Six large dairies in the central San Joaquin Valley could start turning their cow manure into natural gas to heat up to 50,000 homes a year under a breakthrough agreement expected to be announced by a New Hampshire-based renewable energy company.

Pacific Gas & Electric Co. has signed an agreement to distribute the natural gas produced by methane digesters, which would be built at each of the dairies by Microgy Inc., a subsidiary of Environmental Power Corp., based in Portsmouth, N.H.

"This would be a major benefit, considering that methane is a potent greenhouse gas," said Dan Kammen, a professor with the Energy and Resources Group at the University of California at Berkeley.

"This could be an economically attractive process for the dairies. Instead of being a source of emissions, they become a source of green power. This is quite a big deal."

It's expected that the dairies could be putting gas into PG&E pipelines by the end of 2007 or early 2008 "if we can get the regulators off the dime," said Jeff Dasovich, senior vice president of development for Environmental Power's western region.

The dairies include Maddox Dairy in the Burrel area, Joseph Gallo Farms in Atwater and Bar 20 Partners between Kerman and Mendota. Another three dairies - Cloverdale, Hollandia Farms and Lancing - are in the Hanford area.

Dasovich explained that Microgy is paying to build the digesters from the ground up, along with "scrubber" facilities to remove carbon dioxide and water vapor from the gas.

John Shehadey, a managing partner in Bar 20, said he will need to modify his dairy, which will have 9,000 cows about a year from now, to suit the digester installation.

But he said he will recoup his investment. "It pencils out," he said. "It will pay the costs of making the changes.

"One of the biggest things for us is that it will be a big help for us environmentally," he said.

"Manure is a big concern for air and water quality. But if you do something to improve the environment, it has to be cost-effective. This will be."

Farmers get new revenue source

Dasovich said a benefit for the farmers is that the system will provide them with another source of revenue.

Microgy will pocket much of the money from sales of the natural gas, but the farmers will get a cut. The percentage was not disclosed.

Dasovich said each methane production system will cost millions of dollars.

Once completed, the systems will generate about 3 billion cubic feet of commercial-quality natural gas a year.

In July, Environmental Power signed a pipeline interconnection agreement that allows it to transport natural gas through PG&E's pipelines. In October, the utility committed to buying 8 million cubic feet of natural gas daily from future Environmental Power facilities.
In addition to providing gas to PG&E, the six dairies would capture annually nearly 800,000 tons of greenhouse gas emissions, Dasovich said. He said those credits have an estimated value of more than $3 million based on prices on the Chicago Climate Exchange.

Joseph Gallo Farms has been a pioneer in putting methane digesters at its dairy. The planned system would be the third there.

In 2004, the company, headed by Mike Gallo, completed its first digester and used it to generate a portion of the electricity needed to process cheese produced by the megadairy.

In July 2005, Microgy and Joseph Gallo Farms announced their first digester partnership to offset propane use in their cheese production facility.

Michael Marsh, who heads Western United Dairymen in Modesto, said most of the 11 dairies in California that have digesters use them to create electrical power. They have been unable to sell excess power or gas to the utility, so the dairy operators have "flared off," or burned, excess methane.

"Before this, there has been no market for gas or electricity," Marsh said. "We're very pleased that, at last, some type of power purchase agreement has been developed by the investor-owned utility. Finally, there is a market for some of the energy that can be developed on the farm."

Marsh said PG&E has shown more interest in the renewable fuel because of the recent passage of state legislation calling for cutting down on greenhouse gases and because of initiatives from Gov. Schwarzenegger on bioenergy.

He said he believes there remain some issues PG&E needs to address to make the building of digesters on dairies more economically viable.

**News from the San Joaquin Valley**
The Associated Press
In the Fresno Bee, Bakersfield Californian, SF Chronicle and other papers
Wednesday, November 15, 2006

A Bakersfield developer has offered to pay almost $2.5 million to offset future air pollution coming from a proposed development of about 6,400 homes and commercial buildings in Madera County.

Castle & Cooke of California plans to build Gateway Village along Highway 41 north of the San Joaquin River. The company hired a consultant to estimate how much pollution would be caused by the development's construction and increased traffic once residents move in, said Scott Blunck, its vice president of land development.

The company calculated it would pay about $2.5 million to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to ward off lawsuits over pollution that have plagued other companies, Blunck said.

"We wanted to be as proactive as possible. We're also including open spaces, bike lanes and walking paths in the development," he said.

The payment satisfies the requirements of a new air pollution fee developers must pay under regional air quality rules adopted last year, said Tom Jordan, special projects administrator for the district.

Most developers oppose the rule, enacted to reduce air pollution from city sprawl in the San Joaquin Valley, which ranks as one of the dirtiest air basins in the nation. Builders groups sued the air district in June saying vehicles are the problem, not new homes and businesses.

"If someone scientifically demonstrates how we are the cause of this kind of air pollution, then yes, it is something we need to mitigate. But nobody has done that," said Tim Coyle, a spokesman for the California Building Industry Association. "This fee is frivolous, contrived and aimed at making money for the air district."
The air district covers eight counties from Stockton to Bakersfield. It estimates it will receive $103 million from housing, commercial and industrial development fees over the next three years.

Some environmentalists said the air district's rule still allows for growth that could cause more pollution.

"Instead of an unmitigated disaster, Gateway Village will be a mitigated disaster. We need a stronger rule from the air district to take control of sprawl," said Sierra Club member Kevin Hall.

**Valley project surpasses air fees**

**Madera Co. homes' developer hopes $2.5m can avoid legal woes.**

By Mark Grossi / The Fresno Bee
The Fresno Bee Tuesday, November 14, 2006

A Bakersfield developer is paying almost $2.5 million to offset air pollution from a future Madera County community — three times more than local air authorities would ask under a controversial new rule.

The money from Castle & Cooke of California will be spent to replace diesel engines used on farm water pumps and possibly buy new buses and other public vehicles around Gateway Village, a development planned along Highway 41 north of the San Joaquin River.

Company President Bruce Freeman doesn't like the payment, but views it as protection against a potentially costly environmental lawsuit.

He also believes it will be cheaper to replace old diesel farm engines now than to buy pollution reductions in the future.

"The cost will go up because all the big, easy reductions will be gone," Freeman said. "Then you will pay a lot more money to find other reductions, like replacing city buses, that won't cut out as much pollution."

Castle & Cooke's payment is part of a landmark campaign to control dirty air from city sprawl in one of the nation's most unhealthy air basins.

No major air district in the country imposes fees for such a cleanup. And the fees are controversial.

Builders argue homes and businesses don't make air pollution. Vehicles are the problem, they say. In June, they filed suit against the air district.

Castle & Cooke just decided to move its Gateway project ahead by making a payment that is well beyond what the air district wants.

The developer has signed a contract promising to remove as much pollution as the project's traffic and other activities would create. That commitment is well beyond the 30% to 50% reduction required in the air district's rules. Such air quality contracts were hatched in the southern San Joaquin Valley over the last two years to settle Sierra Club lawsuits against developers.

The Gateway Village development contract is the first under the new rules in the central San Joaquin Valley area.
Building industry officials don't like the idea, and neither does Freeman. But he said the agreements are a cost-effective way to do business right now, especially with the threat of lawsuits.

"It isn't really valid to say houses cause air pollution — cars and engines make the pollution," he said. "You can't tie air pollution to houses. But if that's the law, we just say OK."

The California Building Industry Association is among the four groups that sued the air district this year. The others are the Modesto Chamber of Commerce and two Fresno-area groups, Valley Taxpayers Coalition and Coalition for Urban Renewal Excellence.

"If someone scientifically demonstrates how we are the cause of this kind of air pollution, then yes, it is something we need to mitigate," said senior vice president Tim Coyle of the state association. "But nobody has done that. This fee is frivolous, contrived and aimed at making money for the air district."

Builder representatives say the district could amass $400 million in the next five years in fees from housing, commercial and industrial development. The district, covering eight counties from Stockton to Bakersfield, projects a more modest $103 million in the next three years.

District officials say they already have scaled back that forecast because construction has slowed this year in the Valley. The fee is about $900 per house until 2008 when the estimate rises to about $1,770.

Collecting fees is not the point of the cleanup campaign, officials said. The goal is to reduce bad air coming from new homes, businesses, commercial buildings and even school buildings constructed on the edge of town. Generally, the pollution comes from motorists' extra miles in commutes and other trips.

But builders can install air-enhancing features such as outdoor outlets for electric lawn mowers, bike lanes and energy-efficient water heaters to help reduce fees that will be assessed, said Tom Jordan, air district special projects administrator.

"We would rather see the improvements in the developments because those are permanent," he said. "We also want people to know that the new rules are in effect even though there is a lawsuit."

Jordan said there is a long-established connection in state environmental law between new developments and air quality impacts. A recognized mathematical model is used to estimate traffic-based pollution.

Based on the model, the Sierra Club sued developers in the Bakersfield area over such pollution, using the expertise of retired math professor and Sierra Club member Gordon Nipp to explain the estimates.

When their projects snagged in court, developers in Kern County signed contracts to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars. Ten agreements have been signed. Castle & Cooke, which had not been sued, began a company policy of obtaining the contracts for its developments.

Freeman said the contracts can't continue indefinitely without raising the cost of homes. The cost might escalate many times as the cheapest pollution fixes disappear, he said.
"You've got a train wreck waiting to happen," Freeman said. "It's going to raise the price of homes here."

One environmentalist is critical of the air district's campaign as well, but for different reasons. Sierra Club member Kevin Hall said projects like Gateway Village don't fit the mold for smart growth.

With a projected 5,800 homes and other commercial development, he said, Gateway pushes the urban footprint farther into orchards and farmland in the Valley. People will drive more miles, making it harder for pollution-reduction efforts to keep pace.

"Instead of an unmitigated disaster," Hall said, "Gateway Village will be a mitigated disaster. We need a stronger rule from the air district to take control of sprawl."

**Reduction of diesel pollution urged**

By Mark Grossi / The Fresno Bee

Wednesday, November 15, 2006

Diesel pollution creates health problems and causes premature death in California as industries transport $400 billion of freight to the rest of the country, says a study released Tuesday by the nonprofit Pacific Institute and air advocacy groups.

The freight comes from other countries in ships with dirty diesel engines into such ports as Long Beach and Oakland. The products - everything from toy dolls to DVD players - are moved by diesel-powered trains and trucks to stores and distribution centers throughout the state and beyond.

The diesel exhaust annually triggers heart and lung problems requiring $19 billion of medical attention and causing 2,400 deaths, state figures show. Minority-dominated communities and neighborhoods near transportation or distribution hubs suffer the most, including Fresno, the study said.

The government should force industries to clean up the pollution, advocates said Tuesday in a news conference.

"It is a heavy toll on California's communities, breathing dirty air from trucks, trains and ships," said Nidia Bautista, a co-author of the study and an official with the Coalition for Clean Air. "We're paying for the profits of businesses with our lungs. Cleaning it up would add just pennies to the cost of the products they ship."

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, which regulates ships, trains, heavy-duty trucks and planes, already has scheduled more stringent diesel fuel and engine standards in the next few years.

But truck, locomotive and marine engines have long lifetimes. It can take many years for companies to scrap their old equipment and buy new, clean-running diesels, said Kerry Drake, associate director of the EPA's regional air division.

"We're moving forward with improvements in the standards," he said. "But they apply to the new equipment. The trick is changing out the old engines for the new ones."

Spokesman Jerry Martin of the California Air Resources Board said the state will require new EPA-certified engines on equipment at ports by 2010. He said the state plans to reduce the number of deaths related to transportation activities by two-thirds in the next 14 years.
Bautista said the improvements and promises are not enough. She said the government must further reduce toxic diesel pollution in concentrated areas or hot spots, such as freeways near elementary schools.

Air advocates called their news conference in Fresno across the street from Addams Elementary School, on McKinley Avenue, just west of crowded Highway 99.

Parent Margarita Guzman said she worries about her four children at Addams.

"Addams has the third-highest asthma rate in the Fresno Unified School District," she said in Spanish through a translator. "It is not fair that the poorest people are paying so much for health care."

**Businesses urged to help pay for anti-pollution measures at ports**

*By ALEX VEIGA, The Associated Press*

In the Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, Nov. 15, 2006

Retailers, shipping companies and other businesses that profit from moving cargo through California should be paying more to help cut back pollution from trucks, ships, trains and other vehicles, according to a new report.

The 46-page report was issued Tuesday by a coalition of more than a dozen California environmental groups and health organizations known as the Ditching Dirty Diesel Collaborative.

The researchers estimate that corporations that import, export or play a role in transporting goods through the state make a combined $231 billion in revenues per year from shipping products through California, but many don't pay much money, if at all, toward helping reduce the impact of pollution in the state.

Large cargo importers, including Wal-Mart, Home Depot and Target, account for $176 billion of that, said Swati Prakash, program director for the Pacific Institute, an Oakland-based environmental think tank and lead author of the report.

Among the groups' findings, freight transport will cost California residents - particularly low-income residents -- $200 billion over the next 15 years in health costs.

By comparison, the report estimates that using less-polluting technology to transport cargo will cost between $6 billion to $10 billion over the same period.

"It's very important that the owners of the cargo pay a portion of this," Prakash said. "Taxpayers are paying for it already. Certainly, community residents pay in terms of having to live with the health costs."

A call left after business hours at the Waterfront Coalition, a Washington D.C.-based trade group that represents retailers, manufacturers and other cargo importers and exporters, was not immediately returned.

Prakash acknowledged that some in the goods movement industry have begun taking steps to reduce pollution, but said more needs to be done.

The ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach have proposed a $2 billion plan to cut pollution that includes replacing an aging fleet of diesel trucks and improving emission standards in the harbor areas.

The adjacent ports are the principal point of entry for cargo from the Far East.

But activity at the busy ports has made them the largest contributor to smog from diesel engines in the Los Angeles Basin.

The state has forecast freight moved through California will triple by the year 2020.

**Report: Ports dump diesel on the poor**
State freight industry accused of trucking soot through low-income areas
By Douglas Fischer
Tri-Valley Herald, Wednesday, November 15, 2006

OAKLAND - The freight industry places a "staggering burden" on Californians, particularly low-income minorities, as it hauls in billions of dollars in profit distributing goods arriving at the state's major ports, according to a report released Tuesday by a coalition of community and environmental groups.

Some 40 percent of the nation's container cargo travels via ports in Oakland, Long Beach and Los Angeles. It arrives on oil-burning ships, gets unloaded by soot-belching cranes, reloaded onto diesel-powered trucks and trains and then rumbles through some of the state's poorest neighborhoods and communities.

And it makes money - lots of it - for the companies involved. Ditching Dirty Diesel, a collaborative of 15 environmental, community, activist and labor organizations issuing the report, estimated the freight industry generated $231 billion in revenues from their California operations in 2005.

But industry doesn't pay for the soot, smog, asthma and shortened life spans in the poor neighborhoods around California's freight hubs bearing the brunt of that activity, according to Dirty Diesel's report on the "real cost" of freight transport in California.

"Many companies benefit from being able to use the port," said Margaret Gordon, a collaboration member who lives a mile from the Port of Oakland. "We are the ones paying with our health."

Shipping companies and ports countered Tuesday they are working on reducing emissions.

Taiwan-based Evergreen Marine Corp. is building a fleet of environmentally friendly cargo ships. Copenhagen-based Maersk has voluntarily switched from dirty bunker oil to low-sulfur diesel, said Port of Oakland spokesman Harold Jones.

APL Ltd., a subsidiary of Singapore-based Neptune Orient has retrofitted yard tractors in both Oakland and Los Angeles and eliminated 6,000 to 10,000 truck trips a week in Los Angeles by extending rail lines to the dock.

"We absolutely understand community concerns about the environment," said APL spokesman Mike Zampa. "We've seen the industry and APL innovate and improve to better manage environmental impact."

But it's not enough, said Swati Prakash, program director at the Pacific Institute and a report co-author.

The cost to significantly clean up industry - 30 suggestions identified by regulators that range from buying out old diesel trucks to modernizing port equipment - would be a fraction of the benefits derived from freight transport, the group said. Yet little progress is being made, they say.

Transport companies using California's ports could pay that cost - $6 to $10 billion over 15 years - by kicking in one-third of a cent on each dollar earned. Wal-Mart alone could pay for it with less than a penny from every dollar of California-generated revenue, Prakash said.

Instead, citizens of hub cities like Richmond, West Oakland, San Leandro, Long Beach and Merced bear the cost of pollution.

In California, 3,000 school children stay home from school any given day with a freight-related illness, usually asthma, according to the California Air Resources Board. Some 2,400 Californians will die prematurely this year because they lived too close to a freight hub. The 11 communities near hubs analyzed by Dirty Diesel have a median income of $31,829, two-thirds the California average.
"This is a staggering burden." Prakash said. "Some of the biggest companies in the world are making billions at the expense of low-income communities in California.

Those residents, she added, "cannot continue to subsidize industry with their health."

But getting industry to change isn’t easy. The international shipping industry is a combination of national interests and private owners and wants an international standard, said Doug Webster, spokesman for the California Maritime Academy in Vallejo.

It's a fiercely competitive industry where a few cents extra in fees could send millions of containers north to, say, Seattle. Which is why local or even state efforts to tack a few extra bucks onto the containers invariably fail, Webster added.

"Everybody wants to add their $10, $15, $100," he said. "And there are powerful interests - Sears, J.C. Penney, Wal-Mart - that don't want to pay for that."

Offshore plant suffers setback
Ventura County air quality agency closes loophole for liquefied natural gas terminal.
By Gary Polakovic, Times Staff Writer
L.A. Times, Wednesday, November 15, 2006

Ventura County's air quality board on Tuesday dealt a setback to a proposed $800-million liquefied natural gas processing plant that would be moored about 14 miles offshore between Oxnard and Malibu.

The Air Pollution Control District board voted 9 to 0 to oppose a key permit that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is preparing. It affirmed that the most rigorous clean-air regulations should apply to the project and directed the county's air pollution control officer to challenge the EPA's decision to exempt it.

Environmentalists, civic leaders and two members of the county Board of Supervisors had urged the board to act before the federal government issues a final air quality permit next year.

The board's decision, which followed a public hearing that drew more than 100 people, is significant because it closes a loophole that the EPA is using to allow Australian-based BHP Billiton to operate the offshore terminal under less stringent controls than would be required if it were built on land. The action could require BHP Billiton to spend millions more and make deeper emissions reductions to offset pollution from the project.

"The vote sends a strong message that [Ventura County] will stand up for air quality and the health of its citizens and that the EPA and Billiton will not be allowed to twist the rules," said Linda Krop, chief counsel for the Santa Barbara-based Environmental Defense Center.

But company officials said their project, called Cabrillo Port, is good for the environment and would be a portal for cleaner-burning natural gas that energy-starved California needs. They said the emission controls they propose exceed industry standards and would improve air quality in the Los Angeles region as well as the Central Coast.

"When we are constructed and operating, Cabrillo Port will improve the air quality and comply with the Clean Air Act in an environmentally sound manner," said Kathi Hamm, a Billiton spokeswoman.

Cabrillo Port would consist of a floating gas-processing platform the size of three football fields. Tanker ships would haul chilled liquefied natural gas from Asia and Australia. Eight heaters inside the terminal would warm the fuel, producing up to 1.5 billion cubic feet of natural gas per day.

But the terminal would also release up to 95 tons of ozone-forming pollutants annually. An
additional 119 tons would result from small vessels and the two or three tankers expected to dock there each week - ranking the project as the top polluter in Ventura County.

Mike Villegas, executive officer of the Ventura County Air Pollution Control District, and officials for the Los Angeles-area South Coast Air Quality Management District warn that breezes would blow emissions onshore, contributing to pollution in some of the nation's smoggiest communities.

At issue is a series of rules Ventura County developed for new pollution sources. The county does not have direct authority over the project, but a federal law mandates that the Billiton terminal meet local clean-air rules.

The EPA and Billiton cite a so-called island exemption, which they say allows the liquefied natural gas terminal to meet a less rigorous cleanup standard, the one in force for Channel Islands National Park and a U.S. Navy facility on San Nicolas Island 70 miles offshore. EPA officials in California originally resisted that idea, but changed their stance under pressure from the company, the White House and EPA headquarters.

Ventura County officials initially followed suit, but Villegas said a closer reading of the regulation showed the project should not be exempt.

Amy Zimpfer, associate director of the EPA's air quality program in California, said the agency will carefully consider Ventura County's position.

"We're going to take a look at what they are submitting to us and what the analysis shows," Zimpfer said. "We will certainly take it into consideration."

**Panel: LNG terminal should comply with stricter air quality rules**

The Associated Press
In the Fresno Bee, S.F. Chronicle, Bakersfield Californian and other papers
Wednesday, Nov. 15, 2006

A county panel has dealt a setback to a proposed $800-million offshore liquefied natural gas terminal saying it should comply with the same air quality standards that apply to onshore facilities.

The Air Pollution Control District Board voted unanimously Tuesday to oppose a key permit that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is preparing that would exempt the proposed facility from the most rigorous clear-air regulations.

Under the EPA permit, the terminal, called Cabrillo Port, would operate under less stringent controls than would be required if it were built on land.

"This is a rule that makes sense for us," county Supervisor John Flynn said. "What is good for the emitters on land is also good for the emitters at sea."

Australia-based BHP Billiton wants to build the port 14 miles off Oxnard's coast. Tankers would carry liquefied natural gas to the terminal, where it would be converted to a gaseous form and piped ashore.

The board's action could require BHP Billiton to spend millions more and make deeper emissions reductions to offset pollution from the project.

Company officials said the terminal is good for the environment and could help solve California's energy needs. They said the emission controls they propose exceed industry standards and would improve air quality in the Los Angeles region as well as the Central Coast.

"When we are constructed and operating, Cabrillo Port will improve the air quality and comply with the Clean Air Act in an environmentally sound manner," said Kathi Hamm, a Billiton spokeswoman.
Longer agenda may involve City Hall purchase
BY DAVID BURGER, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, Nov. 15, 2006

The Bakersfield City Council will meet earlier than usual today to get through a jam-packed agenda that includes a possible start to the process of buying a new City Hall.

The council will vote on the bulk of its agenda items at 5:15 p.m., instead of its usual 6:30 p.m. slot.

All of the agenda items -- including the second reading of the revised Hillside Ordinance -- to be brought before the City Council at 5:15 p.m. are on the consent agenda.

That means the council can vote all at once, without any discussion, unless an item is pulled off the consent agenda.

The City Council will reconvene at 6:30 p.m. for public presentations, public hearings and reports on Mill Creek and a possible purchase of the Horton, Petrini and Conron building.

New city hall

The council might vote on a possible purchase of the Horton, Petrini and Conron building across Truxtun Avenue from the Bakersfield Police Department.

City Manager Alan Tandy said if he and city staff are able to answer all of the City Council's questions, he'd recommend that the council vote in favor of drafting a purchase agreement that could be finalized at the Nov. 29 meeting.

Last week a city committee recommended that the City Council be sent a full report on the costs and plans for the building, which has been offered only to the city for $9.5 million, about $2 million less than its appraised value.

City officials have imagined the building as a possible new City Hall, with the current City Hall being relegated to housing city staff.

The city has searched for more space to put the growing city staff.

A majority of the City Council has been in favor of the purchase, and a vote to direct staff to develop a purchase agreement may be taken.

A landscape architectural firm and Economic and Community Development Director Donna Kunz will talk about progress on the design of the Mill Creek project.

The Mill Valley firm of Royston Hanamoto Alley & Abey was hired for preliminary engineering design and to develop a master plan for implementing the project.

Mill Creek is a proposed 1.5-mile-long park that would stretch alongside the Kern Island Canal throughout downtown Bakersfield.

Asbestos problem

Raul Rojas, public works director, is asking the City Council to approve additional money to deal with an "asbestos abatement" plan for City Hall.

Material containing asbestos was found in ventilation ducts in late September.

Contractors hired by the city to do sampling and to clean air ducts will perform services worth $239,000, higher than the original $175,000 estimate.

Making noise about leaf blowers

More communities consider bans and new regulations
By Adrian Higgins, Washington Post
In the S.F. Chronicle, Wednesday, November 15, 2006
The autumn leaves, looking particularly good this year, have begun their dazzling avalanche. Honey, pass me the Bose Noise Cancelling Headphones.

The whining roar of the leaf blower begins in earnest, filling the November air with a seasonal symphony: the growl of the gasoline engine, the siren call of its inner fan and the steady hiss of air blasting 200 miles per hour. Electric versions, a little quieter, replace the gas engine's howls with a high-pitched scream that seems to gnaw at something deep in the brain.

This layer of sounds, a cacophony unknown to man or beast until a generation ago, now seems to define the landscape's passage to winter. Manufacturers of leaf blowers shipped a record 2.74 million gas-powered units this year alone. In addition, more than 3 million electric blowers are sold annually in North America. That's a whole lot of wind for sale.

When you think about it, the leaf blower forms an uncanny reflection of the fault lines in modern American society: It's a machine reviled by leftward-thinking intellectuals and beloved by red-blooded horsepower junkies. It is an essential workmate of the laboring immigrant classes.

Montgomery County, Md., bans the sale and use of leaf blowers generating more than 70 decibels, but most Washington area jurisdictions seek to regulate them through general noise ordinances that restrict hours of use. Elsewhere, however, they are banned outright.

Blower bashing reached a peak in the late 1990s when Peter Graves, Meredith Baxter and other Hollywood stars lobbied politicians to prohibit the machine. More than 20 cities in California joined Los Angeles in banning them, the latest the generally serious-minded and well-heeled citizens of Palo Alto.

Since the City Council enacted the ban in June 2005, most of the complaints have been against landscape maintenance crews. Stacey Henderson is the Palo Alto Police Department's officer assigned to enforce the ban, which affects residential areas. In the city's sylvan neighborhoods, she issues two warnings to each offender and then a citation. "I've had one gardener who's been cited seven times, and it's $100 a ticket," she said. "He just won't stop."

Henderson has sent out more than 5,000 warning letters to residents and their landscapers who have been subject to complaint. The result has been a quieter city, she said, though in the rainy season, landscapers like to switch back to gas blowers to avoid getting electric shocks.

In Santa Barbara, where a similar ban on gas blowers went into effect eight years ago, "it's a lot better, but it's not perfect because there are still the electric ones," said Ashleigh Brilliant, who led the ballot initiative to enact the ban. "There are still people who defy the law, but the streets are much quieter, and I think there's less dust in the air."

Brilliant by trade is an epigrammatist: He coins witticisms. He is particularly fond of one: "There are worse things than noise, but I can't think of any because of all the noise." Some others: "Make peace, not noise." And "Honk if you like peace and quiet."

Like an increasing number of people in the 21st century cyberworld, Brilliant works from home, and it's the residential neighborhoods that can get aurally assaulted for hours on end.

"More people are working from home," said Brilliant, "and there just isn't an awareness of how badly detrimental noise can be as a factor in one's life."

Cambridge, Mass., is considering a ban or other restrictions on gas blowers, said Richard Rossi, the deputy city manager. "We are going to be looking at various ordinances that exist around the country, talk to cities and see how effective they are," he said.
Cambridge has more than 100,000 residents crowded into an area of little more than 6 square miles, with more people if you count the daily influx of students, workers and tourists. "A lot of people in this community work from home," said Rossi. A landscape crew may spend only 10 minutes at one property, but if they visit half a dozen on a street, said Rossi, "you multiply that time by 5 or 6. People feel that's a disturbance."

Opponents of leaf blowers say noise isn't the only pollutant. The fumes from the gas engines foul the air and the machines kick up particulates containing mold, pesticides, dried animal waste and plain old dust. John Murtagh, a City Council member in Yonkers, N.Y., is pushing his colleagues to ban leaf blowers during the summer, as other communities in Westchester County have done. Murtagh said 13 percent of the city's children suffer from asthma. He said that other than in the fall, the machines' "utility is dramatically outweighed by the pollution they generate."

Les Blomberg, founder of Noise Pollution Clearinghouse, an environmental resources nonprofit group in Montpelier, Vt., said the machine is an absurdly inefficient contraption as a replacement for leaf rake and patio broom. "You would never take one of these things into your house and dust with it," he said. "Because it's outside, some of that dust is going to settle in somebody else's yard."

Landscapers and manufacturers argue that leaf blowers dramatically reduce the time spent gathering leaves and cleaning littered surfaces. And the industry has invested heavily in making the machines cleaner and quieter, said Bill Harley, president of the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute, a trade group.

"The equipment is 75 percent cleaner than it was in the early '90s, and we've made great strides in sound levels," he said.

Larry Will, a retired vice president of engineering for Echo, a major manufacturer, said engineers have now reduced the sound levels of the quietest gasoline models to the level of electric machines and eliminated "the scream." Advances include redesigning the wind-making impellers to reduce the whine, encasing engines in soundproofed covers and enlarging mufflers.

In Echo's current lineup, three handheld models and two backpack versions meet the gold standard of relatively quiet blowers: 65 decibels, measured at 50 feet. Its five other backpack types -- more powerful and aimed at the commercial market -- range in noise from 71 to 74 decibels.

The sound level at the machines is considerably higher.

If the machines are still meeting resistance in communities across the country, they aren't with homeowners and landscapers who see them as a way to clean up properties rapidly.

Harley's organization reported shipments this year of 2.16 million handheld gasoline blowers, an increase of more than 10 percent over last year. A total of 579,390 backpack blowers were shipped to market, a 24 percent climb over 2004.

Both types "have had a significant growth in the last few years," said Joe Fahey, vice president of marketing for Echo. He said the boom in the housing market and the greater need or desire of homeowners to have contractors do their yard work have fueled the demand. And some do-it-yourselfers have turned to handheld gas models while others are gravitating to the more comfortable backpack versions.

Fahey said that for all the attention given to local blower bans, noise levels aren't the first attribute buyers are looking for. "Certainly, sales of low-noise models are increasing, but the lion's share of the business is for standard units," he said.
Also, many people have managed to tune out the sound or find that it melts into the general cacophony of modern life. Amy Rothstein, a piano teacher in McLean, Va., said the noise of neighbors’ remodeling projects and the construction of two infill houses is more of a bother. "There's machinery going all the time," she said. "The blowers are just a small part of it."

**Softening the sound**

Noise: Gasoline models have been made cleaner and quieter since the 1990s. Look for low-noise blowers and follow local noise ordinances, which generally limit the hours of lawn and garden equipment use. Some electric models can be noisier than gas ones. Look for electric models with variable speed controls to reduce the noise. Use the lowest possible throttle speed to do the job and nozzle attachments that lower sound levels.

- Safety: Keep the blower at least 50 feet from people and pets, and don't blow in their direction. - Stop blowing if approached.
- Pollution: Read the operator's manual, maintain blowers and follow correct fueling procedures. - Don't use a blower to clean up excessively dusty areas. Start with the nozzle at ground level, then raise it to a point where it moves leaves without generating dust.
- See the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute's guide to safe and courteous use at [www.opei.org](http://www.opei.org)

Sources: OPEI, leaf blower manufacturers, government advisories

**Noise comparisons**

Some leaf blower manufacturers are modifying the design of their products to reduce the blowers' volume. Echo's gas-powered PB-260L model leaf blower emits noise up to 65 decibels (measured at 50 feet). It is Echo's quietest model; others reach 74 decibels. Decibel levels for comparison:

- **Painful**: Jackhammer, 130 decibels
- **Extremely loud**: Snowmobile, 100 decibels
- **Very loud**: Vacuum cleaner, 70 decibels
- **Moderate**: Refrigerator, 50 decibels
- **Faint**: Rice Krispies, 30 decibels

Note: Sounds louder than 80 decibels are considered potentially hazardous.

Sources: American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, Echo Outdoor Power Equipment

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**Another Hollywood production: smog**

UCLA report says the movie and TV industry is a major generator of Southland pollution. An economist cautions that more rules may drive filming out of state.

By Janet Wilson, staff writer
L.A. Times, Tuesday, November 14, 2006

Hollywood is creating a film of a different kind over Greater Los Angeles: smog, soot and greenhouse gases, according to a UCLA report due out today.

The report found that the film and television industry emits a whopping 140,000 tons a year of ozone and diesel particulate pollutant emissions from trucks, generators, special effects earthquakes and fires, demolition of sets with dynamite and other sources.

"Given the importance of the movie and TV industry in Southern California, we thought this was something the public should know," said Mary Nichols, head of the UCLA Institute of the Environment. Nichols, a law professor and past secretary of the California Resources Agency, said researchers found that although individual productions and studios are taking steps to minimize environmental damage, the industry's "structure and culture hamper the pace of improvements."

The report noted, for instance, that dozens of contractors with different practices work on a single set, making it tough to regulate.
Industry representatives reached late Monday said they had not seen the report, but said they were concerned about environmentally sound practices.

"Without having seen the report, it's very hard to respond to any specifics. This is an issue the film industry cares about, and many of our studios have individual programs aimed at recycling, preventing air pollution and conserving natural resources," said Kori Bernards, spokeswoman for the Motion Picture Assn. of America, based in Encino.

Bernards said the association and the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers found in 2006 that their members had successfully kept 64% of studio sets and other industry waste out of landfills.

"We'll keep doing our part to make the environment pristine," she said.

The industry tops hotels, aerospace, and apparel and semiconductor manufacturing in traditional air pollutant emissions in Southern California, according to the study, initially prepared for the Integrated Waste Management Board, and is probably second only to petroleum refineries, for which comparable data were not available. The entertainment industry ranks third in greenhouse gas emissions.

State air regulators and some who work with the industry said that diesel engines and fuels are already heavily regulated, and that permits are required for dust control on specific projects.

Still, "we're always looking at new research. It's certainly something we're not going to ignore," said spokeswoman Gennet Paauwe of the California Air Resources Board, the state's lead air quality regulator. She said the agency works with other industries, imposing voluntary practices as well as traditional laws.

Jack Kyser, chief economist for the Los Angeles County Economic Development Corp., cautioned against additional regulation, saying it could drive movie and TV production elsewhere.

"There would be a risk because you have other states out there quite anxious to get a piece of the film industry," he said. "This would just be another nudge ... if they impose some strict air quality regulations."

The entertainment industry generates a combined $29 billion in revenue and employs 252,000 people in the Greater Los Angeles region, Kyser said.

But he said that industrywide, better voluntary practices were a must for everything, including so-called star wagon trailers, remote set generators and caterers baking bread for huge casts.

"I think if you talk to the industry, they would be willing to make some moves to clean up," Kyser said.

"This is an industry that is very, very environmentally conscious. This is just something they may not really be aware of."

**Study Finds Hollywood Can Be Filthy**

By Noaki Schwartz, Associated Press Writer
In the N.Y. Times, S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Tuesday, November 14, 2006

Los Angeles (AP) -- Special effects explosions, idling vehicles, teams of workers building monumental sets - all of it contributes to Hollywood's newly discovered role as an air polluter, a university study has found.
The film and television industry and associated activities make a larger contribution to air pollution in the five-county Los Angeles region than almost all five other sectors researched, according to a two-year study released Tuesday by the University of California at Los Angeles.

Although Hollywood seems environmentally conscious thanks to celebrities who lend their names to various causes, the industry created more pollution than individually produced by aerospace manufacturing, apparel, hotels and semiconductor manufacturing, the study found.

Only petroleum manufacturing belched more emissions.

"People talk of 'the industry,' but we don't think of them as an industry," said Mary Nichols, who heads the school's Institute of the Environment, which released what researchers called a "snapshot" of industry pollution. "We think of the creative side, the movie, the people, the actors - we don't think of what it takes to produce the product."

Researchers considered the emissions created directly and indirectly by the film and television industry. For example, they factored in both the pollution caused by a diesel generator used to power a movie set, as well as the emissions created by a power plant that provides electricity to a studio lot.

They also interviewed 43 people who worked in a variety of areas within the industry, and reviewed major trade publications to see the level of attention paid to environmental issues. In doing so, researchers found that some studios have recycling programs and green building practices.

"Nevertheless, our overall impression is that these practices are the exception and not the rule, and that more could be done within the industry to foster environmentally friendly approaches," the study said.

Part of Hollywood's problem is that unlike other industries, film and television work is often done by short-term production companies, in some cases making it difficult to apply environmentally friendly practices, the study said.

Researchers also noted environmentally responsible examples within the industry.

The makers of the film "The Day After Tomorrow" paid $200,000 to plant trees and for other steps to offset the estimated 10,000 tons of carbon dioxide emissions caused by vehicles, generators and other machinery used in production.

And production teams for "The Matrix Reloaded" and "The Matrix Revolutions" arranged for 97.5 percent of set materials to be recycled, including some 11,000 tons of concrete, steel and lumber. All the steel was recycled and 37 truckloads of lumber were reused in housing for low-income families in Mexico.

Lisa Day, spokeswoman for Participant Productions which worked on offsetting carbon emissions from the making of "Syriana" and "An Inconvenient Truth," she was a little surprised by the study's findings.

"I think the industry as a whole does look at itself," she said. "The studios have done a lot in terms of waste reduction. I think that energy is the new thing the industry is looking at and what impact they have."

News briefs from California's Central Coast
The Associated Press
in the Fresno Bee, S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Tuesday, November 14, 2006
SANTA MARIA, Calif. (AP) - Greka Energy has agreed to pay $75,000 in civil penalties to settle a lawsuit that accused the company of more than 100 safety and environmental violations.

Half the money will go to Santa Barbara County and half will go to the county Air Pollution Control District, said Deputy District Attorney Jerry Lulejian.

The settlement also said Greka would pay an additional $150,000 to the county and the Air Pollution Control District if it makes similar safety and environmental violations over the next three years, Lulejian said.

In all, Greka, the area's largest onshore oil producer and one of Santa Maria's biggest employers, has agreed to pay about $675,000 to settle allegations stemming from the 2004 lawsuit.

The violations, which allegedly occurred over a 16-month period beginning in May 2002, ranged from releases of potentially deadly hydrogen sulfide gas to failure to obtain required permits for certain facilities or to notify construction companies where pipelines were buried.

Through settlement talks, many of the alleged violations were resolved.

Jeffrey Valle, an attorney for Greka, said the company is happy the case was resolved.

"I think it's done," he said. "They're happy that this case which the county announced with great luster is fizzled out."

**Greens sue Bush administration over global warming report**

By TERENCE CHEA, The Associated Press

In the Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, Nov. 15, 2006

Environmentalists sued the Bush administration Tuesday for failing to produce a report on global warming's impact on the country's environment, economy and public health.

The lawsuit seeks to compel the U.S. Climate Change Science Program to issue the national assessment, which should contain the most recent scientific data on global warming and projections for its future impacts. The plaintiffs claim the government must complete such a report every four years under the Global Change Research Act of 1990.

"Global warming is one of the most serious threats facing humanity today," according to the complaint. Without the report, decision makers and the public "are without one of the most important tools to grapple with this complex, potentially overwhelming and yet all important issue."

The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, which was named in the lawsuit, had not received the complaint Tuesday and could not comment on it, said spokesman Ben Fallon.

But Fallon defended the administration's record on combating global warming, pointing to increased funding for alternative energy research and partnerships with other countries.

"We feel very positive about our record on climate change," Fallon said. "The president has been focused on results-driven research and looking for practical ways to address climate change in ways that aren't damaging to the economy."

Officials at the Climate Change Science Program, also named in the complaint, did not immediately respond to calls seeking comment.

The lawsuit was filed in federal court in San Francisco by the Center for Biological Diversity, Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace.

The assessment, which plaintiffs allege was due in November 2004, is the "first step in crafting solutions to the devastating consequences of climate change if we don't act now," said Julie Teel, an attorney for the plaintiffs.
Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., who has also been calling on the administration to issue the assessment, expressed support for the lawsuit.

"It's the right time to push Washington to grapple with this issue," Kerry said in a statement. "For too many years, action on global climate change has been stopped dead in its tracks by government foot-dragging, hiding information and smothering science."

Environmentalists have accused the administration of trying to suppress dissemination of the previous assessment, issued in 2000, which predicted a dramatic rise in catastrophic storms, floods, droughts and heat-related deaths.

The lawsuit comes as experts from around the world meet in Nairobi for the two-week U.N. climate conference, where they have been trying to set a course for future controls on global greenhouse gas emissions.

Scientists attribute at least some of the past century's 1-degree rise in global temperatures to the accumulation in the atmosphere of carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases, byproducts of power plants, automobiles and other fossil fuel-burning sources.

**Disease follows heat wave**

Associated Press
in the Tracy Press, Wednesday, 15 November 2006

*The past century has seen a 1-degree temperature rise, which is directly related to making the population sicker with malaria, heart ailments and dengue fever.*

NAIROBI, Kenya - A warmer world already seems to be producing a sicker population, health experts reported Tuesday, citing surges in Kenya, China and Europe of such diseases as malaria, heart ailments and dengue fever.

"Climate affects some of the most important diseases afflicting the world," said Diarmid Campbell-Lendrum of the World Health Organization. "The impacts may already be significant."

Kristie L. Ebi, an American public health consultant for the agency, warned “climate change could overwhelm public health services.”

The specialists laid out recent findings as the two-week U.N. climate conference entered its final four days, grappling with technical issues concerning operation of the Kyoto Protocol, and trying to set a course for future controls on global greenhouse gas emissions.

Scientists attribute at least some of the past century’s 1-degree rise in global temperatures to the accumulation in the atmosphere of carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases, byproducts of power plants, automobiles and other fossil fuel-burning sources.

The Kyoto accord requires 35 industrial nations - not including the United States, which rejects the pact - to reduce such emissions by an average 5 percent below 1990 levels by 2012. President Bush says such emissions cuts would harm the U.S. economy and complains that poorer countries also should be covered.

In Nairobi, the Kyoto parties are discussing what quotas and timetables should follow 2012 and how to draw the United States into a plan for mandatory emissions caps.

Britain's environment secretary, David Miliband, an early arrival for high-level talks here, said participation of the United States, the world's biggest emitter, was "essential."

"I can't think of a greater legacy for the last two years of the Bush presidency than to work on a bipartisan basis with Democrats as well as Republicans" for a deal to cut emissions, Miliband said.

Besides disrupting normal climate zones, continued temperature rises will "increase threats to human health, particularly in lower income populations, predominantly within tropical-subtropical countries," a U.N. network of climate scientists has projected.
Those problems are arising in parts of the world that have contributed little to global warming, Campbell-Lendrum noted.

“It’s a global issue and a global justice issue,” one that demands action by the industrial north to alleviate the disease burden on the south, the WHO scientist said.

In Kenya, where temperature increases have tracked the global average, malaria epidemics have occurred in highland areas where cooler weather historically has kept down populations of disease-bearing mosquitoes, said Solomon M. Nzioka, a Kenyan Health Ministry consultant.

Research shows that even a seemingly small rise in temperatures can produce a 10-fold increase in the mosquito population, he said.

“Highland malaria seems to be on the increase in the rainy season and when temperatures are high,” Nzioka said.

The WHO’s Dr. Bettina Menne said malaria, which two decades ago was present in only three southeastern European countries, has spread north to Russia and a half-dozen other nearby countries. Russian news media reported in September that larvae of the anopheles mosquito, the malaria carrier, had been found in Moscow.

Menne cited a threat from other mosquito-borne diseases as well. “There’s an increased risk of local outbreaks, especially in the Mediterranean, of dengue and West Nile virus,” she said.

China is trying to track excess deaths from rising average temperatures, said Jin Yinlong of China’s Institute for Environmental Health. Authorities are particularly concerned about surging mortality from strokes and heart disease under warming conditions, he said. Global warming has been linked to more prolonged heat waves. A study of three Chinese cities found annual excess deaths totaled between 173 and 685 per million residents, Jin said.

Bakersfield Californian, Editorial, Wednesday, Nov. 15, 2006:

**Fight to save Kern sludge ban**

**Kern County must pursue every avenue to save Measure E**

Kern County must vigorously pursue whatever action is needed to save Measure E.

On Monday, U.S. District Court Judge Gary Feess issued a tentative ruling in Los Angeles that effectively voids a voter-imposed ban on spreading treated sewage sludge in Kern County. Although the ruling was preliminary, such decisions usually become final.

Sludge is sewage -- including human and industrial waste -- that has been treated in sewer treatment plants. Measure E, passed by 85 percent of Kern voters in June, would ban the spreading of the treated effluent on the basis of environmental, public health and economic risk.

The Los Angeles Department of Public Works, Orange County sanitation districts and sludge haulers were dumping as much as 800 tons of sludge per day on land in Kern County near the Kings County line. Sludge is also dumped south of Bakersfield.

They sued to overturn Measure E to allow them to continue the practice. Feess’s ruling does not affect an earlier county ordinance that requires high levels of treatment.

The legal issue was about which laws apply to sludge disposal. Kern’s opponents argued that a local ordinance could not preempt state or federal rules that require Los Angeles and Orange counties to recycle its waste.

The more basic issue is that Kern County ought to have the ability to prevent potential risks of dangerous pathogens and heavy metals in the sludge. The risk is that they could leach through soil. If that occurred it could contaminate the water table and additionally adversely affect numerous agricultural products.
Kern County also argues that expense and convenience to Southern California should not be the prevailing factor in voiding Measure E. Other disposal options are available to Southern California urban counties, but we are simply a closer and cheaper alternative means of disposal.

Feess himself outlined one course of redress. He said he would allow his ruling to be sent to the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco. That bench hears appeals of federal court rulings in the Western U.S. It could certify the case to be heard by the California Supreme Court.

But appropriate legislative options must be pursued, regardless. State legislators throughout the Central and Sacramento-San Joaquin Valleys should unite to seek legislation at the state level to help local governments strengthen environmental and water quality rules.

And the valley's congressional delegation should seek amendments to federal laws and regulations to the same end.

Fresno Bee editorial, Wednesday, November 15, 2006:

Blueprint for the Valley
Building a better future starts with shared values and regional vision.

The local councils of governments in the eight counties of the San Joaquin Valley have begun an ambitious, yet promising, effort to map a better future for Valley residents. The goal is to draw up a "San Joaquin Valley Blueprint" that will then be adopted - and followed - by all the counties: San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and Kern.

The county COGs are working with the Great Valley Center in Modesto on the project.

The process began earlier this year and won't be completed until early in 2008. It involves drawing together a host of interests, from agriculture and business to environmental, government and civic groups and individuals. The task at hand is to define the values that Valley residents share, the vision they have for the future they want for themselves and their children.

The most encouraging thing about this effort is that the groups and agencies involved have recognized that only a regional effort will work if we are to build a brighter future and create a better quality of life for ourselves.

The areas in which we face challenges - air quality, water supplies, transportation, land use planning - are not confined by the artificial boundaries of cities and counties. Yet we usually make crucial decisions about these issues in a local context, ignoring the fact that their implications are much broader than the parochial limits we impose on ourselves.

Local control is something to be cherished, but it can't address all the problems we face. And "local control" all too often is less a civic virtue than a euphemism for "business as usual," and that's what has created much of the mess we face.

And that's why local governments must work together on a regional basis to find the answers we need.

And new answers are crucial. The eight counties that make up this effort currently have a population of about 3.3 million. That's expected to rise to around 7 million in the next 40 years. We're often unable to handle the problems we have now. If we don't find ways to do better - and soon - we will face catastrophe in the near future: gridlocked roads and highways, foul air, dwindling water supplies, a stagnant economy, increased unemployment, rising crime, growing poverty and a pall of hopelessness draped tightly over the physical and social landscape.

We can do better. We must. The San Joaquin Valley Blueprint is an effort that has the promise of great things. It deserves the support of everyone in the Valley.
Fresno Bee editorial, Tuesday, November 14, 2006:  
Out of the spotlight  
Environmental extremism caught up with Richard Pombo.

Richard Pombo went to Congress in 1992 with the aim of gutting the Endangered Species Act and other environmental legislation that we take for granted today - the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Marine Mammal Protection Act, Estuary Protection Act, Coastal Zone Act and more.

His attempts to roll back this legacy of conservation - much of it crafted by Republicans - finally caught up to him. After seven terms in office, he lost 53% to 47%. He was the first committee chairman in the last five election cycles to lose a race.

As Pombo himself realized, the environment was the issue. The Sacramento Bee reported after the election that Pombo noted that his difficulties "had little to do with Iraq … and more to do with concerted efforts of environmental groups and other critics who targeted his race."

When virtually everyone else thought Pombo was unbeatable, including the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, environmental groups took on Pombo, eventually spending $1.3 million and providing hundreds of volunteers.

What the environmentalists realized was that even though Republicans edged Democrats in voter registrations (44% to 37%), Pombo faced bipartisan rejection of his anti-environmental agenda in a district where the fertile San Joaquin Valley meets the East Bay.

His district is growing rapidly. Many of these residents are priced out of the Bay Area real estate market. Whether Republicans or Democrats or independents, these folks believe that protection of the environment is essential to quality of life.

Environmentalists also realized that where Pombo had been able to run under the radar in the past, everything changed in 2003 when he became chairman of the House Committee on Resources. He had long been associated with the extreme edges on environmental and public lands issues, but he was a backbencher and his proposals rarely went anywhere. Suddenly, as chairman, his anti-environmental agenda was in the national spotlight.

As chairman, Pombo floated ideas for selling off national parks, commercializing public lands, drilling for oil and gas off California's coastal areas and in pristine wilderness areas such as Alaska. One day in 2005 Pombo brought massive changes to the Endangered Species Act to his Resources Committee, bypassing the normal process of an initial review before a subcommittee. The next day the committee voted on it. A week later it passed on the House floor. Pombo showed he could ram legislation through with little scrutiny.

In the Senate, however, Pombo's bill went nowhere. But his actions mobilized people across the country who care about environmental issues. Now that the election is over, Republicans in Congress have to realize politicians who overreach on environmental issues will pay a price.

Letter to the Fresno Bee, Tuesday, November 14, 2006:  
Spare the winter air, not to mention our lungs

With the onset of winter, I ask all residents to stop burning in their fireplaces. I recently awoke to unwelcome fireplace smoke odor in my family room and kitchen. My home is in an L-shape, so during sleeping hours I was not subjected to someone's "smoke" in my bedroom. However, going to the kitchen to make breakfast, I was assaulted by an odor that made me think my house was on fire.
Not only was the odor intense, it was nauseating. Since I had to go to work, I was unable to rid the house of this odor before I left, and was greeted with it once again when I returned home.

Please advise people in the Valley that if you smell smoke, you are inhaling smoke particulates. With the prevalence and outrageous instances of lung cancer in the Valley, perhaps people might consider stopping the "romance" of a fire in their fireplace. Or even put on a sweater or blanket while watching TV and not try to end someone else's life with their selfish desire to have a "cozy fire" on a winter night.

In kindergarten language: Be kind, be nice, don't burn wood this time of year.

_Sandra Bruque, Fresno_