

## **Cow pollution estimates drastically cut**

By Dennis Pollock

[Fresno Bee, Saturday, May 14, 2005](#)

Because of a change in the way it counts cows, the California Air Resources Board has dramatically reduced its estimates of smog-forming emissions from dairies in the San Joaquin Valley.

The change drops dairies from being the region's No. 1 source of reactive organic gases to No. 6.

The revision was disclosed during a dairy industry tour in which about two dozen industry and public officials visited two Tulare County dairies that showcased environment-friendly operations.

"We're pleased that the state board took a closer look," said Michael Marsh, CEO of Modesto-based Western United Dairymen.

Participants in the tour, co-sponsored by Western United Dairymen, included Mike FitzGibbon, manager of the emission inventory analysis section of the California Air Resources Board.

"We'll still be working with the [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District] and looking at population numbers," FitzGibbon said, "but we felt it was important to scale down the figures."

The previous estimate was based on the assumption that emissions from each animal were comparable to those of a 1,400-pound adult dairy cow. That neglected to take into account that emissions vary -- they're less for a newborn calf, for example, FitzGibbon said.

During the dairy tour, he explained that the air district has a Web site with a "cow calculator" that dairy operators use to determine the varying levels of emissions for their mix of animals -- adult cows, calves, heifers and bulls.

"Now we need to go back and get actual population numbers" of dairy animals to better estimate the total Valley emissions, FitzGibbon said. The Air Resources Board is the statewide regulator of air quality. The district's plans for addressing air quality must be approved by the board. The district must decide by Aug. 1 how much pollution comes from the region's more than \$4 billion dairy industry.

The Air Resources Board changed its estimate of dairy emissions from 38.25 tons per day to 23.5 tons, a nearly 40% decrease. FitzGibbon said he expects the district will contend that the tonnage of emissions per day should be higher than the board's figure.

Mention of the reduction was contained in an inch-thick report the Air Resources Board issued May 6, said J.P. Cativiela, program coordinator for CARES, the Community Alliance for Responsible Environmental Stewardship. CARES, based in Sacramento, was a co-sponsor of Friday's tour.

"We're glad to see the revision, but this does not mean dairy operations are off the hook for regulation," Cativiela said. "Under this estimate, dairy remains the sixth-largest source of emissions, and that's something we have to take seriously and we are taking seriously."

The reduction estimate is based on data from the American Society of Agricultural Engineers.

Dairies were previously estimated to be the Valley's top source of reactive organic gases, which can form smog when they mix in the atmosphere with other pollutants.

The new estimate puts the industry behind five other sources: light-duty and medium-duty trucks, light-duty passenger cars, oil and gas production, pesticides and consumer products including windshield wiper fluid and sprays that use a propellant.

Representatives of three county boards of supervisors were among participants in the tour that visited the Hilarides Dairy in Lindsay, a 2-year-old operation that is among the largest in the state, and the Fletcher Dairy in Tulare, a much smaller dairy that is more than 30 years old.

The focus at each dairy was steps being taken to cut down on water and air pollution, including the use of the same water multiple times for flushing stalls, washing cows and irrigating crops.

Operators of each dairy talked of how they keep dust down by watering roads and situating "commodity sheds" so that walls block wind from blowing animal feed -- including culled citrus, almond hulls or cotton seed - outside the sheds.

## **Gas mower trade-in Sunday in Fresno**

[The Fresno Bee, Friday, May 13, 2005](#)

For \$100 plus tax, residents can buy a \$300 corded-electric mower Sunday to help clean up the San Joaquin Valley's air.

But there's a catch: You have to donate your old, gasoline-powered lawn mower. The offer is limited to the first 240 people who show up with their old mowers drained of all fluids.

People who want to take advantage should go to Home Depot, 7150 N. Abbey St., Fresno, between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m. Sunday.

The program allows only one discount per person. When residents turn in the old mowers, they will receive vouchers that must be used at Home Depot to buy a Black & Decker MM875 mower during the hours of the event.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District puts on the mower trade-in program as part of its clean-air incentive programs. One gasoline mower can spew out as much pollution as 40 late-model cars. The district provided about \$30,000 for the program. An additional \$48,500 came from Valley cities, government agencies, utilities and environmental groups.

Dave Crow, the district's air pollution control officer, said the program gives residents a chance to take an active role in cleaning up the air, which is considered among the worst in the nation.

## **Supervisors to air mine issue**

### **Some Woodlake residents critical of proposal.**

By Denny Boyles

[The Fresno Bee, Friday, May 13, 2005](#)

The Tulare County Board of Supervisors will decide Tuesday whether a surface mining operation near Woodlake will get the green light.

In January, the county Planning Commission approved a proposal by Kaweah River Rock Co. to use 280 acres of land between the Kaweah River and Avenue 332 as a gravel mine.

The company operates a 260-acre mine on the other side of the St. Johns River, but that site is expected to run out of usable products within two years.

The new mine site is expected to contain more than 30 years of gravel, sand and silt, all key elements needed for a booming Valley housing market.

But local residents and an environmental group based in Delano oppose the project, known as Kaweah South, saying the mine will have numerous negative impacts on Woodlake residents. "It's unfair to target our city for this project when the products produced are going to benefit other areas of the county more than Woodlake," said Sue Crawford, a member of Valley Citizens for Water.

That group, along with the Center for Race, Poverty and the Environment in Delano, filed an appeal of the planning commissioners' decision to approve the project.

Crawford said the basis of the appeal is that there will be numerous environmental impacts from the project, and that a mitigation plan won't completely remove those risks.

"Our biggest concern is their plan to reroute all of the ground water around the project," Crawford said. "We don't believe they will be able to do that, and our concern is that people who are downgrade from the project will lose their wells."

Other concerns for the two groups are pollution from gravel trucks, noise, dust and the fact that when the mine is emptied of gravel the county will be left with a 50-foot deep, 260-acre pit.

"This project will mean 320 rock truck trips a day, maybe seven days a week, right through our town. The target areas for future growth in this county are Visalia and Tulare, but they are asking us to put up with the negative consequences of that growth," Crawford said.

Crawford said claims from the company that the new project won't impact the town don't hold up.

"They say we won't hear the operation. But at 6 a.m. I can hear the current mine, and that is further from my home than this project," she said. "The bottom line is that nobody is going to invest in a gravel truck town, and that is what Woodlake will be if this project is approved."

Supervisor Steven Worthley, whose district includes Woodlake, said residents' concerns will be heard at Tuesday's meeting.

"No decisions have been made," Worthley said. "We will listen to both sides, and hear everyone's concerns."

Worthley said his experience working for the timber industry taught him that sometimes the need for resources, whether gravel, timber or other products, means making hard decisions.

"Growth is happening everywhere in this county. Homes are being built in every community, and those homes are mostly built on cement slabs that require gravel," he said. "The question is whether the gravel comes from Woodlake, or is trucked in from somewhere else."

The Board of Supervisors will hear the project appeal at 9 a.m. Tuesday, at its regularly scheduled meeting.

The board meets in the county administration building at 2800 W. Burrel, in Visalia.

## **Visalia asked to use bus, bicycles Campaign promotes cleaner transportation.**

By Valerie A. Avalos

[Fresno Bee, Saturday, May 14, 2005](#)

VISALIA - Local agencies are promoting a weeklong campaign encouraging Visalians to spare the air by traveling on the bus or a bike next week instead of by car.

Visalia City Coach, Family Health Care Network, Kaweah Delta Health Care District, and the city of Visalia Waterways, Bicycle and Trails task force organized a week of alternative-transportation suggestions, including giving a free bus ride to everyone on Friday.

"The purpose is to make people aware that there are alternatives to getting around besides your car," said Monty Cox, Visalia transit manager, noting that the downtown trolley is always free. "I think the general public is becoming more and more aware of the need of public transportation."

Cox said Visalia City Coach ridership has increased by about 12% over the previous year by increasing hours, providing Sunday service and establishing a route to Farmersville. The previous five years, ridership declined, Cox added.

Residents are asked to car pool Monday and thank bus drivers on Tuesday. Seniors will ride free on Wednesday. "Thursday, we're focusing on bikes," Cox said. "We're calling it 'Bike to Work Day.'"

Anyone with a bike helmet or bike can ride the bus for free all day.

On Friday, anyone can ride the bus for free.

Companies who encourage their employees to participate in alternative transportation are eligible for a raffle Friday. Two bikes, a fire hydrant and gift certificates for downtown merchants are some of the prizes.

In addition, the city is in the process of ordering its first compressed natural gas bus, Cox said. The bus runs about \$350,000, is designed to last 12 to 15 years, and is being paid by a federal grant and matching funds.

"We could possibly take delivery, say, a year from July or shortly thereafter," Cox said.

Anne Magana, chairwoman of the Visalia Environmental Committee, supports the purchase and says the fewer cars on the road, the better.

"It reduces air pollution," Magana said. "The more we can inform the public on how to reduce pollution, conserve energy and recycle, the better our community and environment is."

Magana said taking the bus and recycling is part of her family's everyday life.

"For my family, it has become a way of life, and we try to convey that to the public," she said. "And with the price of gas right now, you are much better off taking the bus."

## **Air quality rule not likely to affect local plant**

Bob Brownne, Tracy Press

[Tracy Press, Monday, May 16, 2005](#)

Regional air quality regulators are coming up with new rules for glass-making plants.

While new limits on sulfur oxides would apply to Tracy's bottle plant, Owens-Brockway Glass Container on Schulte Road west of town, an engineer with the San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District said the plant most likely won't have to make many changes to its operation.

"Right now I'd say Owens-Brockway would be OK with the limit, because they're already at low sulfur levels," said Sandra Lowe-Leseth, district air-quality engineer.

The district is adding sulfur oxides to the list of compounds to be regulated under rules pertaining to glass-melting furnaces. District officials will discuss the rules during a Tuesday-morning workshop in Fresno, with video links to the meeting at the district's Modesto and Bakersfield offices.

The California Air Resources Board lists glass-making operations as four of the top six emitters of sulfur oxides in the San Joaquin Valley, according to the board's 2002 data.

Because of the San Joaquin Valley's status as a severe nonattainment region for state ozone and particulate matter standards, the district must establish regulations for any pollutant that is recorded in excess of minimum levels outlined in a 2003 policy for controlling particulate matter. Recorded levels of sulfur dioxide exceed that threshold by about 50 percent.

Sulfur dioxide is a component of acid rain, according to the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, and is commonly associated with respiratory ailments in coal miners. The agency also noted that sulfur dioxide in the air can cause respiratory problems for children.

Lowe-Leseth said that of eight glass plants in the San Joaquin Valley, the district is most concerned about those that use fuel oil instead of natural gas, and those that use sodium sulfate as a refining agent.

Owens-Brockway's plant manager did not return phone calls seeking comment, but Lowe-Leseth noted that the plant uses three natural-gas furnaces to turn sand into glass bottles. She added that glass bottles typically don't require refining agents in the production process.

She said companies such as Guardian Industries Corp. in Kingsburg and Pilkington North America Inc. in Lathrop would more likely be affected. Both companies make clear and tinted flat glass used in buildings and automobiles, which do require refining agents. The air resources board lists these companies as the second and third top emitters of sulfur oxides in the San Joaquin Valley, with Owens-Brockway fifth and Gallo Glass Company in Modesto sixth.

The district will meet 9:30 a.m. Tuesday at 4230 Kiernan Ave., in Modesto (teleconference). For information: [www.valleyair.org](http://www.valleyair.org).

## **Balancing fear, hope in foothills**

**Experts face task of explaining asbestos peril, not alarming public.**

By Carrie Peyton Dahlberg -- Bee Staff Writer

[Sacramento Bee, Sunday, May 15, 2005](#)

In the grassy foothills of El Dorado County, doctors and public health experts are trying to do the near-impossible.

They must both outline a real danger and try not to overplay it.

Say too little about the lethal diseases that could be triggered by naturally occurring asbestos, and the community may not take sufficient steps to avoid them.

Paint the hazard too broadly, and people are simply, pointlessly terrified.

The balancing act gets tougher as the fear factor edges up, most recently with federal government advice that a generation of student athletes, coaches and outdoor workers at Oak Ridge High School should tell their doctors they've been exposed to asbestos.

It's good advice, said Dr. Norman Edelman, chief medical officer of the American Lung Association -- but he would add a caveat.

"Tell your doctor, and then go home and forget about it," he said, except for doing what you can to avoid new exposure.

For basic lung health, said Edelman, the risks of asbestos fibers loosened from veins that lace El Dorado's western slopes are real but small.

"There are so many things in life you should be more afraid of -- radon in your basement, living with a smoker, ozone in the air, particulates," said Edelman.

"Prioritize. Worry more about clean air."

Officials with the federal Environmental Protection Agency and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry spent much of last weekend explaining what is known -- and the yawning gaps of the unknown -- about a dust that can make some people sick.

Even amid the flood of information, though, some things simply couldn't be jammed in.

Missing were horrifying details of villages in Turkey where roughly half of all deaths are being attributed to lung diseases caused by exposure to erionite, a mineral similar to asbestos.

Equally absent were hopeful details about advances in diagnosis and treatment of mesothelioma, the rare and vicious cancer that has grabbed the attention of those pinpointing potential health risks in the foothills, where residential construction has churned up the native rock, releasing toxic fibers into the air.

Dr. Robert Taub, director of the Columbia University Mesothelioma Center in New York, is among the most upbeat of doctors treating the cancer, in which a sheathlike tumor spreads around the linings outside the lungs or chest. For now, the condition is usually swiftly fatal, but Taub sees reason for hope.

"In 20 or 30 years from now the disease will be eminently treatable," he said. "We are about a year away from a very good diagnostic test, probably five years away from understanding all the mechanisms that are involved in the production of mesothelioma. ... The science is getting better and better."

Taub's rosy outlook is not shared by some researchers who worry that too little money is devoted to mesothelioma. But the time frame he outlined is significant.

It takes an average of 32 years after heavy exposure to develop mesothelioma, past research has shown. A handful of cases show up in as few as 15 years, and some more than 60 years later, said Taub and other experts. So advances that are decades away still could hold promise for those recently exposed.

Others express frustration at discussion of the potential for distant cures rather than immediate action to limit exposure.

Progress in surgical treatments or discovery of genetic markers for those most at risk are inevitably going to aid some patients and miss others, said Dr. Marc Schenker, chairman of the epidemiology and preventive medicine department at the UC Davis School of Medicine.

As a self-described "guy who believes in prevention," Schenker says his priority is reducing the exposure that can make people sick in the first place. That means focusing on measures that would protect everyone from dust and dirt laced with disease-causing levels of asbestos fibers.

"I have yet to meet the person who said they'd rather have had the cancer and had it treated than not have had it at all," added the doctor, who has been researching the link between mesothelioma and asbestos veins.

Schenker has been studying 3,000 mesothelioma cases, looking into patients' work and residential histories. The findings are significant, he said, but he declined to discuss details before the research is published this summer.

A huge quandary for El Dorado Hills and other communities near asbestos formations is that much of what we know about the mineral involves different fiber types and different types of exposure. Workers in shipyards, factories and mines tended to inhale much more of a less potent form. No one knows how to extrapolate from their fates.

It's tough, too, to draw direct parallels from villages in Greece, Cyprus, New Caledonia, China and other locales, where cancer clusters have been linked to asbestos-bearing rock used in household whitewashes, building materials or roads. Exposure levels in those places are thought to be higher.

Also, while it's clear that large amounts of asbestos make many people sick, it's equally clear that very tiny amounts don't, because virtually everyone in the industrialized world has some asbestos in their lungs. The trouble is, no one is precisely sure where the dividing line lies between a low exposure that seems "safe" and one that could be deadly in time.

There are a few certainties, though.

Virtually everyone who has investigated the issue agrees there are not enough asbestos fibers floating around the air in El Dorado County for people to worry about getting a lung-scarring disease called asbestosis.

The same scientists also agree that if a dangerous disease does emerge in detectable levels from exposures there, the most likely candidate is mesothelioma. Even so, the vast majority of those exposed will not get it: Different experts, relying on different studies, put the chance of developing mesothelioma after very high exposures at anywhere from 5 percent to 10 percent.

Who gets sick and who doesn't is widely believed to be affected by genetics. Dr. Michele Carbone, a Loyola University professor, suggests a virus also might play a role, although he hasn't convinced most experts in the field. Carbone is among several trying to track down genetic factors in hopes of blocking mesothelioma's development.

The picture is much less clear for lung cancer, the other fatal disease associated with asbestos. In those heavily exposed, lung cancer kills more people than mesothelioma, even after allowing for the background level of cancers that would have been expected in a large group anyway.

UC Davis' Schenker is convinced that lung cancer won't show up significantly in El Dorado because exposures are too low. Dr. Vikas Kapil, with the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), is not so sure.

"I don't think anyone can answer that question yet," he said.

The other health issue that could emerge for people who have lived, worked or played in affected areas is a range of changes in the pleura, a membrane surrounding the lungs. Thickening, plaques and other alterations, lumped together and described as pleural changes, are not life-threatening, and people generally aren't even aware of them, said Dr. Aubrey Miller, an EPA toxicologist.

They are associated with increased risk of both lung cancer and mesothelioma, but the association is complex, doctors say. Not everyone with pleural changes develops other diseases, and many with the more serious diseases don't have pleural changes.

Still, the changes indicate people could benefit from more intensive follow-up testing, and that they should pay more attention to better pulmonary health overall, perhaps being more vigilant about flu shots or getting to a doctor sooner with a bad cold, Miller said.

Federal scientists are still studying asbestos zones in El Dorado County and throughout California to see whether they can offer risk assessments beyond a single high school in El Dorado Hills.

Meanwhile, they are urging selected Oak Ridge students and workers who spent time outdoors on campus before cleanup was completed last summer to tell their doctors they've been exposed.

Some wonder what good telling a doctor would do.

"There is no consensus in the medical community as to what to do," said Dr. Nicholas J. Vogelzang, director of the Nevada Cancer Institute who has published many papers on mesothelioma.

"One doctor will say have a chest X-ray every year, and one doctor will say a pulmonary function test."

Many physicians, including some who treat asbestos patients, hooted at the idea of telling a doctor about an environmental asbestos exposure, saying it's likely to be an exercise in futility. There are no easy, early warning signs of mesothelioma, and there's still debate about the value of earlier diagnosis of lung cancer, they say.

In addition, too few doctors know enough about asbestos-caused ills, which often are misdiagnosed, said Dr. Brad Black, medical director of the Center for Asbestos Related Diseases in Libby, Mont.

But federal doctors are adamant it could help.

A physician can watch for the pleural changes, said Dr. Ketna Mistry of the ATSDR. A doctor can counsel patients to stop smoking - good advice anyway, but more important in regard to lung cancer, the incidence of which shoots up dramatically in heavily exposed people who smoke.

Even Black, while dubious about the benefits today, said in time that could change. He is involved in research on a new test, which has shown promise in Australia that might someday indicate the presence of mesothelioma before symptoms develop.

The advice has left some people who once attended Oak Ridge High nonplused, others deeply shaken.

"I guess I'll go tell my doctor next time I go for my physical," said Paul Kuzmich, who played basketball and studied amid the construction dust in the early 1980s when Oak Ridge High School opened. "I don't think I'm real worried about it."

Mark Salowitz, who graduated from Oak Ridge a few years after Kuzmich and has been monitoring the news from his home in Virginia, looks back and shudders at his years of track, cross-county and dirt-biking in areas shown on today's maps to be streaked with asbestos.

"I went beyond fear to resignation, thinking, this is how I'm going to die. The question is when, and what I'm going to do about it," he said.

Beyond telling his doctor, Salowitz's plans are simple. Have a lot more fun. Maybe get a little more religion. He is 34.

## **Importing power, fostering pollution** **4-state electric line encourages coal-fired plants**

By Mark Martin, Chronicle Sacramento Bureau

[San Francisco Chronicle, Sunday, May 15, 2005](#)

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has committed California to an interstate power project that environmentalists warn could help usher in a new era of electricity generation that will dirty the air and spoil the water for the next 50 years.

Schwarzenegger and the governors of three other states -- Wyoming, Utah and Nevada -- last month pledged support for a proposed 1,300-mile electricity transmission line imagined as a new highway for megawatts in a region starved for more power.

Schwarzenegger's top energy advisers tout the so-called Frontier Line as a way to lessen sky-high electricity bills, create a more reliable Western energy grid to protect against blackouts, and encourage the use of sources like the wind and earth to produce eco-friendly power. The line is conceived as an incentive for new power generation in the three interior states that would be built mainly to feed California's revving economy.

But the Frontier Line plan comes as energy companies have proposed more than two dozen power plants across the West that would be fueled by coal -- a high-polluting fossil fuel that clean-air advocates contend is a major contributor to global warming.

They worry that the line could encourage the coal projects -- none of which are proposed in California -- and allow this state to, in essence, import power while exporting pollution.

"It is a 21st century version of colonialism," said Vickie Patton, a Colorado-based lawyer with the group Environmental Defense. "California's power needs create the need for these dirty plants, and we in the interior West suffer the consequences."

The governor's point man on energy, Joe Desmond, said protecting the environment is a top concern. "We're focused on the advanced technologies that are near zero emissions," Desmond said. "All the plants that will be proposed will be high-tech plants that get to the goal of near-zero emissions."

The Frontier Line debate encompasses the same talking points as a broader discussion among Western power companies, environmentalists and policy-makers over how to supply the megawatts for booming population centers such as Salt Lake City, Las Vegas and California.

While Schwarzenegger and some other Western governors have pledged to support renewable power such as solar and wind as a key component of the region's energy portfolio, far more plans call for building coal-fueled power plants than environmentally friendly ones.

Decisions made in the next few years, all sides agree, will have profound impact on the region for decades to come.

"There is a very important public policy discussion going on right now," said Jan Smutny-Jones, executive director of a Sacramento-based energy generators trade group, who, like many involved in the debate, envisions a future that includes both more renewable power and some coal-based generation.

"It shouldn't have to be an either-or situation," he said.

In the budget Schwarzenegger announced Friday, the governor commits \$2.5 million of California money toward work on the Frontier Line.

The governors' idea is this: The states will provide the planning but then step aside and allow a private investor to build the line. The line will in turn prompt investment in power projects around the West.

No one can deny the need for more electricity. California energy experts estimate this state alone will need 1,000 new megawatts per year to keep up with a growing economy and prevent the kind of blackouts that roiled the state in 2000 and 2001. One megawatt is enough to light 100,000 homes.

Desmond, who has worked on energy issues for Schwarzenegger and was recently tapped by the governor to become chairman of the state's Energy Commission, contends the Frontier Line will spark new investment in wind farms and geothermal projects that produce electricity with little or no harm to Western skies.

He also contends the state's stake in the line will allow California to play a lead role in a major part of the discussion regarding the coal build-out in the interior West.

The technology exists to build a coal-fired power plant that has near-zero emissions, by turning coal into gas. It also adds about 25 percent to the costs of building a plant, according to some estimates.

While California's major utilities will play a major role in what gets built, the state has no control over what other state regulators approve. Of 31 coal-based proposals now in various stages of permitting processes, none currently plans on using the advanced technology Desmond mentioned.

And officials in other states aren't as focused on near-zero emissions.

Wyoming Gov. Dave Freudenthal insisted his state would require energy companies to build relatively clean coal-powered plants.

But, he said, requiring gasification technology was not economically viable.

"Near-zero emissions is just not realistic," the governor said in an interview. "We'd all like to have that, but it's like saying I'd like to have a teenager I don't have any problems with."

Unlike much of the rest of the West, coal-based projects aren't proposed in California. There are several reasons. One is that it would be too expensive to transport the coal. Another is that the state's air quality already is poor by federal standards; the last thing regulators would allow is a high-emissions plant.

But air quality in the Nevada desert, or the steppes of Wyoming, is much better, a fact that environmentalists note with irony is one reason so many power companies want to locate plants there.

"It's precisely because the air is so pristine here that companies chose a place like this," said Jon Wellinghoff, a member of the Nevada Clean Energy Coalition. "They have more room to foul it up with a dirty plant."

Wellinghoff is organizing opposition to a proposal by Sempra Generation to build a giant coal-fueled power plant in a northern Nevada desert about 50 miles from the California border.

The plant would be located about 8 miles from the site of the annual Burning Man festival, whose participants pride themselves in the small environmental impact that such a big event leaves. Participants would likely be able to see the proposed plant's smoke stack and plume, if the project happens.

It is easy to understand why coal is in vogue in the rest of the West.

Natural gas, which is used to fuel almost all of California's power plants, has risen dramatically in cost during the last few years as demand has grown. Coal provides a cheaper fuel source, and proponents argue it could lower the price consumers pay for electricity.

"What coal brings is a resource that's domestic and in great supply," said Marty Swartz, a Sempra Generation official who is the project manager for the proposed plant in Nevada, which would be called the Granite Fox Power Plant. "It provides greater diversity for our power supply."

States like Wyoming, which has an abundance of coal, see a major economic development opportunity. A new coal-fueled plant there would mean many high-paying jobs.

President Bush's administration has also promoted coal by boosting federal research dollars into the industry.

But there is plenty of downside to a new fleet of coal-powered electricity plants. Aside from cars, power plants are the leading emitter of the kind of gases that cause global warming.

Emissions from power plants contribute to the kind of air pollution that can cause everything from asthma to kidney damage.

A typical coal-fired plant sends about twice the amount of carbon dioxide into the air as a plant that uses natural gas, for example. Using coal as fuel also emits mercury, which settles in lakes and rivers and does real damage to aquatic life.

The coal rush comes at the same time California policy-makers have taken groundbreaking steps to reduce greenhouse gases in this state.

A law to curb emissions from cars and rules enacted by the state's Public Utilities Commission requiring more renewable power and restricting more carbon-based power have made the state the national leader in addressing global warming.

That's why the Frontier Line concerns many.

"If it provides the way to get to clean coal and also taps into a bunch of renewables, great," said Michael Peevey, president of the PUC. "But if we're just talking about somewhat cleaner coal, I don't think that's the direction Californians want to head in."

Virtually all of the power companies proposing new coal projects won't begin construction until they have contracts with utilities. California's big utilities seem unlikely in the current political climate to commit to supporting high-polluting operations.

That could change, however, if power shortages pop up again. Environmentalists suggest the state should be looking at other transmission projects instead of the Frontier Line.

New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson is proposing his state create a new agency that would use bonds to pay for transmission lines hooking up, for example, potential wind-powered projects in New Mexico with California.

And proponents of geothermal-powered electricity, which extracts scalding-hot brine from the earth and uses its steam to create power, note that California's Salton Sea has vast geothermal resources but few wires connecting it to the state's grid.

"We are at a crossroads," said Patton, the Boulder, Colo., attorney. "We either chart a course for clean energy and healthy air or we commit ourselves to another 50 years of toxic pollutants and global warming."

## **Diesel From Natural Gas Could Cut Smog**

By JIM KRANE, Associated Press Writer  
[San Francisco Chronicle, Monday, May 16, 2005](#)

RAS LAFFAN INDUSTRIAL CITY, Qatar -- The rat's nest of pipes and columns snaking across the desert harbors a secret process that will use cobalt to turn natural gas into a powerful, clean-burning diesel fuel. By next year, rulers of this tiny desert sheikdom hope, these gas-to-liquids (GTL) reactors under construction will bring in billions of dollars while clearing big city smog belched by trucks and buses.

Petroleum experts who have sniffed vials of gin-clear GTL diesel speak of it with reverence.

"It's a beautiful product," says Jim Jensen, a Massachusetts-based energy economist. "The kerosene smells like perfume."

In all, some \$20 billion has been committed to build an unprecedented array of clean diesel plants in this Gulf shore industrial park.

Those chipping in include oil titans Royal Dutch/Shell Group, ChevronTexaco Corp. and Exxon Mobil Corp., which is making a \$7 billion bet on GTL, the largest investment in the corporate history of America's largest company.

Smaller plants in Malaysia, South Africa and the United States have proved the technology works, but none is nearly as large as those planned here. In a few years, says Andy Brown, who heads Shell's office in Qatar, the country will be "the GTL capital of the world."

"This really is where GTL will come of age, where the industry will be born," he said.

By 2011, the Qatar plants should be producing 300,000 barrels of liquid fuels and other products daily. The largest GTL plant now producing is Shell's plant in Bintulu, Malaysia, churning out 14,700 barrels per day.

The investments amount to a big gamble on a clean alternative to pollutant-rich crude oil, based on an obscure "synthetic fuel" process developed to make fuel from coal in 1920s Germany.

Like Qatar's headlong rush to produce liquefied natural gas, the ruling sheiks here are pushing GTL as an idea whose time has come.

The clean-burning fuel, with almost none of the smelly sulfur soot belched by engines firing on conventional diesel, appears tailor-made for countries looking to reduce emissions in line with the Kyoto Protocol on global warming.

Faisal al-Suwaidi, chief executive of Qatar Liquefied Gas Co., said he's gotten interest from Japan, Canada, Korea, Europe and the United States, the world's largest polluter. Although Washington has refused to sign the Kyoto protocols, state and local caps on emissions are pushing refiners to clean up diesel.

Complying with Kyoto's strictures "is agenda item No. 1 when we visit countries like Japan," al-Suwaidi said over coffee in his office in the Qatari capital, Doha. "This is the product for them. This is green diesel."

As far as carbon emissions go, green diesel appears to offer only a modest dent, partly because natural gas contains less carbon than oil-based diesel to begin with. The big difference is in sulfur.

Sulfur emissions from diesel engines cause as many as 10,000 deaths a year among Americans with heart and lung ailments, said William Becker, who represents state and local air pollution control agencies in the United States.

"It's a matter of life and death," Becker said. "And the solution depends on removing the sulfur."

Emissions can be cut further by adding better filters that remove up to 90 percent of remaining particulates, said Richard Kassel, a fuels expert at the Natural Resources Defense Council in New York. Sulfur-laden diesel gums up these finer filters, he said.

"Clean fuels open the door to the most advanced emission controls," Kassel said.

Tests of GTL fuel are under way in several countries. Shell is already selling the fuel in Thailand, The Netherlands, Greece and Germany, charging slightly more than its oil-based diesel. In Europe, Shell calls the fuel V-Power Diesel.

Environmentalists like Kassel caution that GTL fuel is most attractive when high oil prices make it competitive. The fuel will probably see most of its smog-cutting in developing countries where emissions standards will require better filters.

"It's going to be a very important blending stock but the idea that it's going to compete with crude oil is overstating the case," Jensen said. "It sort of cuts down on the use of crude but it's not going to massively change things."

GTL diesel from Sasol Chevron, the South African-American joint venture that is a 49 percent shareholder in the first Qatari GTL plant, will surge onto the market next year and could wind up as a niche fuel that powers fleets of city buses and trucks, company spokesman Malcolm Wells said.

More likely, says economist Jensen, the clean fuel will be blended with crude-oil diesel to lower sulfur emissions into compliance with tightening standards in several countries.

The economics of GTL make sense, experts say, when it's produced on a large scale and with a cheap source of natural gas. And Qatar, a Connecticut-sized thumb on the Arabian peninsula, is perhaps the world's best source of cheap gas. It sits on a bubble containing 10 percent of the world's known gas reserves, conveniently gathered in the planet's largest reservoir.

By 2011, Qatar hopes three ventures will convert natural gas into more than 300,000 barrels per day of liquids, most of that diesel fuel, but also including naphtha, liquid petroleum gas and lubricating oil. That much synthetic diesel won't cut into the current market for oil-based diesel - 13 million barrels a day - but it might help clear some skylines.

The fuel will be sell for more than conventional diesel, and is hugely profitable with current oil prices above \$50 a barrel. But Shell will still profit if oil drops to \$20, Brown said.

Exxon Mobil aims to produce 155,000 barrels per day by 2011, said Wayne Harms, Exxon's chief in Qatar.

"We have a lot of money invested here. We're going to invest a lot more," he said. Exxon counts investments in some 200 countries, and Qatar "will be one of our top countries by the end of the decade," he said.

## **Heads of Toyota, GM Meet Amid Speculation**

[San Francisco Chronicle, Monday, May 16, 2005](#)

TOKYO, Japan (AP) -- The heads of Toyota and General Motors have met in a courtesy call that reaffirmed a longtime partnership but stopped short of producing any new deals on technology, a Toyota spokesman said Monday.

Visiting General Motors Corp. Chief Executive Richard Wagoner met with Toyota Motor Corp. President Fujio Cho and president-elect Katsuaki Watanabe on Saturday over dinner in Toyota city, after Wagoner visited the nearby 2005 World Expo in Aichi.

Toyota spokesman Paul Nolasco said Wagoner also met with Toyota Honorary Chairman Shoichiro Toyoda. But Nolasco denied Japanese media reports that Cho and Wagoner discussed sharing hybrid technology or setting up a joint venture on fuel cells.

Hybrids produce better mileage than comparable gasoline-engine cars by switching between an electric motor and gas engine. Fuel cell vehicles produce no pollution by running on the power produced when hydrogen stored as fuel combines with oxygen in the air to produce water.

Japanese business daily Nihon Keizai quoted Cho as saying that the two sides did not make any concrete agreements but "we plan to strengthen our partnership with GM."

Toyota and GM already have a partnership but it does not involve investment stakes in each other. They run an auto plant in California together and exchange research under a 1999 pact to jointly develop environmental technology.

The meeting between Cho and Wagoner comes at a time when Toyota's rosy fortunes contrast with GM's losses. After leaving Japan, Wagoner traveled to China, where he is scheduled to speak at a business forum this week.

## **GM, Toyota Plan Fuel Cell Venture**

**By John O'Dell**

[Los Angeles Times, Thursday, May 12, 2005](#)

The world's two biggest carmakers are deep into plans for a joint venture to build fuel cell systems that would enable them to begin making hydrogen-powered cars.

General Motors Corp. and Toyota Motor Corp. believe that by combining forces they will send a powerful signal to governments and the fuel industry that the futuristic power plants that use no gasoline or oil aren't so farfetched, insiders say.

And California is a potential location for the venture's research and manufacturing operations.

There is no deal yet, and it could be months before a formal agreement is hashed out, said an automotive source.

But the companies already have picked a name for the enterprise: Project Apollo.

GM is working on fuel cell development with Sacramento-based California Fuel Cell Partnership, with several Southern California companies and at its own Advanced Technology Center in Torrance.

Toyota's U.S. sales and marketing headquarters and one of its major research and engineering units are in Torrance. Toyota also operates a small fleet of experimental fuel cell vehicles in the state.

The two automakers jointly operate a major auto assembly plant - New United Motors Manufacturing Inc. -- in Fremont in the Bay Area.

GM has insisted for years that it will have a commercially viable fuel cell vehicle ready for the market by 2010, and insiders say the company is well ahead of schedule in several key areas. Toyota has been a major proponent of hybrid technology, which combines standard gasoline engines with electric power.

Carmakers see fuel cells as desirable because if they can be perfected, and if a retail fuel distribution system is developed, they would remove the auto industry from much of the debate over air pollution and fossil fuel consumption.

By combining resources, the two industry giants "would have a lot more clout with other decision makers and could help get government and industry more involved," said Lindsay Brooke, an advanced automotive technology analyst at CSM Worldwide in Farmington Hills, Mich.

## **Struggling to breathe**

### **Valley kids try to control their asthma**

By Jennifer Radcliffe, Staff Writer

[Los Angeles Daily News, Sunday, May 15, 2005](#)

PACOIMA -- Wendy Valenzuela raises six children in a federally subsidized apartment in the East San Fernando Valley, working two part-time jobs to supplement her husband's income as a house painter.

But even on their shoestring budget, the couple scrimped to buy a \$1,300 vacuum cleaner and \$595 breathing machine to stave off their 5-year-old son's asthma attacks -- fits of coughing and wheezing that have landed Johnny in the emergency room several times.

Johnny's asthma has turned the family's life upside down. It costs them extra money, keeps them awake at night and forces them to rethink even simple trips.

"It affects everything. I don't sleep at night. I get up every day wondering whether my son will have an asthma attack," Valenzuela said.

The family is not alone. Asthma is the most common chronic childhood disease, affecting roughly 6 million U.S. youngsters and costing taxpayers \$12.7 billion a year.

An estimated 63,000 Los Angeles Unified School District students have asthma -- prompting the nation's second-largest district to create a \$400,000-a-year program to try to keep youngsters healthy.

Grass-roots efforts paint an even bleaker picture in the East San Fernando Valley. In a pocket of Pacoima, for example, 28 percent of residents report having asthma, and, in a nearby Sun Valley school, about 14 percent of children have been diagnosed.

Surrounded by landfills, highways and other pollutants, many of Valenzuela's East Valley neighbors are plagued by a condition that steals their babies' breath and can turn their children shades of blue.

"We're the trash can for L.A. County," said Maria Sesma Sooy, outreach consultant for Fernangeles Elementary School in Sun Valley. "This is landfill heaven."

While the actual causes of asthma are unknown, studies show that genetics, lung development and the environment can lead to its development. Triggers found in sub-par, overcrowded housing exacerbate the symptoms.

"Asthma is an epidemic. We know the (triggers) and we have to eradicate them," said Jim Mangia, CEO of St. John's Well Child and Family Center in Los Angeles.

Even though asthma is a manageable condition, children of the area's mostly poor and immigrant population usually are not properly diagnosed or treated. They're also often uninsured or lack access to quality health care, experts said.

"Although it is a chronic illness, you can manage it and can have a completely normal life," said Roberta Villanueva, an LAUSD nurse practitioner. "There's just tons of kids out there that are completely mismanaged."

## **Mismanaged asthma**

After a few frightening visits to the emergency room, 13-year-old Demi Williams was diagnosed with asthma.

Her mother, North Hollywood resident Shari Holiday, left the hospital unsure of what the condition meant and how to help her daughter.

"It's so sad. She was uncomfortable and it seemed like there was nothing we could do," said Holiday, who was staying in a homeless shelter with three of her children.

Children in the United States miss more than 10 million days of school a year because of asthma. Disrupted sleep leaves them with poor memory recall, problems concentrating and mood swings.

After Demi was flagged for missing too many classes at Sun Valley Middle School, LAUSD's Villanueva came to Holiday's dormitory-style room to explain the condition.

Holiday also learned that her daughter's moderate asthma requires two medications -- a daily treatment, such as a steroid, to keep the airways from becoming inflamed, and a quick-relief medicine to relax the muscles in an emergency.

Only 55 percent of children in California with moderate or severe asthma regularly take the much-needed medicine for maintenance, according to a 2004 study, Children and Asthma in America.

It's among the mounting evidence that many asthma cases are mishandled. Some families -- many of whom are poor, uneducated and speak a language other than English -- also confuse the medicines or overuse the emergency formula.

"These families require a lot more than just 'here's a prescription' and send them out the door," Villanueva said.

But because the East Valley is considered "medically underserved," hospitals and clinics are often overcrowded. Caregivers have little time to properly advise patients on how to use the medicines or how to asthma-proof their homes.

Others lack current information on the condition or aren't familiar with modern treatment goals.

Some doctors are still reluctant to call it asthma, relying instead on more generic labels like "bronchitis" or "restrictive airway disease," which don't require the same level of treatment.

"There's some people, because of fear of asthma and what it meant in the past, they don't want to call it asthma," said Ana Saravia, a pediatrician at the Northeast Valley Health Corp. "People used to die from asthma."

## **Finding triggers**

When Kevin Ayelan, 10, was diagnosed with asthma, he had to throw out his stuffed animals -- sparing only a favorite bunny.

The confident, athletic boy, who dreams of being president -- or maybe just a lawyer -- blames garbage for his asthma.

"It's the dump over there," he said, pointing from his house in Sun Valley. "A lot of people in my school have asthma too because of the dump."

On top of throwing out dust-attracting toys, the Ayelans spent \$10,000 tearing out their carpet, repainting their house and cutting back flowers in their yard to help calm Kevin's condition.

"The minute we changed everything, he got better," Kevin's mom, Alma Ayelan said, adding that he's down to one or two attacks a year.

Many families like the Ayelans are at the mercy of social workers who are trying to spread the word about controlling asthma one East Valley house at a time.

The workers explain how families can clean their house and change their lifestyles to reduce triggers.

Doctors may diagnose the problem, but "they never go to the source and find out what's causing it," said Liseth Romero-Martinez, director of programs for Pacoima Beautiful.

Still, many renters have a tough time convincing their landlords to make even basic repairs, such as fixing leaky plumbing that can cause mold or attract cockroaches.

Property owners need to be held responsible for meeting city and state codes. In addition, penalties need to be stiffer for companies that violate air quality laws, especially near schools, advocates said.

"Kids need to be protected," said Martha Dina Arguello, director of health and environmental programs for Physicians for Social Responsibility in Los Angeles.

The Asthma Collaborative, a collection of 40 groups from across the county, is supporting legislation that would tighten laws and drafting an asthma action plan that will address the area's growing health problem.

But even when asthma is seemingly under control, it still weighs heavily on parents' minds.

Ayelan was initially so concerned about Kevin's well-being that she decided to study to become a certified nursing assistant and now works at the pediatric unit of All Saint's Health Care.

With her newfound education, she's confident that Kevin's asthma will not keep him from being an active little boy who plays sports, swims and studies hard enough in school to become an attorney.

"He's going to get better," she said. "He's going to have a normal life. We don't have to be scared all the time."

## **Are state's problems too big for anyone to reverse?**

[Bakersfield Californian, Saturday, May 14, 2005](#)

SACRAMENTO -- Is California becoming ungovernable? That's a frightening thought, but it's a question that keeps occurring to many people.

Author and Sacramento Bee columnist Dan Walters contends that it is already ungovernable because of the conflicting demands of its growing and increasingly diverse population.

That may be overly pessimistic, but Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and the Legislature are presiding over a government that is alarmingly dysfunctional and unable to deal with major policy issues.

California's streets and highways are falling apart. Its schoolchildren do poorly on achievement tests. It has the nation's worst [air pollution](#). The list goes on.

But the government has shown no more ability to deal with these problems than it did in the final year of disgraced Gov. Gray Davis' tenure.

Consider:

- Gridlock and chaos have replaced rational policy debate.

The Democrats who control the Legislature were initially cowed by Schwarzenegger's popularity and bowed to him last year on some major policy issues like worker's compensation reform and repealing driver's licenses for illegal immigrants.

But that evaporated once they saw that he had no influence in defeating Democratic legislators in last year's election.

They have returned to stonewalling all of his proposed reforms and protecting the spending programs that benefit their constituencies.

The old political stalemate between the two most powerful interest groups -- businesses that back the Republican governor and the unions behind the legislative Democrats -- has returned.

- To make matters worse, the two sides are using ballot initiatives as weapons against each other instead of ways to make policy.

Just one example:

Unions forced Schwarzenegger to back off from his initiative to rein in soaring public employee pensions by claiming he would scrap death benefits for widows and orphans of slain officers.

Schwarzenegger retaliated by supporting an initiative that could sharply cut the unions' ability to use members' dues for political purposes.

- There is an odor of corruption in the air.

Democrat Kevin Shelley was forced to resign as secretary of state after an investigation into possible diversion of taxpayer money to his campaign and the use of federal funds for political purposes.

The current leader of the state Senate, Don Perata, D-Oakland, is under federal investigation for smelly business dealings.

California may not yet be completely ungovernable, but voters need to demand better performance from their elected officials -- and soon.

[Fresno Bee, Editorial, Friday, May 13, 2005:](#)

### **Cleaner fleets**

#### **Ruling allows war on dirty diesel to resume in Southern California.**

There's some good news for people who breathe the much-discussed air of Southern California. A U.S. District Court judge has ruled that the controversial fleet rules adopted by South Coast air regulators do not violate the federal Clean Air Act. That means regulators in Southern California can continue to require government agencies to purchase the cleanest vehicles available when replacing fleets.

Last year, the U.S. Supreme Court cast a legal cloud over the rules. Engine manufacturers and oil companies, joined by the ever environmentally friendly Bush administration, had sued to invalidate them, arguing that the South Coast's actions amounted to promulgating emissions standards in violation of the federal Clean Air Act. The high court reversed a lower court ruling upholding the rules but sent the case back for further review. Specifically the court wanted to know whether the air district's fleet rules were emissions regulations - pre-empted under federal law - or simply new "internal state purchase rules."

Last week, U.S. District Court Judge Florence-Marie Cooper said they were purchase rules. The South Coast Air Quality Management District was acting as a participant in the market, not as a regulator, Cooper ruled. With its fleet rules, the district was setting procurement standards in the manner other governments might set standards for buying garbage cans, computer paper or asphalt.

The legal fine points aside, the rules under question have serious public health significance. The South Coast district, using air monitors of pollutants, completed a study in 1999 that found that 71% of the total cancer risk from air pollution in Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino counties was due to diesel exhaust.

In response, the district moved to phase out dirty diesel buses, garbage trucks, airport shuttles, street sweepers and even taxis. Following last year's inconclusive Supreme Court ruling, the air district pulled back, limiting the scope of its fleet rule to government entities only. District officials think the new ruling will free regulators to require not just governments to purchase clean vehicles but also private companies that have contracts with government agencies for services, and that's good. The faster dirty diesel can be replaced with clean technology, the easier we can all breathe.

[Fresno Bee, Editorial, Friday, May 13, 2005:](#)

### **Need a fresher vision**

#### **Governor's transportation wish list is tightly anchored in the past.**

A shower of spring revenue has prompted Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger to pump \$1.3 billion into some long-dormant transportation projects. On the surface, this sounds like a good idea. California's infrastructure is decaying and decrepit. Many highways - especially the Valley's Highway 99 - are seriously congested. In addition, there's long overdue work, such as finishing Highway 180 through Fresno.

An effective transportation system is essential for the movement of goods, the environment and the sanity of commuters.

Those realities, however, must be balanced with the state's fiscal quagmire. California faces a structural budget deficit of about \$8 billion yearly. Although the governor's revised budget today will show some welcome new tax revenue, it won't be enough to cover the deficit. And those revenues may not be there next year, when the budget gap is projected to grow even bigger.

In January, Schwarzenegger proposed to borrow \$1.3 billion from Proposition 42, a 2002 ballot initiative that earmarked general funds for transportation (above what the state gas tax provides for highways and transit). Now, following intense lobbying from the road construction industry and unions, Schwarzenegger wants to restore the \$1.3 billion he earlier wanted to borrow.

This idea would be more appealing if the governor's list of projects focused more on repairing existing infrastructure and providing alternatives to the automobile, especially in areas like the Valley that suffer from poor air quality and congestion. This state needs a balanced transportation plan. Instead, Schwarzenegger's list includes a number of old-fashioned highway projects that, while politically popular, may trigger more sprawl, air pollution and costs down the road.

Sunne McPeak, Schwarzenegger's secretary of Business, Transportation and Housing, talks about stopping "dumb growth" with the state's investments. When will the governor's policies match that rhetoric?

Schwarzenegger appears to be appeasing his business friends (and his union enemies) by pumping up highway spending before unveiling his new budget. Only when we see that full plan can we know if the state can afford to invest in new transportation projects, or if the money is better spent to plug other holes.

[Sacramento Bee, Editorial, Monday, May 16, 2005:](#)

### **Car talk: After ruling, war on dirty diesel resumes**

There's some good news for people who breathe the much-discussed air of Southern California. A U.S. District Court judge has ruled that the controversial fleet rules adopted by south coast air regulators do not violate the federal Clean Air Act. That means regulators in Southern California can continue to require government agencies to purchase the cleanest vehicles available when replacing their fleets.

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U.S. District Court Judge Florence-Marie Cooper then determined they were purchase rules. The South Coast Air Quality Management District was acting as a participant in the market, not as a regulator, Cooper ruled. With its fleet rules, the district was setting procurement standards in the manner other governments might set standards for buying garbage cans, computer paper or asphalt.

The legal fine points aside, the rules under question have serious public health significance. The south coast district, using air monitors of pollutants, completed a \$1 million study in 1999 that found that 71 percent of the total cancer risk from air pollution in Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino counties was due to diesel exhaust.

In response, the district moved to phase out dirty diesel buses, garbage trucks, airport shuttles, street sweepers and even taxis. Following last year's inconclusive Supreme Court ruling, the air district pulled back, limiting the scope of its fleet rule to government entities only.

District officials think the new ruling will free regulators to require not just governments to purchase clean vehicles, but also private companies that have contracts with government agencies for services, and that's good. The faster dirty diesel can be replaced with clean technology, the easier we can all breathe.

[Modesto Bee, Editorial, Monday, May 16, 2005:](#)

## Valley air board needs strength of new voices

A number of county leaders are objecting to a proposal to add more city and public representatives to the valley air district governing board. We don't think their arguments hold up.

The issue at hand is Senate Bill 999, authored by state Sen. Mike Machado, D-Linden. The bill would strengthen the leadership of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's board by adding members to speak directly for the public and to give medical and scientific input to the board.

The board currently has 11 members — one from each of the eight counties and three city representatives, one each from a large, medium and small city. Under Machado's proposal, the total would increase to 17. Each of the valley's three largest cities — Fresno, Bakersfield and Stockton — would have a spot. There would be a guaranteed spot for a medium-sized city and another for a small city.

The other new seats would go to members of the public. The governor would fill two of those: one with transportation or urban planning expertise, the other with an expert on the environmental effects of air pollution. The Assembly speaker would appoint a member of the "environmental justice community," and the Senate Rules Committee would choose a doctor with "expertise regarding the health effects of air pollution."

Those are useful changes. The current board too often hears only the voices of developers, the oil industry and others who oppose changes that could cost them money. The result is a pace of improvement as stagnant as the summer air.

Stanislaus County supervisors joined those from at least three other counties in opposing the enlarged board, in part on the grounds that it would reduce local control. We don't see how that can be the case when all 17 members would have to be local residents.

Furthermore, the public members could add credibility and energy to the body. Our bad air is contributing to asthma and other medical problems affecting thousands of residents; it needs to be an urgent concern for everyone in the valley.

SB 999 goes to the full Senate in the next month. No date for the vote is set. We hope that it will receive majority support there and in the Assembly, and get the governor's signature.

The text of the bill can be read online. Go to [www.sen.ca.gov](http://www.sen.ca.gov) and then click on Legislation. Type in SB 999.

[Bakersfield Californian, Commentary, Saturday, May 16, 2005:](#)

### **Needs of people, economic impacts lost in water case**

By DEAN FLOREZ, Shafter

The Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee has disappointingly failed to pass one of the most monumental bills on water policy in the Central Valley.

Senate Bill 21, which I wrote, aimed to re-establish the importance of the economic health of the community in the long and drawn-out fight to release water from the Friant Dam for river restoration.

There has been 17 years of litigation between the Natural Resources Defense Council and the federal government about re-creating a salmon run by release of Friant Dam water. A federal judge recently sided with the "let's create salmon" coalition and has begun the remedy phase of the case, which presumably includes a discussion on the amount of water to be released from the dam.

The people who live in our region are justifiably concerned. Over the past 60 years since the dam was built, 1.25 million people living in 28 communities have come to rely on water that flows from the San Joaquin River and the Friant Kern Canal.

So have 15,000 farm families and hundreds of thousands more who work the farms, fields and factories in the central and southern San Joaquin Valley region. Add that to the many small businesses and other diversified economies that make up the region, and the tens of thousands that they employ, the proposed water releases will have an economic impact that reverberates throughout California's economy.

Those in the environmental community with whom I have worked on clean air legislation must realize that this case seems to say that the health of salmon is being placed above the health of the community.

This is an issue where people must come first. When compared to the social and community economic impacts, a river full of fish sounds like a luxury that we simply cannot afford.

SB 21 was my attempt to include people and a factual foundation back into the equation by providing that studies relating to the restoration of salmon in the San Joaquin Valley should include: available scientific information relating to fish movement; cost estimates of structural improvements to fisheries and to the San Joaquin River; the amount, source and cost of water required on an annual basis to accomplish restoration; and the social, cultural and economic impacts on affected individuals and communities.

My goal was to ensure that credible, complete information was gathered so that we can move forward in a thoughtful and common sense way. A report that would reveal alternatives and solutions toward water storage and economic development is an important key to our region's future.

Unfortunately, without this legislation passing, getting to this information will now be left up to the discretion of the judge in this case -- which doesn't give those of us in the farming community much comfort.

***Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, represents the 21st state Senate District, which includes Kings and portions of Fresno, Tulare and Kern counties.***

[Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Sunday, May 15, 2005:](#)

### **Allow some thinning**

According to recent statements by the Sierra Club, the answer to our overgrown, diseased and high fire risk forests is prescribed burns. There is absolutely no place in their mind for selective thinning. Yet a prescribed burn of an overly dense forest is much like striking a match to gasoline.

They fail to mention that prescribed burns will release millions of tons of so-called greenhouse gases that the environmental movement blames for global warming. Whereas, according to Dr. Patrick Moore, co-founder of Greenpeace, selective thinning would reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The 1985 workshop on Giant Sequoia included a summary position by the Sierra Club that said, "Perhaps the biggest threat to some of the groves today is fire. Accumulated fuel and dense stands of fir and pine are a disaster waiting to happen. The Sierra Club has advocated a one-time timber harvest in some groves where whitewoods are too dense."

Fire threat to the groves today is even greater. Why has the Sierra Club reversed their position now?

The Giant Sequoia National Monument Plan is not proposing doing only timber harvest, but in addition to prescribed burns where appropriate to protect the Giant Sequoia Groves.

When you add it all up, having less greenhouse gas emissions, cleaner air, providing a renewable resource, jobs and faster fire hazard reduction in the forest, it just makes sense to use all the tools, including chain saws where appropriate.

-- CHRIS HORGAN, Executive Director, Stewards of the Sequoia, Lake Isabella

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Monday, May 16, 2005:](#)

### **Local control**

This addresses a recent editorial supporting Senate Bill 999 by Sen. Mike Machado. It allows politicians from urban areas to decide the Valley's future by giving them authority to appoint four additional members to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District board. We do not believe that expanding board membership in this manner is the best way to solve the Valley's air pollution problem and therefore, oppose SB 999.

Currently, we have policy-makers on the air board who are accountable to people of this Valley, not beholden to Sacramento, environmental, business or any other interest. The Valley does have an air pollution problem, but the solution should come from local stakeholders accountable to the Valley.

Moreover, farmers and Valley industries do not get special treatment from the district. Rules passed by the board will cost agriculture and associated industries hundreds of millions of dollars. Growers face mounting regulations that force them to make critical decisions about the future of their operations.

We hope future legislation on the air district will not only embrace the goal of enhancing technical resources, but also ensure greater local awareness, responsibility and control.

Ryan Bertao Executive Director  
Kings County Farm Bureau, Hanford

This letter was sent in behalf of farm bureaus in Stanislaus, Kern, Merced, Fresno, Madera and Tulare counties.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Saturday, May 14, 2005:](#)

### **'Our own role'**

A recent letter gives us a telephone number and Web site to contact the Central Valley Air Quality Coalition regarding legislation to curb pollution by industry, farming and transportation. While people are sitting down by their telephones to make these calls, I hope they will also ring up new- or used-car dealers to shop for smaller vehicles or hybrids; call their local hardware stores about electric lawnmowers or call the city of Fresno to get bus schedules (621-1122 or <http://www.fresno.gov>).

While certainly pollution standards must be raised on industry, farming and transportation, we as individuals cannot ignore our own role in pollution. Roughly half of the Valley's air pollution is due to the automobile. Even a modest reduction in this pollution by each driver could make a significant difference.

Ruby Suhre, Fresno

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Sunday, May 15, 2005:](#)

### **Cows and cars**

Cows produce useful products such as milk, butter, cheese, meat and leather. Cars do not. Cars produce pollution by burning fuel from oil taken from the ground.

Cows get their energy from green pasture and alfalfa, and the green is due to chlorophyll, which removes gas toxic to humans and liberates oxygen into the air, thus cleansing and renewing the atmosphere.

Growing fuel for the cows cleans the air. Cars do not share this attribute. Dairies should not be required to obtain "air operating permits." Several anti-farm items appeared in different papers on May 7, and I cannot imagine why anyone would try to get more government controls by so slanting their so-called facts.

Gerald E. Peters, M.D., Fresno

[Letter to the Modesto Bee, Monday, May 16, 2005:](#)

### **Let sanity prevail in cow-gas debate**

"Dairy cows pass gas, but how much?" (May 7, Page A-1) inspired me to pass judgment. As a dairy farmer and dairy veterinarian, I am biased. However, as a pragmatist and scientist, I cannot understand the lack of common sense exhibited by the Air Pollution Control District committee.

Consider the following:

Lock yourself in a garage with a running car and you will die of carbon monoxide poisoning. Lock yourself in your garage with a cow and you will not die or get sick.

Ruminants existed by the millions (bison) in the West before the arrival of Europeans, and air quality was excellent. Millions of cars show up in California's valleys, and air quality deteriorates quickly.

Every living thing has an impact on the Earth and its atmosphere, including human beings. Drive by the sewer plant and take a whiff.

Each dairy cow sustains large parcels of open land growing oxygen-producing forages.

The University of California at Davis continues to conduct cutting-edge research on cattle emissions of volatile organic gases. The failure of the air quality advisory committee to accept this science readily is pure cow manure. I hope reason and sanity ultimately prevail in their decision-making.

ROBERT B. CHERENSON, DVM  
Turlock