Siding with an industry coalition, the court said the states' program was based on Environmental Protection Agency methods that the court, ruling in a case three years ago, had found to be "inconsistent with the Clean Air Act."

Friday's decision deals with efforts by Arizona, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah and Wyoming to cut sulfur dioxide pollution that contributes to regional haze, particularly at the Grand Canyon.

Mike Leavitt, now the Health and Human Services Department's secretary and formerly EPA's administrator, had helped lead those efforts as Utah's governor.

Judge Stephen Williams, writing for a three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, said the similarity between methods rejected by the court and adopted for the haze program "fatally taints EPA's rule." The judges' decision came in a challenge from the Alexandria, Va.-based Center for Energy and Economic Development, a coalition of coal, utility, rail and other companies.

But the court agreed with EPA that the Clean Air Act lets states develop pollution-trading programs that rely on the market to cut haze regionally, as opposed to strictly requiring retrofitted pollution controls on a per-plant basis.

"We are disappointed," EPA spokeswoman Cynthia Bergman said. "We will continue to work with the Western states and with all other states that seek to use such trading programs to achieve these goals."

States are still assessing the ruling's impact and will need time to figure out a new approach, said Joseph Mikitish, an Arizona assistant attorney general who represented the five states and two others, California and Illinois, that supported the efforts.

"We're going to have to revisit the program that we adopted now that the court struck it down," he said Friday night. "We need to go back to the drawing board."

EPA is scheduled to issue by mid-April regulations on cleanup requirements for power plants and other industrial sources of haze in national parks.

Vickie Patton, an attorney for Environmental Defense, called the court's decision "another chapter in the coal industries' efforts both in the courts and in the Congress to weaken clean air protections for our national parks."

The National Park Service's air resources division reported earlier this month that ozone pollution is worsening at Yellowstone, Rocky Mountain, Craters of the Moon, Canyonlands, Mesa Verde and Grand Canyon national parks. Other parks where ozone is worsening are North Cascades in

Washington state, Death Valley in California, Acadia in Maine and Congaree Swamp in South Carolina, the Park Service said.

[S.F. Chronicle column, Sunday, Feb. 20, 2005:](#)

Is a symbolic pact just hot air?

BY Debra J. Saunders

HOW IMPORTANT to the world's future is the Kyoto global-warming pact that went into effect Wednesday?

It can't be that important when Eileen Claussen, president of the Pew Center on Global Climate Change, told the Washington Post, "The greatest value is symbolic."

Symbolic is the word. Kyoto won't reduce emissions in America because this country never ratified Kyoto. What's more, negotiators at Kyoto in 1997 had to know the United States never would ratify the pact. Before Vice President Al Gore left to attend the Kyoto summit, the Senate voted 95-0 in favor of a resolution that warned that the Senate would not support a global-warming pact that exempted developing nations such as China and India.

Kyoto won't make a difference in those developing nations because they don't have to reduce emissions, or even agree to curb how much their pollution grows. While 141 countries ratified the pact, Kyoto's emission caps only apply to some 35 countries.

Kyoto won't result in big greenhouse gas reductions in Europe. The Kyoto pact required Europe to reduce its emissions to 8 percent below its 1990 levels by 2012 and the United States by 7 percent below 1990 levels. That makes it seem as if Europe has a tougher mandate, except the baseline year chosen, 1990, was rigged to help Europe. The year 1990 preceded the shutdown of coal-spewing smokestacks in the wake of the fall of the Soviet Union. By 1997, many European countries already had met their Kyoto target. When the race started, some European nations were already at the finish line.

Claussen noted on the phone Thursday that some European countries are now exceeding their goals and will have to work to meet them. Allow me to interject that they'll be struggling despite their humongous head start.

President Clinton clearly understood Kyoto was poison. He never asked the Senate to ratify it. More important, Clinton never pushed for meaningful legislation to reduce emissions. When Clinton left office, emissions were on the rise -- they had reached a whopping 14 percent above 1990 levels.

As Claussen noted, Team Clinton was "no different in substance than the current administration."

Claussen explained that she believes Kyoto is important because it establishes a global "statement of will" to reduce greenhouse gases. But Kyoto is "symbolic," she added, because it doesn't begin to address by how much emissions would need to be reduced to stop global warming. Greenhouse-gas emissions would need to be as low as 50 percent of 1990 levels to address human-induced global warming, albeit in 50 to 75 years. Other enviros have argued that much steeper reductions are needed -- one science biggie said "40 successful Kyotos" are needed.

The Bush administration estimates Kyoto would cost the United States 5 million jobs and \$400 billion annually. Even if that figure is inflated, I don't know many Americans who want to lose their job for a symbol, or a first step. And it doesn't help that the global-warming debate has been distorted by politics.

I am a global-warming agnostic. I think that warming may well be human-induced, but I am skeptical of the doomsday scenarios, and I don't trust people who use the issue as a club against America itself (and George W. Bush). I don't trust the zealots (like Gore) to pick the best remedies, after they misrepresent the science.

Claussen rightly notes one reason for Bush to make nice with Europe on Kyoto is that he owes British Prime Minister Tony Blair. Note, I concentrate on Europe, because it is Europe that bellyaches the loudest about Bush's unilateralism on Kyoto.

And Bush could boost his environmental agenda in ways that not only would address global warming, but also promote national security and cleaner air. (As Brookings Institution scholar Gregg Easterbrook noted on the New York Times' op-ed page last week, Bush's Clear Skies measure would go a long way by reducing some greenhouse-gas pollution from power plants by 70 percent.)

The Kyoto crowd has to get real, however. Be honest with the American people about how much change is involved. Admit that the science is not clear, and even scientists who recognize global warming as human-induced vary widely in what they see as the remedy.

While Europe blames President Bush for the demise of Kyoto, I blame Kyoto negotiators for passing a document that wasn't a pact to spread the pain universally, but a pitchfork aimed at the U.S. economy. They call themselves sophisticates, but they negotiated like Madame Defarge.

[S.F. Chronicle column, Sunday, Feb. 20, 2005:](#)

A sick-building hypochondriac clears her head

by Carol Lloyd

A few weeks ago, I explored the phenomenon of sick-building syndrome and its increasing legitimacy among medical researchers.

The ordinary house and its typical domestic contents can include literally hundreds of potential contaminants -- and the sky is the limit on all the ways you might be being made sick.

But unless mildew is growing down your walls in great furry rivers, chances are the contaminant is invisible. That's when the imagination, in all its fertility, can begin running riot.

Soon after I wrote the column, I was avoiding sleeping in my bed, which lies within spitting distance of soon-to-be-undergrounded PG&E wires, discarding my 50-year-old pillow and throwing open all the windows at the least whiff of any dreaded fragrance.

My husband, who never complains about anything except me, began to nag that I was losing my head -- which, of course, I took to be only more evidence of neurological damage.

I wondered whether I needed professional help.

My husband recommended a psychiatrist who specializes in paranoia, but I had another specialist in mind: someone who, rather than prescribing drugs for fears, would perhaps shed some light on the reality. When it comes to our homes, what does healthy really mean?

I called Michael Aroner, a certified environmental inspector in a field whose name, Bau-biologie ("building biology"), was coined in Germany. Bau- biologie originated in the 1970s as a way of researching the factors involved in healthy and sick buildings.

In Europe, research laboratories are studying the issue. But here in the greener-than-thou Bay Area, Aroner, who is certified by the International Institute for Bau-Biologie and Ecology, in Clearwater, Fla. (www.buildingbiology.net <<http://www.buildingbiology.net>>), is a rarity. As far as I can tell, he's the only practicing Bau- biologie inspector here.

I thought Aroner's work might have a New Age flavor. At the very least, I imagined he would possess the maniacal gleam of a missionary.

But I was wrong on both counts. A mild-mannered man arrived at my door with a suitcase full of technological gadgets and a scientist's patience for detail.

As a former restaurateur, he became interested in the concept of Bau- biologie after years of focusing on nutrition. Yet after conducting nutritional counseling, he began hearing so many stories about health problems resulting from buildings that he decided to study it.

Although his interest grew out of a general search for holistic health, it turns out that his job is more technical sleuth than health counselor.

His clients, who range from the acutely ill to the worried well to super-affluent health nuts, contact him for diverse reasons. Although some do believe their house is poisoning them, others simply want to persuade their landlord to replace the carpet.

A consultation typically takes one to three hours and costs \$200 to \$400. Although some of his clients opt for more-expensive solutions, he says he tries to give them the cheapest options and a sense of what's really important. "There's the ideal," he explained, "and then there's what you can really afford."

Aroner agreed to an interview in the context of giving my house a mini-inspection, so although we didn't spend the time (nor the money) taking multiple measurements, exploring the crawl space and taking air, fiber and paint samples to be sent off to a laboratory, I got a taste of what his work entails.

We started with my responding to a short questionnaire covering everything from mold and formaldehyde to pests and weird, unidentified smells.

As I unburdened my concerns about the unhealthiness of our house, from the power lines outside to the wall-to-wall carpet upstairs, I realized that as toxic house fears go, mine are pretty tame. Maybe I am a little paranoid after all.

If Aroner agrees, he graciously hid such conclusions. Instead, he listened carefully, then began to work, removing devices from his bag and describing the purpose of each one.

At first, there were few surprises. He used a moisture meter to measure a bit of peeling paint on my kitchen ceiling. (It turned out to be dry.) He tried to find evidence of mold with his humidity gauge. (A quick survey found none.) He got out an air-sample pump and offered to take an air sample to analyze my air quality. (Cheapskate that I am, I declined.) He used a gas detector but found no leaks around my stove.

Then he tested the electromagnetic frequencies (EMFs) in my bedroom, and his meter confirmed my suspicion that the EMFs are high.

I awaited a general summary: Sleep in another room! But because the health ramifications of long-term, low-level EMFs are unproven, he mildly suggested I might think about sleeping elsewhere if EMFs are a concern for me. (Luckily, PG&E will be burying the wires soon, which will take care of the problem, whether it's really disturbing my sleep or it's simply psychosomatic.)

When I complained that when we'd first moved into the house, which features refinished floors, new carpet and new double-paned windows, I sometimes went upstairs and felt like the whole second floor was filled with poison gas, he hardly seemed surprised.

"You've got a classic situation with a tight building," he explained. "If a building isn't getting air in, then all the chemicals in your home just stay there, and you have to dilute it. You can do that with an expensive ventilation system, or you can do it the old-fashioned way -- by opening the windows."

None of this information was earth-shattering. But it didn't mean it was worthless, either. And even though I didn't go in for a lot of laboratory testing, just seeing my home through Aroner's eyes allowed me a glimpse of a more holistic vision of our built environment.

Seeing the whole system changes everything. For instance, he recommended running the ceiling fan for 10 minutes after showers to prevent mold growth. But that, he noted, would set up another imperative: to replace the air that is being sucked out.

"If you don't allow the fresh air to come in, the fans end up sucking air from attics and crawl spaces and places where you'd rather not be breathing." Thus, when you turn a fan on, you should also open windows.

Likewise, it's not simply the original off-gassing of my carpets that presents health concerns but the fact that synthetic fibers in carpets bond with many pollutant molecules. Without suggesting I

rip the carpet out tomorrow, he observed quietly, "If it's a pollutant, it will probably bond with the carpet, and if it's on the carpet, it will go in your child's mouth."

By the time he described the presiding metaphor behind Bau-biologie -- that every building is a living organism -- I realized I would never look at buildings again in quite the same way.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Friday, Feb. 18, 2005:](#)

On the same page

Air district, park service settle a dispute over controlled burn.

The Valley's air district has aggressively asserted its prerogatives as the arbiter of when it's OK to burn outdoors in the region, at a cost to the National Park Service of \$25,000 in a case arising out of a controlled burn last June.

We hope the payment of the fine will lead to better cooperation and closer coordination between the two agencies, and all others working in the Valley and the nearby mountains.

This is the first time the Park Service has been cited for such a violation, much less fined.

The brush-clearing fire that sparked the confrontation was part of a larger forest-thinning effort in Sequoia-Kings Canyon. The program is one of the most highly developed such efforts in the nation, and seeks to forestall larger, catastrophic wildfires, as well as clear the forest floor of underbrush to promote the growth of younger trees.

Park Service experts determined that conditions were good for a burn on June 30, they had been on previous days, and gave crews the order to start the fires. But the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's experts thought otherwise, and ordered the burn be postponed. The Park Service went ahead with it, and, as it happened, there was no major problem downwind. But the air district issued a citation and a \$75,000 fine for the violation of the no-burn order. Negotiations brought that amount down to \$25,000, but the point was made.

"The decision about burning is ours to make," said Wayne Clark, the air district's compliance manager.

Critics of the air district cite the value of controlled burns to help prevent disastrous fires, but that misses the point. The air district isn't against controlled burns. It just doesn't want them to happen on days when they might do even more damage to those of us who breathe the air.

Both sides sounded conciliatory in the aftermath of the settlement, and we hope that's sincere. There will be areas of disagreement among scientists, agencies and citizens as we grope our way toward cleaner air, but as long as we keep our collective eye on the main purpose, we should be able to ride out any bumps in the road.

What's important here, after all, is that the Valley has some of the most polluted air in the nation. It sickens and kills those of us who live here, and costs billions of dollars in lost crops and other damage.

It is a powerful impediment to economic development, without which we will never diversify our way out of the Valley's low wage, high-unemployment rut.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Monday, Feb. 21, 2005:](#)

Memories of nature

I grew up spending summers in the Mammoth Lakes region. I loved the crystal clear water in the lakes at the 9,000-foot elevation; the sound of the waterfall; the crisp, clear breezes; and drinking out of a high-mountain stream without fear of it being contaminated. These are wonderful memories and my childhood was blessed because I had the opportunity to spend time there.

Years later I lived and worked in Yosemite National Park, not far away from Mammoth Lakes. It was such an incredible experience to live year round in a national park. I never dreamed that I would get to do something like that, but I did. Of course, you could no longer drink out of any stream, no matter how high up you were.

To lose our beautiful natural wonders to development, mining, drilling for oil or gas, timber harvesting, pollution from power plants and other destructive practices directed at them by people in the name of economic development is heart-breaking, short-sighted and disgraceful. I cannot imagine California without these two amazing places, or any of our other incredibly beautiful natural areas that have been preserved for all to enjoy.

Linda Foster, Fresno

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Thursday, Feb. 17, 2005:](#)

'Cannot long endure'

While America will have President Bush for four more years, that does not mean we have to accept his catchy phrases that mask the reality of his programs. It is time for the voters, elected officials and the media to call him on his distortions.

His "Clear Skies Act" will increase air pollution and should be renamed the "Dirty Skies Act." His "Healthy Forest Act," which allows clear-cutting of forests, should be called the "No Tree Left Behind Act."

As noted in your Feb. 13 editorial, there is no crisis in Social Security. There are various options available to assure the continued stability of the system. The president's plan is not Social Security reform, but Social Security destabilization.

The topper is the president's 2005 budget "to make America stronger and safer." Cutting funds for community policing, veterans benefits, children's health care and more than \$4 billion from education (among many other critically needed and cost-effective programs) weakens our communities and makes our country less secure.

A country cannot long endure policies based upon distortions of fact. We need to hold the president accountable for what he does, and not just follow what he says.

Howard K. Watkins, Fresno