

Pigeons with cell phones beam air quality info to blog

By JULIANA BARBASSA, The Associated Press

In the Bakersfield Californian, Saturday, Aug 12, 2006

Pigeons with backpacks and cell phones will be taking to the sky and sending air quality data to a blog as part of a whimsical project that blends science, art and activism.

Investigators at the University of California, Irvine hope the winged researchers will fill in gaps in knowledge about the air we breathe, and bring nonscientists into the debate on air quality.

"They transmit in real time, and all the information is available to the public," said Beatriz da Costa, a UC Irvine professor of arts, computation and engineering.

The pigeons will fly over Silicon Valley Saturday as part as ZeroOne San Jose, a technology and art exhibit.

Da Costa said the project was inspired both by the haze she saw hovering over Los Angeles when she moved to the city three years ago, and by a century-old photo of a pigeon carrying a spy camera around its neck.

"They were heavily used in World War II by several European countries," da Costa said of homing pigeons. "So I started thinking, what could we surveil right now that would be in the social interest?"

The birds will carry miniature backpacks equipped with a global positioning system monitor, pollution sensors, and cell phone transmitting equipment that can send the data directly to a blog where it is overlaid on Google maps. Visitors then can roll over the maps and learn about air pollution in the area.

It took da Costa and two graduate students working with her a year to develop equipment that is small and light enough, at 1.3 ounces, for the one-pound birds to carry.

Still, the project has drawn opposition from animal rights advocates, who questioned its scientific validity in a letter to UC Irvine's chancellor last week, saying the experiment could "result in injury and exhaustion for the birds."

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District already monitors air pollution at 28 different stations, and the data gathered by pigeons would be redundant, said Holly Mattern, spokeswoman for People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals.

"It's an experiment with animals that is unnecessary," Mattern said. "It just shows bad decision-making on a lot of people's parts."

UC Irvine's animal ethics panel reviewed the project, and found it was harmless.

"It's not that they don't feel it at all, but they're capable of carrying it," da Costa said of the pigeons. "They're trained to do it, and the worst that can happen is that they fly, then take a rest."

The birds fly for about half an hour at between 300 and 500 feet. Their value to air quality researchers comes from their mobility, since they could potentially fill in pollution information between the stationary monitors researchers have to rely on, investigators said.

"This is about raising awareness, and rethinking the way we gather data," da Costa said. "In this case, we're doing it in a fun way, using homing pigeons."

Hostile Climate Greets Governor's Plan to Save Earth

Eco-hipsters love status of 'green' goodies

by Janis Mara

Tri-Valley Herald, Sunday, August 13, 2006

When Henri and Jeanne Lese bought a 2005 Toyota Prius, they did it for all the right reasons: It got great gas mileage, it had low emissions ... and, as Jeanne admits, "It is a really cool car."

The comment, as well as movies like "The Da Vinci Code," featuring stars tooling around Paris in a tiny, fuel-efficient car, and developments like Emeryville's upscale, but energy-efficient, GreenCity Lofts, underlines a developing trend: green chic.

Sustainably harvested hardwood floors like those at GreenCity Lofts and 60-mile-a-gallon hybrid cars are less and less associated with the crunchy hippie movement or the need to save money, and more and more with status.

Case in point: Sergey Brin and Larry Page, the billionaire founders of Mountain View-based Google, are widely reported to drive Priuses. Even Comedy Central's "South Park" show made fun of hybrid car owners in an episode this year, blaming the do-gooders for causing smog instead of smog.

The Prius doesn't cost as much as a luxury car, but Toyota did announce it was raising the U.S. starting price of the hybrid car 2.1 percent for the 2007 model to \$22,175.

Henri Lese, a San Rafael resident, pointed out, "If you own a Toyota Corolla, which is already a small conventional car that gets good mileage, it probably wouldn't make sense to buy a Prius just on potential gas savings alone. So from that point of view, it's very much an image car. People are buying it to say, 'I'm this cool

GREENIBusiness 2green person, and I've got this cool trendy green car.'"

A national popular culture expert agreed that the trend is taking off.

"Green chic has not reached its peak yet, but it is in the ascendancy, no question about it," said Robert Thompson, a professor of popular culture at New York state's Syracuse University, who is himself something of a pop-culture celebrity.

A sizzling-hot example of motorized "green chic" is Tesla Motors, a San Carlos firm partially funded by Google's Brin and Page.

The company has designed a sports car that goes as fast as a Ferrari or Porsche but runs on electricity.

The new Tesla Roadster goes 0 to 60 in "about 4 seconds," according to Tesla's Web site. The car, which the company expects to start shipping to customers in summer 2007, sells for about \$100,000.

Indeed, a burgeoning electric car industry is thriving in the Bay Area, with startups including Tesla and Wrightspeed of Woodside (founded by a gentleman named, naturally, Ian Wright) working to develop electric cars or components.

"It's hip to be green. I think it has become stylish to espouse less use of natural resources," said Mike Harrigan, Tesla's vice president of marketing. Tesla was founded by Martin Eberhard, who sold his previous company, NuvoMedia, for \$187 million in 2000, and friend Marc Tarpenning - both of whom love fast cars.

Not only fast cars, but sustainably produced comestibles are part of the trend, as witnessed by the Berkeley branch of national grocery chain Whole Foods - an upscale outfit affectionately known to some as "Whole Paycheck."

Whole Foods earlier this year made the single largest wind energy purchase in the history of the United States," said Justin Jackson, Whole Foods grocery coordinator for the Northern California region. "We purchased wind credits. We were the only Fortune 500 company to do so."

As anyone who has ever tried to park at the Telegraph Avenue Whole Foods store knows all too well, the venue is incredibly popular.

Though he wouldn't divulge numbers, "We consistently see double-digit increases in sales in the store," Jackson said.

Whole Foods' Berkeley store has a solar electric rooftop system from Berkeley's PowerLight Corp., and the grocer plans its delivery routes to minimize the use of gas, Jackson said. Along

those lines, San Leandro coffee and beer maker Rogers Family Co. just bought a Prius as its company vehicle.

"It gets 80 miles to the gallon," said Pete Rogers, green coffee buyer for the company, which sells its gourmet coffee to a number of Bay Area grocers.

Rogers sees his family's product as the polar opposite to such standbys as Dunkin' Donuts, both in its quality and the way it's harvested. "Our coffee is hand-harvested. Theirs is machine-harvested. We treat the soil as important. We compost garbage and rejuvenate the soil," he said. The family owns a farm in Panama where the coffee is grown and harvested.

Next to food and coffee, perhaps the most basic human need is housing, and some Bay Area architects are developing energy-efficient dwellings that also have deluxe features.

Emeryville's GreenCity Lofts is a perfect example. The condo development's Web site says, "Welcome to GreenCity Lofts - 62 of the most innovative, elegantly styled, Energy Star homes you'll find anywhere in the Bay Area."

The lofts, which run around \$750,000 for a two-bedroom, two-bath condo, feature stunning views, tons of windows, stainless steel kitchen appliances and radiant floor heating.

"For a long time green was seen as a sort of alternative, so it had to look alternative. Our project shows it doesn't have to look alternative at all. It doesn't wear its green on its sleeve," said Robert Swatt, principal of Emeryville-based Swatt Architects, designers of the development.

Swatt proudly enumerates the condos' energy-saving features. The homes are Energy Star qualified - a classification created by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy requiring energy-efficient appliances, lighting, heating, cooling and other features.

"Since we use so much glass, the occupants will need less electricity during the day because the interiors are naturally lit," Swatt said. The windows' placement allows for natural cross-ventilation and the radiant heating saves as much as 40 percent on energy bills, according to the GreenCity Lofts Web site.

Swatt's firm is currently at work on an upscale green home in the Berkeley hills. And Swatt Architects is not the only local firm doing so.

"We've done some upscale green homes in the Bay Area," said Henry Siegel, a principal at Emeryville's Siegel & Strain Architects. Siegel is widely known for his expertise in green matters. "We've done straw bale, we've done houses out of recycled Styrofoam, we've done stabilized earth," referring to a variety of alternative, energy-efficient approaches.

"This isn't the first time something like this has happened. Something will seem like an activity only people of culture and social consciousness are engaging in, and then it becomes popular," said Syracuse University's Thompson.

"One of those things would be cuisine. For a while, in the 1970s and 1980s, tofu, salads, stuff like that was looked upon as froufrou, something only a pretentious person would eat. The American Beef Council had a slogan, 'Real Men Eat Beef.' That completely transformed; now there are salads at McDonald's and eating a burger is seen as low-class, blue-collar," Thompson said.

"For a while, the Hummer, SUVs, that was what real people drove," Thompson said. "Now late-night comics are making jokes at the expense of Hummers. All of a sudden, the Prius is considered the latest chic in conspicuous consumption."

Negotiators fine-tune plan on greenhouse gas emissions

With key support on all sides, bill should hit governor's desk soon, Núñez says.

By Judy Lin -- Bee Capitol Bureau

Sacramento Bee, Saturday, August 12, 2006

Negotiations are intensifying between the Legislature and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger over an ambitious plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in California.

Assembly Speaker Fabian Núñez said he expects to introduce amendments next week on Assembly Bill 32 -- which would make California the first state to impose pollution caps on industries to combat global warming.

The Democratic leader said in an interview that he intends to address governance and enforcement concerns of environmentalists, business groups and the Schwarzenegger administration to pass the bill by the Aug. 31 close of the legislative session.

"This bill is going to be on the governor's desk," Núñez said.

AB 32 aims to reduce California's global warming emissions to 1990 levels by 2020 -- a 25 percent reduction in carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases. Last year, California was the world's 12th-largest producer of greenhouse gases.

The bill has been opposed by an industry coalition. But other business groups, environmentalists and political leaders have rallied behind the bill, raising the likelihood the Republican governor will sign it.

"I'm optimistic and I think it's a great sign that all the leadership is engaged," said Ann Notthoff, California advocacy director for the Natural Resources Defense Council.

The bill, which is part of a package of green legislation moving through the Legislature, would phase in reductions to meet goals set by the governor himself last year.

Schwarzenegger, who is running for re-election, recently signed a unique state-nation global warming agreement with British Prime Minister Tony Blair to share information on solutions for reducing pollutants blamed for climate change.

"AB 32 could be an important tool in meeting Governor Schwarzenegger's aggressive greenhouse gas targets," said EPA Secretary Linda Adams. "I'm confident we can develop legislation that will support California's progressive approach to address climate change, economic growth and technological innovation."

Legislative staff members say they are close to working out a governance structure that's acceptable to all parties. Some of the changes will likely include emergency provisions that allow industries to lift caps only in case of extreme circumstances, such as a major supply disruptions or natural disasters.

Right now the bill directs the state Air Resources Board, which has a strong reputation for enforcement, to promulgate regulations for the mandatory reporting of greenhouse gas emissions from several major industries, such as cement, landfills and utilities.

It requires state agencies to coordinate programs and encourage emissions reduction technologies.

But the state EPA, acting on behalf of the governor, would rather see an umbrella board made up of agency heads.

Catherine Witherspoon, executive director of the Air Resources Board, said it doesn't make sense for her board to duplicate the job of other existing state agencies.

Witherspoon said the air board, for example, isn't the best agency to identify energy-saving and pollution-reducing remedies for the utility industry. She said that would be better left to the Public Utilities Commission.

Núñez and environmental groups sponsoring the bill say Witherspoon has a point. However, they maintain that the governor's advisory group, the Climate Action Council, is a weak structure, particularly when it's made up of political appointees.

"Having an enforceable cap is key, as well as mandatory reporting," Notthoff said. "Unless California sets the cap and has the teeth to enforce it, it won't give the strong market signal we need."

Negotiators say the bill will likely be amended to include a mix of agency heads appointed by the governor as well as experts appointed by the Legislature.

Another concern negotiators have to work out is how industries can meet tough emissions caps in a realistic and flexible manner.

The administration wants to mandate market-based trading -- or alternate ways to meet caps, such as buying and selling carbon credits so industries can meet their quotas.

The current bill calls for trading only on a voluntary basis.

Adams also noted that the EPA supports the idea of lifting caps only in case of emergencies. Previously, the EPA proposed an economic safety valve that environmentalists said would make it easier for businesses to sidestep emission caps.

The industry lobby remains opposed to the bill, believing it will send companies out of state. However, a recent poll by the Public Policy Institute of California found bipartisan concern over global warming.

Next week, environmental groups supporting AB 32 will kick off a climate campaign in Sacramento by bringing in Nobel laureate economists and pro-environment business leaders and showing an HBO documentary on global warming, "Too Hot Not To Handle."

The bill is just one in a package of green legislation. Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata, D-Oakland, is carrying Senate Bill 1368, which would require utilities to meet new emission levels. Another authorizes the state to continue investing in renewable energy and research and development.

Environmentalists and businesses are cool to Schwarzenegger's global warming initiative.

By Marc Lifsher, Times Staff Writer
L.A. Times, Monday, August 14, 2006

SACRAMENTO - Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger is running for reelection as a self-styled bold leader, who can boost the business climate at the same time he protects the planet from global warming.

But Schwarzenegger's latest plan to curb greenhouse gas emissions beginning in 2012 is being greeted with skepticism by many environmentalists and downright opposition from major business lobbyists.

And if a compromise is to emerge, it must come in the next three weeks. The Legislature finishes for the year Aug. 31.

"It's really important to the governor and the Legislature that something gets passed in this area of global warming," said Mark Baldassare, a senior fellow at the Public Policy Institute of California.

"The public is saying it's increasingly worried about the effects of global warming on the quality of life and the economy."

The bill designed to carry out the governor's Climate Action Initiative is heading toward final action in the Legislature. But many of its details remain hotly contested.

Still being debated - in committee rooms and behind closed doors - are issues of which businesses would be regulated, what agency would be charged with enforcement and what restrictions would be imposed on the state's big air polluters.

"We think this is clearly the most important environmental bill of the year and maybe the most important bill of the year," said Linda Adams, secretary of the California Environmental Protection Agency, who would play a key role in making any new law work.

Schwarzenegger and British Prime Minister Tony Blair had signed an agreement July 31 to work together to curb greenhouse gas emissions.

"California will not wait for our federal government to take strong action on global warming," the governor said.

As Sacramento negotiations ensue this week, environmentalists expressed concern that the governor's plan lacked the teeth needed to enforce strict limits on the amount of carbon dioxide pollution from power plants, refineries and cement kilns.

Business groups fear that imposing mandatory caps on emissions would burden California companies by driving already steep electricity prices higher.

"We can't really tolerate anything that raises energy costs," said Dorothy Rothrock, vice president of the California Manufacturers & Technology Assn.

Even a normally staunch Schwarzenegger ally, the California Chamber of Commerce, denounces the governor's global warming legislation as "a job killer," an epithet the group usually pins on bills carried by liberal Democratic lawmakers.

Finding a way to please both camps is perhaps the biggest challenge facing the governor as the Legislature begins its last three weeks of session before the November general election. Schwarzenegger doesn't want to alienate the deep-pocketed business groups that contribute to his campaign.

But neither can he afford to ignore the 80% of California residents who say they're worried about global warming, according to a July poll by the Public Policy Institute of California.

"It's a difficult task," said Frank Wolack, a Stanford University energy expert. "Everybody has a different objective."

Neither side showed much sign of changing its stance at a Senate Appropriations Committee hearing Aug. 7 on the principal global warming bill, sponsored by Assembly Speaker Fabian Nuñez (D-Los Angeles). The measure was kept in committee, pending a detailed review of its potential costs to taxpayers. Nuñez's bill, which is expected to make it to the governor's desk in some form, had passed the Assembly on a partisan 50-27 tally.

Though they differ on remedies, businesses, environmentalists and the governor agree on a basic premise that something should be done to reduce human activities that heat the atmosphere. The overwhelming preponderance of scientific research indicates that human activities are increasing emissions of greenhouse gases and contributing to climate change.

Schwarzenegger compares global warming doubters to people who once believed the world was flat. He calls business critics doomsayers. "You can build a great economy and you can take care of the environment at the same time," he insists.

Stark disagreements, however, arise over what Californians specifically can do to attack a problem that doesn't confine itself to state or national boundaries. Environmentalists contend that at minimum California should become a model for other states and countries by taking strong measures to deal with global warming. Symbolic acts are fine, counters business, but not if it means chasing jobs to neighboring states that don't limit greenhouse gas emissions.

Until now, business says it opposes any government limits on greenhouse gas emissions, even if the caps are tied to a market-based system that allows industries to buy and sell permits that would allow them to release carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. With that in mind, Nuñez said he was talking to two electric utilities, at least one oil company and the cement industry to convince them they could live with the emissions caps.

The governor is sympathetic to business concerns. His version of AB 32 contains a so-called safety valve that would allow deadlines for capping greenhouse gas emissions to be extended if an administration-dominated Climate Action Board decided that limits would harm the economy. The governor's proposal also would create a new bureaucracy, consisting of the heads of a number of state agencies, to oversee the process for mandatory reporting and capping of greenhouse gas emissions.

"We have no intention to put people out of business or do economic harm," Cal-EPA's Adams said.

Nuñez and his environmentalist supporters, though they welcome the governor's support, are wary of the administration's push for the safety valve and the oversight board. "To have a cap that is meaningful, there needs to be enforcement," said Devra Wang, director of California energy programs at the Natural Resources Defense Council.

The governor's version of AB 32 is largely silent on how the global warming caps would be enforced. Environmentalists say they would prefer leaving enforcement to the independent California Air Resources Board. The board has decades of experience in fighting localized toxic pollutants such as sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide. Schwarzenegger's Democratic challenger, state Treasurer Phil Angelides, says he supports Nuñez's bill as it stands and accuses the governor of trying "to gut" crucial enforcement mechanisms.

For their part, business groups contend that both the Nuñez and Schwarzenegger versions of the global warming bill do not clearly spell out the government's power to cap greenhouse gas emissions.

Schwarzenegger won't have an easy time selling business on the need for a California-only law on global warming, said Severin Borenstein, director of the University of California Energy Institute in Berkeley.

"There are costs for reducing greenhouse gases, but if California can get on board, it might be able to demonstrate that those costs are not tremendously high," he said. "And the rest of the United States might follow along."

Steel, car industries agree to mercury-reducing plan

Juliet Eilperin, staff writer

Washington Post, Saturday, August 12, 2006

Washington -- The Bush administration has brokered a pact with the steel and auto industries to remove millions of mercury-containing light switches from vehicles before they are scrapped.

Although foreign automakers stopped using mercury in their cars' lighting systems in 1993, and domestic manufacturers did the same in 2002, about 67.5 million switches are still used in older cars and trucks. Mercury -- which is released into the air when recyclers flatten, shred and melt old automobiles into steel -- can cause neurological and developmental problems in infants and small children.

Over the next 15 years, the program will reduce the country's annual mercury pollution by at least 5 percent, Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Steve Johnson said. Under the pact announced Friday, the steel and auto industries will pay \$2 million each to recover 4 million switches over the next three years.

"President Bush and our partners have taken a big step to erase this source of mercury pollution," Johnson said. "It's a pollution-prevention approach."

While U.S. automakers initially resisted paying for the program -- Johnson called the two-year negotiation over it "difficult" -- other industries involved in the recycling of as many as 12 million autos a year backed the program.

Mark Reiter, vice president of governmental affairs for the Institute of Scrap Recycling, said his trade association's 1,400 members felt strongly about reducing their industry's impact on its surroundings.

"They didn't want to make an environmental problem," Reiter said. "Because mercury is pernicious to kids, people felt very emotional about this. People did not want another Superfund."

Environmental advocacy groups, including the Ecology Center in Michigan and the Environmental Defense in New York, have lobbied state and federal officials to address the problem of mercury switches for five years. Over the past three decades, U.S. automakers have installed more than 200 million mercury switches containing a total of nearly 250 tons of mercury.

Ten states -- Maine, New Jersey, Arkansas, Rhode Island, North Carolina, South Carolina, Utah, Illinois, Iowa and Massachusetts -- have adopted programs to remove the switches, which are about the size of a pencil eraser.

"Recovering mercury switches from old cars will remove up to 75 tons of highly toxic mercury from our air and water," Environmental Defense President Fred Krupp said. "Look what can be done where there is the will to achieve real progress and a cooperative approach."

The program will provide participants with a financial incentive to remove the switches, Johnson said, but if it fails to meet its objective, federal officials can regulate mercury emissions from the steel mill furnaces that melt used vehicles.

"We still have that tool in our toolbox," he said.

Attention to Locomotives' Emissions Renewed

By Juliet Eilperin <<http://projects.washingtonpost.com/staff/email/juliet+eilperin/>>, Staff Writer
Washington Post, Monday, August 14, 2006

For years, government scientists who measure air pollution assumed that diesel locomotive engines were relatively clean and emitted far less health-threatening emissions than diesel trucks or other vehicles.

But not long ago, those scientists made a startling discovery: Because they had used faulty estimates of the amount of fuel consumed by diesel trains, they grossly understated the amount

of pollution generated annually. After revising their calculations, they concluded that the annual emissions of nitrogen oxide, a key ingredient in smog, and fine particulate matter, or soot, would be by 2030 nearly twice what they originally assumed.

That means that diesel locomotives would be releasing more than 800,000 tons of nitrogen oxide and 25,000 tons of soot every year within a quarter of a century, in contrast to the Environmental Protection Agency's previous projections of 480,00 tons of nitrogen dioxide and 12,000 tons of soot.

The new findings have put pressure on the government to crack down further on diesel engine emissions, a long-standing goal of Bush and Clinton administration officials. Bill Wehrum, the EPA's acting assistant administrator for air and radiation, said recently that his agency hopes to issue draft regulations by the end of the year or early next year for trains and ships that would reduce nitrogen oxide and particulate matter emissions "on the order of 80 to 90 percent."

Research has linked soot and smog to premature heart attacks, as well as to lung disease and childhood asthma, leading environmental activists to argue that the government has no choice but to impose tighter rules on locomotives.

"This is compelling evidence that EPA should move aggressively to clean up this major source of soot and smog," said Frank O'Donnell, who heads the advocacy group Clean Air Watch. "More than 150 million Americans live in areas that violate public health standards for one or both of these pollutants, and a lot of them live near major rail lines. Millions will probably continue to breathe dirty air in the future unless we reduce public exposure to train pollution."

In 2000, Clinton administration officials required manufacturers of trucks and buses to reduce their nitrogen oxide and soot emission by more than 90 percent by 2030; four years later, the Bush administration put the same requirements on off-road equipment used in construction, farming and heavy industry.

The EPA announced two years ago that it was drafting rules to clean up trains and marine vessels: Any rule would likely force manufacturers to redesign their engines and install controls on trains' exhaust.

"It's a real priority for us," Wehrum said in an interview. "This is a standard we want to get done, and we want to get it done as soon as possible."

The EPA's revised diesel pollution estimates highlight the extent to which shifting scientific data can lead to changes in federal regulations, according to Daniel C. Esty, a Yale environmental law and policy professor.

"This new information shows the environmental realm is very dynamic, and you've got to update your regulations to make them consistent" with the new calculations, said Esty, who worked in the EPA under President George H.W. Bush.

According to Association of American Railroads spokesman Tom White, diesel trains are three times as fuel efficient as trucks, having reduced their fuel consumption by 70 percent over the past 25 years, and emit a third of the pollution trucks release when transporting the same weight over a comparable distance.

"Today, rail is simply cleaner than trucks," White said. "Nothing that has been said changes that."

Trucks emit more than three times as much soot as trains a year and well over twice as much nitrogen oxide, according to the EPA's most recent data. But locomotives' advantage in terms of pollution is expected to erode over time as diesel-powered trucks and buses meet new federal standards. By 2030, trains will emit almost twice as much soot as trucks: 25,000 tons to 14,000.

State and local environmental officials say they need tougher pollution curbs on trains as soon as possible to meet the federal air quality standards that will take effect in the next few years.

Kathleen A. McGinty, head of Pennsylvania's Department of Environmental Protection, said her state is having such a hard time achieving federal standards that it has begun regulating the design of portable gasoline containers to cut down on emissions.

"It really is a situation where we're trying to get blood from a stone," McGinty said. "Transportation is probably the toughest nut to crack, across the board, in terms of air pollution."

Pennsylvania has the fifth-most-extensive railroad network in the nation. McGinty said the proposed standards for train emissions are particularly important because train traffic will increase in the coming years. "For us, clean trains is a growth industry," she said.

Communities located near rail yards experience the highest level of pollution. One example is the Houston-Galveston area, where marine vessels and trains accounted for 41 percent of the region's off-road nitrogen oxide pollution in 2002, according to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

"It will be difficult for Texas to attain the 8-hour ozone standard in some parts of the state unless cleaner engines are federally mandated," wrote Glenn Shankle, the commission's executive director, in a letter to the EPA.

Two years ago, the California Air Resources Board analyzed diesel pollution from the Roseville Rail Yard, the largest service and maintenance rail yard in the West, through which more than 30,000 trains pass each year. The study found that the cancer risk level for as many as 26,000 nearby residents averaged between 100 and 500 in a million, meaning that the exposure nearly doubled the lifetime cancer risk for these residents.

"They're breathing in this stuff all the time," said Diane Bailey, a scientist at the advocacy group Natural Resources Defense Council. Bailey added that many trains idle three-quarters of the time they are in rail yards, and that, compared with trucks and buses, locomotives are "lagging so far behind other diesel equipment."

Air Pollution and the Environment

Juliet Eilperin, Washington Post Staff Writer
Monday, August 14, 2006

Washington Post environment writer Juliet Eilperin will host an online discussion Monday at 11 a.m. ET about the environmental effects of smog and air pollution.

In Monday's [Science Page](http://www.washingtonpost.com/science) <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/science>> feature, she reports on new findings that show government scientists underestimated the amount of pollutants generated annually by diesel trains: Research has linked soot and smog to premature heart attacks as well as lung disease and childhood asthma, leading environmental activists to argue that the government has no choice but to impose tighter rules on locomotives.

A Pact on Mercury in Scrap Yards

Industries Agree to Remove the Toxic Metal From Junk Cars

By Juliet Eilperin <<http://projects.washingtonpost.com/staff/email/juliet+eilperin/>>, Staff Writer
Washington Post, Saturday, August 12, 2006

The administration has brokered a pact with the steel and auto industries to remove millions of mercury-containing light switches from vehicles before they are scrapped.

Although foreign automakers stopped using mercury in their cars' lighting systems in 1993 and domestic manufacturers did the same in 2002, about 67.5 million switches are still used in older cars and trucks.

The toxic metal -- which is released into the air when recyclers flatten and shred old automobiles and melt them for their steel -- can cause neurological and developmental problems in infants and small children.

The program will reduce the country's annual mercury pollution by at least 5 percent over the next 15 years, Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Stephen L. Johnson said in an interview yesterday. Under the pact announced yesterday, the steel and auto industries will pay \$2 million each to recover 4 million switches over the next three years.

"President Bush and our partners have taken a big step to erase this source of mercury pollution," Johnson said, adding that he is "very confident" the program will ultimately remove the country's remaining mercury-containing switches. "It's a pollution-prevention approach."

While U.S. automakers initially resisted paying for the effort -- Johnson called the two-year negotiation over the program "difficult" -- other industries involved in the recycling of as many as 12 million autos a year backed the program.

Mark Reiter, vice president of governmental affairs for the Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries, said his trade association's 1,400 members felt strongly about reducing their industry's impact on its surroundings.

"They didn't want to make an environmental problem," Reiter said. "Because mercury is pernicious to kids, people felt very emotional about this. People did not want another Superfund."

Environmental advocacy groups, including the Michigan-based Ecology Center and New York-based Environmental Defense, have lobbied state and federal officials to address the problem of mercury switches for five years. Over the past three decades U.S. automakers have installed more than 200 million mercury switches, containing nearly 250 tons of mercury.

Ten states -- Arkansas, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, New Jersey, North Carolina, Rhode Island, South Carolina and Utah -- have adopted programs to remove the switches, which are about the size of a pencil eraser.

"Recovering mercury switches from old cars will remove up to 75 tons of highly toxic mercury from our air and water," said Environmental Defense President Fred Krupp. "Look what can be done where there is the will to achieve real progress, and a cooperative approach."

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"We still have that tool in our toolbox," he said.

Big tug-of-war over bucolic spot on I-80 corridor

Developer wants 1,025 homes and a golf course; 'friends' say leave Lagoon Valley alone

Robert Hollis, Special to The Chronicle
S.F. Chronicle, Sunday, August 13, 2006

Vacaville's Lagoon Valley, one of the last undeveloped pastoral stretches along Interstate 80, is also one of the biggest environmental battlegrounds along the corridor.

Marian Conning, an area resident since 1999, is among those opposed to a proposal to build more than 1,000 homes, a golf course and a new commercial-business village in the valley between Fairfield and Vacaville.

"It's a beautiful development," says Conning, the spokeswoman for the Friends of Lagoon Valley, which is battling the 879-acre proposal. "It's just in the wrong place."

The once-thriving agricultural area with its native oak savannas on rolling hills gets its name from a 106-acre spring-fed freshwater lake that is surrounded by a small regional park. It presents motorists on I-80 with a landscape that is a throwback to 30 to 40 years ago, when travelers between the Bay Area and Sacramento passed by miles of cattle operations and green orchards.

But more and more, Conning said, the freeway corridor through Solano and Yolo counties resembles the now-urbanized I-880 route from Oakland to San Jose. "Development just went out of control, they didn't leave even one orchard," she said of the East Bay corridor.

The changes all along I-80 since Conning's family moved to Vacaville from Berkeley seem alarmingly similar to what happened from Oakland to San Jose. "We realized that within our lifetimes we could drive from San Francisco to Tahoe and never get out into the country until we get above Auburn," she said.

Friends of Lagoon Valley is engaged in an extended legal struggle with the city of Vacaville and Triad Communities of Seattle, which won approval in 2004 to build 1,025 homes, a tournament-level golf course and 750,000 square feet of commercial and office space in what it described as a business village in the valley.

The development, covering about 1.4 square miles, would abut I-80 between the Lagoon Valley Road and Pena Adobe Road interchanges. It would sit on the south and west sides of the Lagoon Valley Regional Park. The project's environmental impact report acknowledges "unavoidable" increases in traffic on I-80 and air pollution if the project occurs.

The community group sued the city and the developer in 2005, arguing that the project did not conform to the Vacaville general plan, a 1991 development agreement for the area, and various planning and zoning regulations.

The city and the developer won a victory in December when a visiting Superior Court judge ruled that the city had acted within the scope of its jurisdiction. A few months later, the group appealed to the California Court of Appeal.

An earlier lawsuit filed by the Greenbelt Alliance of San Francisco was settled when the city agreed to reduce Triad's original Lagoon Valley development plan by roughly 300 dwellings and delete plans for a commercial strip for big-box retailers adjacent to the freeway.

In documents filed in June, with the Court of Appeal, attorneys for the city and Triad compared the latest project to what was proposed about 16 years ago.

"Here, the city balanced the massive development allowed under the 1990 Lower Lagoon Valley Policy Plan with (the current) proposal to build a more environmentally sensitive, walkable, sustainable mixed-use community that provides for senior and moderate-income households, and produces 70 percent less traffic than anticipated under maximum Policy Plan build-out," the attorneys wrote.

Melinda Stewart, Vacaville assistant city attorney, said the Appeal Court is expected to issue a ruling this fall.

HUNTERS POINT

Development plan runs on sunshine

By Cecilia M. Vega, staff writer

S.F. Chronicle, Saturday, August 12, 2006

A new development planned for an area of San Francisco known for its toxic soil and polluted air -- Hunters Point -- could become the city's first to run entirely on clean, renewable energy.

Hydroelectric and solar power provided by the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission would run the 1,600 new housing units and 300,000 square feet of commercial and retail space going up on a 93-acre site in the former Hunters Point Naval Shipyard, under a proposal announced by city leaders Friday.

Mayor Gavin Newsom said the proposal is an attempt to help clean up the environmentally damaged Hunters Point community, which has some of the city's worst air pollution and until this spring was home to a Pacific Gas and Electric Co. power plant.

"Here's an opportunity to deliver power that is 100 percent renewable," Newsom said. "Here's an opportunity to deliver power to a community that's been ravaged by environmental injustice."

Lennar Corp., the developer, will ultimately decide whether it wants the PUC to supply the renewable power to the new neighborhood or whether PG&E will get the bid.

The PUC already provides 20 percent of the city's power as well as water to 2.4 million customers around the Bay Area. The power it delivers to the city currently goes to places like San Francisco General Hospital, police and fire stations around the city, public transit and streetlights.

Supplying hydro and solar power to a residential community would be a first for the agency. The power that could go to Hunters Point would come from a reservoir and solar panels in the Portola District.

"We are going to make it right for Hunters Point," said Susan Leal, the PUC's general manager. "We're going to make sure they have renewable power."

The city purchased the former shipyard from the Navy last year. The environmental cleanup on the property where the new development will be built is complete and homes, which will be constructed from environmentally friendly materials, could be offered for sale as early as March. At least 32 percent of the residential units will be set aside for low-income families. The city awarded development rights for the land in 1999 to Lennar Corp.

On Friday, officials from PG&E, which owns the city's electric distribution network, said they intend to compete for the bid.

"It's new development. We'd like to serve all customers in San Francisco," said Nancy McFadden, PG&E's vice president of government relations. "It's competition."

San Francisco has a long, unsuccessful history of attempting to bring public power to the city and its battles with PG&E have been contentious.

In 2002, voters shot down a measure that called for the PUC to secure electricity for all the city's power customers and to possibly buy out PG&E's local distribution system. PG&E spent nearly \$3 million to defeat the measure. There also were two local public-power measures on the ballot that voters narrowly rejected in 2001.

McFadden said there would not be expensive litigation resulting from the PUC's efforts to move into Hunter's Point "if there's fair competition."

"We're not expecting it to be a fight," she said. "We are competitors, but we share the same goal and that is to see a revitalized shipyard."

Still, given the contentious battles waged in the past, some in San Francisco's City Hall wondered whether that would prove true.

"This is immensely benign, and PG&E should not be freaked out by it," said Supervisor Ross Mirkarimi, who was behind the unsuccessful ballot measure in 2001 to replace PG&E with a public power utility. The majority of the power for the Hunters Point development would be solar under the PUC plan.

"If you're going to get serious about global warming...we're going to need to do things like this," Newsom said.

The city still needs to negotiate the terms of distributing power generated by the PUC through PG&E's power transmission system. And any contract between Lennar Corp. and the city agency would need approval by the city's Board of Supervisors.

Sam Singer, spokesman for Lennar Corp., said the company is excited about bringing public power to the former shipyard and is "hoping this comes to fruition."

"We have to keep an open mind," he said. "But we're encouraged."

Leal attempted to sweeten the deal Friday by saying her agency would ensure that rates for the new development will be the same or lower than PG&E's.

Newsom said he also plans to bring public power to an environmentally friendly development planned on Treasure Island.

"We want to move forward and we're going to move forward in this direction," Newsom said. "We're not here to take someone out of business. We're not here to get into the court system and fight this out legally, but we're resolved to do it."

[L.A. Times editorial, Sunday, August 13, 2006:](#)

California Should Be the Coolest

Gov. Schwarzenegger has an opportunity to make the state a leader on global warming.

BEFORE THIS MONTH IS OVER, the Legislature and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger have a chance to make California a world leader in reducing global warming. It's an opportunity the state - and the rest of the planet, for that matter - can't afford to miss.

The Global Warming Solutions Act, or AB 32, would place limits on carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases emitted in the state, codifying pollution goals Schwarzenegger approved last year. The state would set the regulations, which wouldn't take effect until 2012, after studying various approaches, including one touted earlier this month by the governor and British Prime Minister Tony Blair that would allow businesses to meet the limits by buying and selling pollution. By forcing California industry to reduce its greenhouse emissions, AB 32 could promote the kind of innovation for which this state is famous.

Some business leaders, however, including the California Chamber of Commerce, worry that the bill is a "job killer." They say it would increase costs for California power plants, refineries and cement factories and encourage companies to relocate to states with no such regulations. They also argue that limits on emissions could hinder California's energy production and lead to rolling blackouts during heat waves like last month's.

Their fears are overblown. California - and California business - needs AB 32.

The real "job killer" is global warming. If hotter days shrink California's premium vineyards, that's a job killer. If more precipitation falls as rain than snow, the Sierra snowpack dwindles and the fragile infrastructure built to control floods and allocate water rights in the state's Central Valley collapses, that's a job killer. If warmer temperatures make it harder for California to rid its air of smog, that's a job killer. Global warming puts property, jobs and, yes, corporations at risk.

In fact, AB 32 could help create jobs. Capping carbon emissions could help spur an alternative-energy boom and research into alternative-energy technology that could help the economy grow and ease future energy shortages. Opening the door to these opportunities now would give California a competitive advantage when the rest of the nation catches up.

And California is not likely to be alone for long. New England states have already begun forming a cap-and-trade consortium. New Mexico is organizing neighboring Southwest states. Other states have followed California's lead on clean-air regulations in the past - and are likely to again.

None of this means that the changes will be easy. At stake here is nothing less than providing affordable energy for sustainable prosperity without wrecking the global climate. But carbon caps are coming. Climatologists and economists agree that voluntary measures alone will not sufficiently reduce emissions. If what business wants is regulatory certainty, then it makes sense to start working for it now.

[Sacramento Bee, Commentary, Monday, August 14, 2006](#)

Back - seat driver: Official clears the air on drive-up windows

By Tony Bizjak -- Bee Staff Writer

Is it possible that fast food drive-up windows in fact help reduce air pollution?

We started wondering about that after getting an e-mail from reader Mike from north Sacramento during a recent spate of hot, polluted days. He declared: "Anyone serious about air quality in this area needs to start looking at closing the drive-up window at so-called fast food places."

Clearly, Mike's right in the sense that driving your car to a restaurant creates pollution, compared, say, to eating at home or bag-lunching it at the office.

But, surprisingly, idling in the drive-up lane seems to be more eco-friendly -- or rather, less eco-unfriendly -- than parking and going inside.

Peter Christensen, an official with the Sacramento Air Quality Management District, tells us that idling in your car for five minutes, and even possibly up to 10 minutes, generally creates less pollution than if you turn the engine off, then start it up again. Starting an engine produces a bigger burp of pollution.

Christensen said air quality district officials, however, don't particularly like fast food restaurants installing drive-up windows in neighborhoods where plenty of people live within walking and biking distance.

Their point being: When you have a choice, choose walking.

David in Elk Grove recently was stopped by a long string of cars "and what appeared to be cops on motorcycles who were blocking the traffic. A closer look showed that they were what I will call 'pseudo cops.' What legal right do they have to control traffic for the convenience of a funeral party?"

State law allows police, but not privately hired security patrols, to stop traffic for funeral processions. But some cities have ordinances allowing private patrols to control traffic.

Elk Grove is not one of them, police spokesman Chris Trim said. Legally, David didn't have to stop. But Trim points out that Elk Grove police sometimes do help out on traffic patrol for funeral processions, so before you decide you really need to shoulder your way through someone's funeral, take a good look at the uniforms. If they are real police, you may get a ticket.

Nanci from Sacramento clearly is exasperated after some scary moments on the road recently at blank traffic signals during power outages. She was almost rear-ended on Fair Oaks Boulevard when the driver behind her didn't want to stop, and she saw a close call on Folsom Boulevard. "I would have loved to have been a witness if there had been a collision. I would have jumped out (carefully watching for other vehicles and being mindful of all traffic laws regarding pedestrians jumping out into traffic, of course) and yelled at the driver who didn't stop, 'Ha! Your fault! Your fault! Stupid person!' Yes I would."

Well, OK, we're not sure about the jumping out of the car concept, but Nanci is right about the law. CHP's Lizz Dutton says if traffic control signals are inoperative, drivers must stop, then "proceed with caution when it is safe."

The problem, according to Dutton, sometimes occurs with drivers who are unfamiliar with the area, especially when it's dark.

Lorrie in Rocklin wonders where the consistency is in rules about freeway diamond lanes. Some require two people in the vehicle; some require three. Some function as diamond lanes just during morning and afternoon commutes; others all day, every day.

The reason, says Caltrans official Monica Kress, is that one size does not fit all situations. Officials are looking to get "optimal" flows. In Southern California, and parts of the Bay Area, that means requiring three in the car; in Sacramento, that means two. Also, in congested Los Angeles, diamond lanes are effective all day and on weekends. In Sacramento, it would be a waste of freeway space to extend the hours.

[Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Sunday, Aug. 13, 2006:](#)

In this together

As someone who works for a Bay Area-based public policy and grantmaking foundation that has been focused on and funding San Joaquin Valley air quality efforts for the past four years, it is disappointing to read San Joaquin Valley air district administrator Seyed Sadredin's opinion ("Public pumps out ideas at air district meetings") about the so-called "elitist mentality" he feels organizations like Earthjustice; Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment; and mine possess.

There is more that the district can do to clean up the valley's air and Sadredin knows it. There is nothing elitist in that attitude.

It is, instead, common sense, environmental justice and caring about the human condition that propels organizations like mine to work side by side with our valley public health and environmental colleagues to improve the region's air pollution problems.

With people suffering and dying from air pollution, we should all be working together to solve the valley's air quality crisis, instead of continuing with a message of "my hands are tied."

We agree with Sadredin that all sectors need to be involved in crafting the solution. So let's work together, regardless of where the helping hands are located, toward the same goals.

-- SUSAN FRANK, Vice President, Public Policy Steven and Michele Kirsch Foundation, San Jose, CA

[Letter to the S.F. Chronicle, Sunday, August 13, 2006:](#)

A happy gaggle of bicycle commuters

Editor -- I don't understand why Herb Fawcett's Aug. 5 letter against bicycle commuting ("Bicycle commuting is a dead horse") received such prominent positioning. Fawcett is to be commended for trying this commute. If anyone can cover the distance, as Fawcett easily did, working out the minor logistics is neither unreasonable nor ridiculous.

For more than 15 years, I've found it to be very fun, healthy and relaxing to put two daily workouts onto my weekday schedule. Many others agree.

For Logistics: If one wants a change of clothes, but dislikes carrying it by bike, ride four days per week and use the other day to carry in next week's clean clothes and take home last week's dirty sets.

Subsidized mass transit is another great idea that Fawcett mentioned. Cheaper mass transit alleviates bridge toll-booth lines, air pollution and highway congestion. So, it would make sense for bridge tolls and gas taxes to subsidize mass transit for the direct benefit of car drivers.

Happy cycling!

Mitch Cohen, Berkeley

[Lodi News Sentinel, Letter to the Editor, Saturday, August 12, 2006](#)

We can all help stop global warming

I just got home from seeing Al Gore's movie, "An Inconvenient Truth."

I can't say that I enjoyed it but it sure opened my eyes, and I consider myself to already be "enlightened" about global warming.

When you see "then" and "now" photos of glaciers in various places in the world you have to realize how "global warming" is affecting, or going to affect, all of life on earth.

Unfortunately, in my opinion, global warming has become the catch phrase, even though overall that is what's happening. A better description might be weather disruption as some places receive much more rain than usual and others receive much less, hurricanes and tornadoes become more violent and prevalent, and people and animals suffer the effects of all of it.

This is not the result of regular weather cycles, folks.

So, what can we do?

You can check out <http://www.climatecrisis.net> for one thing. There you can find specific ways to lessen your impact on the earth.

The ancient Chinese saying of Lao-tzu, "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step," or the story of the little girl at the beach throwing star fish back into the ocean (you can't throw them all back, but it makes a difference to the ones you do) apply here.

If we all do a little bit, we'll make a difference. If everyone in the U.S. replaced just three incandescent light bulbs with fluorescent bulbs, we'd reduce emissions of carbon dioxide by 23 million tons, reduce electricity demand equivalent to 11 coal-fired power stations, and save \$1.8 billion!

My friends have just purchased a Toyota Prius and they gave me a ride in it from the theater to my truck. All I can say is, wow! I am so impressed that if I had the money I'd run right out and buy one myself!

In the meantime, I am going to continue being a cheerleader for straw bale houses (or, if you prefer, super-insulated houses).

The recent heat wave of over 100-degree weather, not to mention a neighbor's window-shaking car music, sure made me wish I had one already. Straw bale houses cost less to heat and cool and are more quiet due to the thickness of the walls.

Call me a tree-hugger if you will. I'll be happy sitting in the shade of my tree on those over 100 degree days while you're sitting out in the sun, wondering why you're so hot.

It's not too late to start hugging your own tree.

Betsy Fiske
Lodi