

Concerns about lab toxins

Residents meet with pollution control officials about bid to increase detonations

Rob L. Wagner

Tracy Press, Thursday, July 19, 2007

About 40 people late Wednesday voiced concerns to regional pollution control officials about the toxins, specifically depleted uranium, released from Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory's Site 300 during outdoor detonation testing of explosives.

Tracy residents met with officials of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District in the council chambers at City Hall for an informational meeting to discuss a permit sought by the lab.

The lab has a permit to detonate no more than 100 pounds of explosives a day or 1,000 pounds a year. The lab, which conducts research and development of high explosives at Site 300 just 6½ miles from downtown, is seeking to increase detonations to no more than 350 pounds a day or 8,000 pounds a year.

Jim Swaney, permit services manager of the district, said the district is only examining air quality related to the site and not land-use issues.

Susan Sarvey of Tracy told Swaney and Glenn Reed, a senior air quality specialist, that the amount of uranium in the air is unknown and that children in the city are at risk.

"I'm concerned about radioactive material in my kid's lungs," she said.

Reed said the district would examine potential cancer risks resulting from testing as well as acute health risks such as eyes tearing or burning nasal passages.

Reed also said that current guidelines allow 10 cancer deaths in 10 million people from pollution from a controlled environment at a specific site.

But pollution district officials acknowledged that no studies have been performed to determine whether Site 300's outdoor explosives testing has had any previous health effects on Tracy's population, Swaney said.

"We will consider all toxic compounds, including depleted uranium," Reed said. "We will try to determine the risks to (people). We will look at nearby facilities but not at the workers at the lab."

The California Division of Occupational Safety and Health is responsible for worker safety at the lab, Reed said.

Loulana Miles, an attorney for Tri-Valley CAREs, an environmental group based in Livermore, said in a statement before the meeting that "it is questionable whether any high-explosive testing with the attendant tons of radioactive and toxic materials should occur in this vicinity at all."

Marylia Kelley, executive director of the group, suggested during the meeting that a full Environmental Impact Report should be conducted to determine the effects on "human health and the environment."

Dan Barber, who supervises the California Environmental Quality Act requirements, said it hasn't been determined whether a full EIR would be required, but noted it's unlikely.

Pollution district authorities originally granted the permit to allow the lab to increase its detonations, but Bob Sarvey of Tracy appealed. During a February hearing, district officials discovered that some information Sarvey sought had not been provided. The lab also did not tell the district that depleted uranium had been used in the detonations.

The permit was canceled. The district is now re-evaluating the permit application. The district will then issue a preliminary recommendation to either approve or deny the application, which will be followed by a public workshop.

Farm Bill Leaves Some Subsidies Bill vows \$1.6b for specialty crops

House panel preserves provisions beneficial to California farmers.

By Michael Doyle / Bee Washington Bureau
Fresno Bee, Thursday, July 19, 2007

WASHINGTON -- Californians won and delicate compromises survived Wednesday as the House Agriculture Committee laboriously wrote a far-reaching farm bill.

Working late into the night, lawmakers kept largely intact a multibillion-dollar package that adopts modest reforms while lavishing record funding on the nation's fruit and vegetable growers.

"I think the end product is very positive for agriculture and for nutrition," said Rep. Dennis Cardoza, D-Merced.

The committee's farm bill allocates some \$1.6 billion to specialty crops over the next five years. The money would pay for research, block grants, federal purchases and conservation. It is roughly double what the committee originally proposed earlier this year, and roughly quadruple the amount devoted to specialty crops in the last farm bill completed in 2002.

There's still a long way to go, even as the House agriculture panel moved to complete its work as late as midnight or sometime today.

The full House and Senate must still act and reconcile different bills spanning hundreds of pages.

But in an excruciatingly detailed mark-up session that began at 10 a.m., breaking for a hot-dog lunch sponsored by the American Meat Institute, the House committee repeatedly held firm on its current proposal. As they confronted some 120 proposed amendments, lawmakers retained provisions considered key by Californians.

The panel, for instance, agreed to keep a new \$150 million air-quality program that will pay farmers to take anti-pollution measures. Much of this money could end up in the San Joaquin Valley, designated one of the nation's most polluted regions.

"I don't think this is going to solve the problem," said Rep. Kevin McCarthy, R-Bakersfield, "but it's going to help."

McCarthy joined committee Democrats in defeating an amendment that would have eliminated the new air-quality program. Opponents contended the funds would be better spent distributed more broadly, through the Agriculture Department's Environmental Quality Incentive Program.

"This is a classic case of parochial interests trying to pick winners and losers," grumbled Rep. Michael Conaway, R-Texas.

California lawmakers likewise fended off a proposal to let more growers of subsidized crops plant tomatoes. As a test, the committee's bill will allow a relatively small tomato planting on Indiana land that formerly grew subsidized crops. Fruit and vegetable growers and their congressional allies, potentially fearing new competition, want to ensure this test remains limited.

Otherwise, Cardoza warned, "it would hurt our specialty crop guys."

While retaining the air-quality funding, Californians also secured the possibility of more water-quality funding. The panel accepted an amendment by Rep. Jim Costa, D-Fresno, that frees up \$30 million annually from a "regional water enhancement program" for use in regions that could include the Sacramento or San Joaquin valleys.

In a decision important for California's subsidized cotton, rice, wheat and corn growers, the committee stuck with its modest payment reforms.

Currently, growers with adjusted gross incomes greater than \$2.5 million can't collect subsidies. The new bill lowers this gross income limit to \$1 million.

"This strikes the proper balance," Costa said. "It relates to reform, while at the same time allowing farmers to continue in business."

Environmentalist lauded for Valley ag ties

By Dennis Pollock / The Fresno Bee

Thursday, July 19, 2007

The top official of a San Francisco environmental group has been honored for her efforts that include work with farmers and dairy operators in the central San Joaquin Valley and elsewhere on air and water quality issues.

"We'd rather be working with businesses in the field rather than against them in the courtroom," said Ashley Boren, executive director of Sustainable Conservation, as she accepted one of six leadership awards given Monday by the James Irvine Foundation in San Francisco.

Boren, head of the group for a decade, has been active in the agriculture industry on three fronts:

Working with farmers to cut air pollution in the central San Joaquin Valley by encouraging them to do "conservation tillage," a practice that requires fewer tractor passes to prepare soil for planting. That cuts down on dust as well as emissions from machinery.

A pilot project involving 16 farms cut dust pollution by more than 85% and reduced tractor fuel expenses nearly 74%.

Dino Giacomazzi, a Hanford dairy operator, uses a technique called "strip tilling" that narrows the piece of ground disturbed in tilling and planting. He said it not only saves fuel and cuts down on dust, but it also increases yields.

"Environmentalists and those in business may be at odds sometimes, but the reality is that environmental solutions can be -- and really have to be -- economically beneficial," Giacomazzi said.

Working with dairy operators and utility companies to reduce the impact of manure on the environment by encouraging development of methane digesters that generate electricity.

Jake De Raadt, a Lemoore dairy operator, has contracted with Pacific Gas & Electric Co. to supply power, but the machinery on his digester is not yet running at full capacity.

De Raadt said he was pleased to see Boren's enthusiasm for renewable energy and "all the potential out there."

Michael Marsh, who heads Western United Dairymen and has worked closely with Boren on methane digester projects, said she seeks to "find common-sense solutions to very complex regulatory problems."

He said Sustainable Conservation has "been a voice of reason toward agriculture; something not often heard."

Working with the nursery industry to address the problem of invasive species finding their way into the California landscape. A coalition of major retailers and nurseries has agreed to keep 21 of the most invasive types of garden and landscaping plants off store shelves.

They are also educating on noninvasive alternatives that can be planted.

Monrovia Nursery, which grows some plants near Woodlake, is among those involved in the project.

Boren said it has taken time to develop trust on the part of those in the farming industry.

"Historically, there has been a lot of animosity, and initially we were viewed with skepticism," she said. "We started by seeking to understand how these businesses operate and talking with trade associations."

Six people representing five organizations were honored at Monday's ceremonies. Each of the five organizations was awarded \$125,000 for "tackling pressing state issues that many considered intractable." After the ceremony, they met with Gov. Schwarzenegger.

Those honored, in addition to Boren, were:

Cesar Calderon with Soledad Enrichment Action High School of Los Angeles, a charter school focused on high-risk youths.

John Carlon and Tom Griggs with River Partners of Chico, who forged alliances among farmers, conservationists and government agencies to address risks of deteriorating levees.

Yvonne Chan, of Vaughn Next Century Learning Center in Pacoima, a charter school that includes science and multimedia labs set up in former crack houses.

Sheldon Epps with the Pasadena Playhouse, which had a renaissance with an emphasis on diversity.

Boren said Sustainable Conservation will divide the money it will receive from the award, spending half of it working with farmers in the Valley to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and half on water quality in the coastal watershed.

Proposal Includes New Grants for Fruit and Vegetable Industry

By Dan Morgan, Special to The Washington Post
The Washington Post, Thursday, July 19, 2007

Farm bloc lawmakers yesterday offered the U.S. fruit and vegetable industry \$1.8 billion in new federal grants over the next five years as part of a farm bill that would leave in place far larger subsidies for grain, cotton and dairy producers.

The concessions were part of a balancing act by House Democrats to craft a bill that will satisfy politically powerful farm interests while also bearing a Democratic imprint of reform. The House Agriculture Committee was set to vote on the legislation late last night or today.

The package, unveiled yesterday by Committee Chairman Collin C. Peterson (D-Minn.), also increases funding for land conservation, wetlands protection and nutrition programs -- popular with environmental groups and urban lawmakers.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) called the package "a good first step toward needed reform."

Deputy Agriculture Secretary Charles F. Conner said it "moved in the right direction but still has some ways to go." He noted that the Democratic proposal increases price guarantees and supports for some crops such as wheat and soybeans at a time when U.S. trading partners are demanding that those crops be sharply reduced to create a level playing field for farmers worldwide.

The proposal, presented at a committee meeting attended by throngs of farm group lobbyists, received a mixed reaction from some House members and outside critics of the farm program.

Rep. Ron Kind (D-Wis.), who is leading an effort to phase out traditional farm programs and channel more money to conservation and nutrition programs, said the proposal gave "crumbs and pennies" to states such as California and Florida.

The bulk of farm program funds, he said, would still go "to 20 congressional districts" in the South and Midwest that benefit from traditional price guarantees and income support programs even though farm incomes are at record levels.

Raymond C. Offenheiser, president of the anti-poverty group Oxfam singled out for criticism a measure outlined by Peterson. It would lower the ceiling for individuals receiving farm subsidies from \$2.5 million to \$1 million in adjusted gross income. The Bush administration has proposed a deeper cut to \$200,000.

"It's a sad day when the Democratically led Agriculture Committee is a better friend to wealthy special interests than the Bush administration," Offenheiser said.

Some farm-state lawmakers are opposed to any adjustments in the payment limits, but Peterson said publicly that without some gesture toward reform the entire farm bill could face a major fight on the House floor.

Rep. Dennis Cardoza (D-Calif.), who has spearheaded the lobbying for fruit and vegetable interests, praised Pelosi for "direct involvement" in pushing for substantial grants for that sector for the first time. "She made clear we had to have serious and significant reforms but maintain a safety net for those areas of the country that were already covered," he said.

The proposal would also expand acreage in a grasslands reserve and provide help for farmers required to meet federal air-quality standards.

Federal payments to private crop insurers would be reduced by about \$1 billion over 10 years to free funds for other priorities.

An earlier subcommittee draft of the farm bill would have merely extended the current farm subsidy programs. The proposed new version would do away with some price guarantees and allow farmers to opt for an income guarantee instead.

Bill adds money to keep California growers afloat

By Garance Burke, Associated Press
Contra Costa Times, Thursday, July 19, 2007

FOWLER -- Third-generation farmer Bill Chandler has coaxed ripe plums and nectarines from a dusty maze of trees since he was a child, but he's finding developers' offers to buy the land for housing increasingly appealing as he nears retirement.

Chandler, 66, says laws that govern how he nourishes and harvests his crops have made farming a hassle.

He nevertheless would like to live through a few more harvests and says the \$1.6 billion added into this year's farm bill that benefits California farmers -- who grow more than half of the nation's fruits, nuts and vegetables -- might help keep his sunbaked plot in production.

"I figured by the time the trees filled out we'd pull them out and plant houses," said Chandler, standing next to a canal that channels water from Sierra Nevada rivers to his orchards. "This'll stop the bleeding a little bit."

Members of the state's congressional delegation organized a last-minute huddle in the House Agriculture Committee this week to make sure the Golden State got a piece of the federal money.

The latest draft now includes money to market specialty crops abroad and stave off sprawl in rural areas, concerns that Chandler faces daily.

Though the new rash of payments pale compared with the \$40 billion in direct subsidies the bill includes for corn, wheat, soybean, cotton and rice growers, they mark one of the biggest shifts in farm policy since the Great Depression, analysts said.

"California, really for the first time, has been treated with the respect and fairness that it deserves based on the volume of production that we have in the state," said Rep. Dennis Cardoza, D-Merced, who helped broker the deal. "It's a huge win."

Telephone calls from House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-San Francisco, and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger also helped convince committee chairman Rep. Collin Peterson, D-Minn., that the bill should be restructured to keep the nation's most productive farm state competitive, said Cardoza, a committee member.

California is the top producer of dozens of fruits, nuts and vegetables -- including grapes, almonds, raisins and carrots -- but the bulk of its \$17 billion-a-year specialty crop industry doesn't qualify for the federal subsidies that corn and soybean producers get.

With land values soaring across the state, many farmers in the agriculture-rich San Joaquin Valley have opted to sell their land to real estate developers.

From June 2002 to June 2004, 18,800 acres of orchards and fields were plowed under and paved over with subdivisions and shopping malls, according to state figures.

Cardoza, whose constituents include some of the country's largest farming operations, threatened that California Democrats would block an earlier version of the farm bill and would join forces with other farm policy reformers unless the Agriculture Committee gave more money for specialty crops.

After a late-night session with Peterson, Cardoza said he got \$1.6 billion specifically for specialty crops written into the bill.

The legislation is expected to be approved by the committee this week and to reach the House floor later this month.

Instead of receiving direct payments like commodity farmers do, fruit and vegetable growers would get indirect support through marketing programs, block grants and research funding.

As written, the farm bill would hand out \$365 million during the next five years to promote and research specialty crops, \$350 million to buy fruits and vegetables for public schools, and about \$110 million to create or expand farmers markets.

It also includes \$150 million to help farmers meet [air quality](#) requirements and \$50 million for organic farming, Cardoza said.

The produce aisle has a higher profile in this year's package in part because of a blossoming alliance between environmentalists and groups such as Western Growers, which represents 3,000 fruit and vegetable farmers, all of whom oppose traditional subsidies.

"There have been times when you've kind of had to wonder, What on earth am I doing in bed with these people?" said Ken Cook, president of the Environmental Working Group, a nonprofit organization that advocates for farm policy reform. "Together we've made progress, but it's not really a fair share yet."

San Joaquin Valley farmers also found an ally in organic yogurt czar Gary Hirshberg, a major supporter of presidential hopeful Sen. Barack Obama.

Based in New Hampshire, Hirshberg advocated for a \$300 million program to preserve farmland now written into the bill thanks in part to the California delegation's efforts.

Last month, he topped 8 million of his Stonyfield Farm yogurt containers with lids warning consumers that in the time it took them to finish their yogurt, 10 acres of cropland would be eaten up by development.

"The yogurt lids generated lots of interest in the idea that farm policy is something that matters to people in San Francisco and New York and Florida," said Tim Male, a senior ecologist with Environmental Defense. "This isn't just about farms, it's about food quality and wildlife habitat and preserving open space, too."

The new programs hit even closer to home for Chandler. He said he hopes the new measures will help his sons see what inspired his grandfather in 1889, when he left Illinois to start the family farm in the valley flatlands.

"The developers come out and offer me prices if I were to sell today," Chandler said. "But I look at the land and think we have some of the best soil, weather and water in the country. For now at least, I'll keep farming."

Friendly farm bill emerging in House Specialty crops could be in for big increase

By Michael Doyle - Bee Washington Bureau

Modesto Bee and Sacramento Bee, Thursday, July 19, 2007

WASHINGTON - Californians won and delicate compromises survived Wednesday when the House Agriculture Committee laboriously wrote a far-reaching farm bill.

Working late into the night, lawmakers kept largely intact a multibillion-dollar package that adopts modest reforms while lavishing record funding on the nation's fruit and vegetable growers.

"I think the end product is very positive for agriculture and for nutrition," said Rep. Dennis Cardoza, D-Merced.

The committee's farm bill allocates about \$1.6 billion to specialty crops over the next five years. The money would pay for research, block grants, federal purchases and conservation. It is roughly double what the committee proposed earlier this year, and roughly quadruple the amount devoted to specialty crops in the last farm bill, completed in 2002.

There's still a long way to go.

The full House and Senate must act and reconcile different bills covering hundreds of pages.

But the House committee repeatedly held firm on its current proposal. As members confronted about 120 proposed amendments, lawmakers retained provisions considered critical by Californians.

The panel, for instance, agreed to keep a new \$150 million [air-quality program](#) that will pay farmers to take [antipollution](#) measures. Much of this money could end up in the San Joaquin Valley, designated one of the nation's most polluted regions.

"I don't think this is going to solve the problem," said Rep. Kevin McCarthy, R-Bakersfield, "but it's going to help."

McCarthy joined committee Democrats in defeating an amendment that would have eliminated the new air-quality program. Opponents contended the funds would be better spent distributed more broadly, through the Agriculture Department's existing Environmental Quality Incentive Program.

California lawmakers likewise fended off a proposal to let more growers of subsidized crops plant tomatoes. As a test, the committee's farm bill will allow a relatively small tomato planting on Indiana land that formerly grew subsidized crops. Fruit and vegetable growers and their congressional allies, potentially fearing new competition, want to ensure this test remains limited. Otherwise, Cardoza warned, "it would hurt our specialty crop guys."

While retaining the air-quality funding, Californians also secured the possibility of more water quality funding. The panel accepted an amendment by Rep. Jim Costa, D-Fresno, that frees up \$30 million annually from a "regional water enhancement program" for use in regions that could include the Sacramento or San Joaquin valleys.

In a decision important for California's subsidized cotton, rice, wheat and corn growers, the committee stuck with its modest payment reforms. Currently, growers with adjusted gross incomes greater than \$2.5 million can't collect subsidies. The new bill lowers this gross income limit to \$1 million.

The farm bill package heading to the House floor in two weeks includes:

\$215 million for a new specialty crop research initiative. This could pay for research in everything from pest management to new crop varieties.

\$365 million for a beefed-up specialty crop block grant program.

California would get the largest share of these funds, which might be used for marketing campaigns.

\$350 million for buying fruits and vegetables for the federal school lunch program.

A Schwarzenegger folly: 'Flex-fuel' cars

Tri-Valley Herald, Thursday, July 19, 2007

WHEN IT comes to the greening of the state, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger often seems to prefer promises and photo opportunities to actual advances.

The latest example is the so-called "flex-fuel" state vehicles, designed to use environmentally friendly high-grade ethanol. Over two years, the

1,138 vehicles, costing \$17 million, have traveled more than 10 million miles and used 413,202 gallons of fuel. As a MediaNews investigation revealed, not one gallon was of high-grade ethanol.

Not only were the vehicles not environmentally friendly, they created worse pollution than the state's old fleet. Because of their design, they create more smog and greenhouse gases - 2,000 extra tons a year - when they use gasoline.

So how did taxpayers end up spending \$17 million for so-called green vehicles that create worse pollution? It turns out there are no stations where the vehicles can fuel up with the high-grade ethanol.

There weren't any stations four years ago when the first of the "flex-fuel" vehicles hit the road, and there aren't any now. To call it an example of extraordinarily poor planning is an understatement.

Since MediaNews started making inquiries, the state has sped up the timetable to provide ethanol fuel. The General Services Department plans to open a competitive bid next month for companies to provide the ethanol-rich fuel to one station in Sacramento.

However, some environmentalists question the wisdom of using the fuel at all. It might sound like a good idea, but the source of ethanol, corn grown in the Midwest, must be hauled to California. The gas used by tankers making the trip and the resulting pollution compromises the benefits of using ethanol.

It's not the first time the state has made promises about alternative fuel it couldn't keep. Twenty-six years ago, California started buying vehicles that ran on M85, a blend of methanol and gasoline. And there were no pumps for the fuel.

Six years later, a flex-fuel vehicle was designed that also could run on gasoline. The fleet was expanded with the idea that if California took the lead, the fuel industry would follow. But the methanol stations never appeared. The state even helped finance construction of 50 pumps. Still the effort failed. The flex-fuel vehicles ended up running only on gasoline.

This is a case of *deja vu*. The state's experience with flex-fuel vehicles and the difficulty of providing fuel should have been a lesson for Schwarzenegger's administration. Switching the state's vehicles to alternative fuel sources is an excellent idea. But it doesn't happen simply because the governor makes an announcement in front of a bank of cameras.

If Schwarzenegger wants to be remembered as the Green Governor, he needs to institute programs that are planned and can be executed, not simply pronounced.

Agency to offer rebates for less wood smoke

BAY AREA: Air district plans to offer homeowners as much as \$600 if they install cleaner-burning fireplaces, stoves

By Denis Cuff

Contra Costa Times, Thursday, July 19, 2007

Hoping to spare the air from wood smoke, the Bay Area's clean-air agency unveiled plans Wednesday to offer homeowners cash rebates to switch to less-polluting fireplaces or stoves.

Owners of conventional open-hearth fireplaces or old smoky stoves would be offered \$100 to equip a fireplace with ceramic logs heated by natural gas.

They would get \$300 to install an EPA-certified wood stove, and as much as \$600 to install a pellet stove, according to a preliminary draft of the rebate program.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District board is expected to consider approving the rebates in time for winter -- just as the board takes up a proposal to ban wood-smoke fires on bad air nights.

"This is part of our multiprong campaign to reduce the public health risks of wood smoke," said Karen Schkolnick, spokeswoman for the nine-county air district. "One prong is incentives. Another prong is regulatory."

Wood smoke on cold nights can account for as much as a third of the Bay Area's fine particle pollution called PM. 2.5, which can increase the public's risk of developing lung and heart problems and cause premature death among the sick and elderly, officials say.

The rebates won't cover the full cost of new burning devices -- which can run from \$300 to \$3,000 to buy and more to install -- but it could be enough to motivate many people to switch, said Kelly Wee, the district's director of enforcement.

The district also will look at rebates for sealing off or removing fireplaces.

To qualify for the rebates, homeowners would file declarations that they owned an open-hearth fireplace or a non-EPA certified stove, Wee said.

Then they would submit proof that they had installed the clean-burning devices and had the old stoves crushed.

An air board committee given a preview of the rebate plan Wednesday said it likes the concept but wants to hear more details before the program goes to the full board.

"I think this is a good way to clean the air," said Gayle Uilkema, a Contra Costa County supervisor on the air pollution board.

She said she wants to investigate the possibility that industries be allowed to earn credits for meeting their own pollution-reduction obligations if they contribute money toward the rebate program.

Uilkema said her county office surveyed hundreds of West and Central Contra Costa residents and found that 76 percent don't burn wood fires even if they have fireplaces.

A rebate program could prove popular among the 24 percent who do burn, she said.

In the winter, the district issued 30 Spare the Air tonight warnings because it predicted air quality would violate a federal health standard for fine particles.

Local agency will decide on climate change plan Bay Area commission lacks legal authority to enforce much of proposal

By Julia Scott, Staff Writer

Tri-Valley Herald, Thursday, July 19, 2007

Will Travis likens the impacts of climate change to a disaster of historic proportions.

"In some ways we're like the captain of the Titanic," he said. "It was inevitable he was going to hit that glacier."

When climate change hits the Bay Area with maximum impact, it won't be in the form of a glacier. It will be rising sea waters, heavier storm activity, higher temperatures and more air pollution, scientists say.

Travis, executive director of the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission, and his fellow staff members have drafted a "climate change action plan" to help their agency prepare for it.

The plan, which the commission is expected to approve following a public hearing today, will bring climate change considerations to the forefront of the BCDC's approval process.

The state agency, which has jurisdiction over all development inside the Bay and within a 100-foot land area surrounding it, also hopes to help individual cities plan for impacts of climate change on their territories - whether they face water inundation from sea level rise or the loss of local marshland wildlife due to changing water salinity levels.

The impetus for a climate change plan, one of the first such plans adopted by a public agency anywhere in California, came from a shocking Bay inundation map the BCDC staff prepared in January using global warming projections of sea level rise provided by the California Climate Change Action Team. If the Bay water level were to rise by one meter, or 3.3 feet, by the year 2100, more than

200 square miles of land around the Bay could be flooded, with potential damage in the neighborhood of \$100 billion, according to the agency. Entire Bayside cities, such as Foster City, could be underwater.

"It is a huge issue facing us because there has been about 240 square miles around San Francisco Bay that have been filled since 1849 - filled just enough to get them above sea level," said Travis. "It could be that water will inundate much of this land. Silicon Valley, SFO, Oakland International Airport and many other low-lying areas around the Bay."

As part of their plan, the BCDC has resolved to ask developers to address the climate change-related impacts of their projects before approving them.

Meanwhile, the agency hopes to be able to redesign and replant sensitive estuaries around the Bay to prepare for another impact of climate change: As less freshwater is available from the reduced Sierra snowpack, more saltwater from the sea will enter the Delta and change the consistency of the water, affecting plants and wildlife that depend on freshwater to survive.

"It's like playing God," said Travis. "We know the water will get higher. We know its chemistry will change and we know its salinity will change. What we don't know is how much and where. We need more research."

David Lewis, executive director of Save the Bay, praised the agency's efforts.

"They are being admirably proactive in adopting an action plan and pushing for greater attention to impacts in the shoreline," he said.

However, the BCDC could still take a more aggressive stance, he said.

"It's mostly focused on adaptation and there should be more of a focus on prevention," said Lewis. "It's not appropriate for a state agency to take the position that climate change is inevitable and to just take an adaptive approach," he said.

Travis said the BCDC has been looking at prevention as well. It is partnering with three other Bay Area agencies - the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, the Association of Bay Area Governments and the Bay Area Air Quality Management District - to start focusing on big-picture ways to prepare for and possibly even moderate the impacts of global warming in the future.

This coalition of agencies, known as the Bay Area Climate Team, has a goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020 and to 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050. One focus is to embrace transit-oriented development, helping people get to work without getting into their cars.

In spite of their ambitions, neither BCDC nor the other agencies have the authority to enforce much of what they propose, said Travis. It's up to each city whether to approve transit-friendly development or deny a permit to a subdivision destined for a danger zone.

The BCDC doesn't have permit jurisdiction beyond 100 feet bordering on the Bay, which leaves out, for example, all of Foster City's housing. All they can do is provide information and work with cities to help officials make the right choices.

No agency exists to coordinate protection efforts on the Bayside in the same way the California Coastal Commission does for the coast, said Travis.

"Legally, it isn't our problem. We have inherited this problem, but we have absolutely no legal authority to deal with it."

Be that as it may, Lewis said the BCDC ought to seek greater authority to develop and enforce new rules in areas that have traditionally fallen outside their jurisdiction.

"I think this issue merits a more assertive approach and the governor and the legislature's mandate gives them room to push for that," he said.

China's financial health threatened by pollution

Rapid urbanization leads to dirty environment, which cost the country \$64 billion in economic losses in 2004, report says

By Alexa Olesen, Associated Press

Contra Costa Times, Thursday, July 19, 2007

BEIJING -- China's smog-choked cities and contaminated waterways are leaving many people sick and unable to work, in turn fomenting unrest and threatening the country's economic growth, an international think tank said Tuesday in a government-requested report.

Concluding an 18-month review, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development said China's severely polluted environment has caused "significant damage to human health," hurting the country's prospects for continued economic expansion.

"Clearly a healthy economy needs a healthy environment," said Mario Amano, deputy secretary-general of the Paris-based OECD, which groups 30 industrialized countries.

Amano said he had no specific figure for the cost of China's pollution. But the Chinese government said last year that pollution cost the country \$64 billion in economic losses in 2004, about 3 percent of its economy that year. It has not given updated figures.

China's rapid urbanization, industrialization and economic growth during the past nearly two decades has resulted in some of the world's filthiest air, soil and water.

The OECD report, citing an earlier World Bank report, said that by 2020 China will have 600,000 premature deaths a year in urban areas and 20 million cases of respiratory illness a year because of pollution. The overall cost of health damage will be equal 13 percent of gross domestic product.

About 190 million people are estimated to be suffering from illnesses related to dirty drinking water and more than 30,000 children die every year from diarrhea due to polluted water, it said.

Lorents Lorentsen, OECD's environmental director, said pollution-related illnesses have hurt productivity, driven up health care costs and spurred social unrest.

That is "not good for the economy," he said.

Amano and Lorentsen spoke at a news conference attended by Zhou Jian, vice director of China's State Environmental Protection Administration or SEPA. Zhou said China would try to implement the report's suggestions. China is not an OECD member, but the report was prepared at its request.

Farmers throughout the country have protested tainted water supplies and ruined farmland. SEPA director Zhou Shengxian acknowledged the unrest last week, saying the agency was receiving more environment-related petitions.

Lorentsen said China's poor record on environmental issues threatens to damage its reputation as an exporter.

"If you have a reputation for being a polluted country, then you have a bad trademark abroad. It's very hard to sell pharmaceuticals, to sell food and feed from a country that has a reputation for being polluted," he said.

Last month, the Food and Drug Administration placed restrictions on imports of Chinese farmed seafood, including shrimp, catfish, eel, basa and dace, after finding residues of drugs the U.S. does not allow in fish.

The FDA said sampling of fish found traces of the antibiotics nitrofurans and fluoroquinolones, as well as the antifungals malachite green and gentian violet.

But the toxic substances were not linked to pollution and all the restricted imports were farmed -- not wild. More than half of China's global seafood exports are farmed.

The report said China's environmental efforts have "lacked effectiveness and efficiency," mainly because existing regulations were not being implemented, particularly at the local level.

"Economic priorities have overridden environmental concerns," it said.

The OECD recommended that China make the SEPA a ministry-level body to give it more say in monitoring and enforcing environmental regulations.

It also said the government should be more transparent about the health effects of pollution and allow greater "environmental democracy," or participation from civil society, such as nongovernment groups, in cleaning up the country.

The limited availability of information on environmental health "limits the capacity of Chinese authorities and citizens to act in preventative or curative ways," it said.

[Stockton Record Editorial, Thursday, July 19, 2007:](#)

Let's clear the air board

Governor, lawmakers must stop interfering with air-quality policy

Cleaning polluted air in the San Joaquin Valley should begin with clearing the political air in Sacramento.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and lawmakers need to stop trying to micromanage the California Air Resources Board.

Mary Nichols, 62, appointed chairwoman of the board by Schwarzenegger on July 3, should be confirmed by the Legislature and allowed to do her job.

She said during a state Senate Rules Committee hearing Tuesday that Schwarzenegger told her he wants the state's new, landmark global warming regulations strictly enforced.

Nichols has the right mix of environmental credentials, experience and political moxie to find a necessary middle course.

She needs to remedy the damage done when Chairman Robert Sawyer was fired and Executive Director Catherine Witherspoon resigned on June 28.

Sawyer and Witherspoon subsequently testified that Schwarzenegger's staff has micromanaged the agency and worked to weaken the state's well-advertised global warming initiatives.

The governor's aides say the dismissal had more to do with the air board's vote to seek an 11-year delay from the U.S. Environmental Agency's requirements for smog standards in the San Joaquin Valley.

The dispute revolves around disagreements about how California's landmark legislation to curb global warming (AB32) should be implemented and how 24 of the 123 new jobs it creates will be apportioned between regulation and managing the market.

Schwarzenegger wants a strong reliance on a market-driven plan that would permit companies that can't meet caps on greenhouse emissions to purchase permits from businesses that have cut their pollution below allowable limits.

Members of the Legislature insist their bill places greater emphasis on tough regulation.

Both enforcement and market trade-offs are needed desperately.

One in six Valley residents has been diagnosed with asthma, and one in five students takes an inhaler to school each day.

Nichols, a Democrat who worked in the administrations of Govs. Jerry Brown and Gray Davis, was Brown's Air Resources chairwoman 30 years ago.

"There is no one more qualified, more committed and more able to lead our efforts on climate change and air quality," Schwarzenegger said.

He's right. Now it's time for the governor and those in the Legislature who think they know best to stop trying to micromanage and manipulate the 11-member Air Resources Board alone.

This is supposed to be an independent agency.

Nichols and her colleagues must develop the proper balance of regulatory action and market measures. They have 1,100 employees to direct and manage. Let them do it.

Schwarzenegger should support legislation by state Sen. Michael Machado, D-Linden, to add scientific expertise to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District board.

The governor is a master at making big pronouncements, staging events and engaging in visionary thinking.

Schwarzenegger still struggles with the practicalities and realities of governing. He should just let professionals like Mary Nichols do their jobs.

That message should be coming through clean and clear.

[Merced Sun-Star Editorial Wed., July 18, 2007:](#)

Our View: Hold the line on diesel

Legislative leaders are struggling to resolve several sticking points in this year's state budget, but there's one issue that shouldn't be in contention: the need to direct bond funding to contractors that meet minimal standards for limiting diesel pollution from their construction equipment.

Democratic leaders have so far stood firm on a budget proposal that would award bond funds to construction firms that have installed filters on their equipment to reduce diesel particulates. Contractors and state transportation officials oppose the requirement, and for several weeks Republican legislators have urged Democrats to drop it as a condition of reaching a budget deal.

Sure, the state could more easily disperse \$68 billion in bond funds if it imposed no environmental standards on contractors, but the tradeoffs would be unacceptable. Diesel soot contains more than 40 substances proven to cause or suspected of causing cancer. Contractors who continue to use old, unretrofitted equipment expose the public to harmful diesel soot. Their own workers face even higher risks.

The bulk of the \$68 billion in bond funding will be spent on Proposition 1B highway and transit projects. As noted here before, voters were told in official ballot arguments that these transportation bonds would both reduce congestion and cut air pollution. If Proposition 1B ends up increasing particulate pollution near these projects, the state will have broken its promise with voters and could face lawsuits as a result.

To level the playing field between small contractors and large contractors, the budget proposal provides an extra \$20 million a year to help contractors retrofit their equipment with air pollution filters.

This isn't the type of money or goal that should bring budget negotiations to a deadlock.

[Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, July 19, 2007:](#)

Warming war heats up

California cannot simply regulate itself into cleaning up the air and curbing green house gas emissions. It will take a system of rules and economic incentives.

Gov. Schwarzenegger and the Democratic-controlled Legislature are locked in a tug-of-war over how to implement AB32, landmark legislation passed last year that requires California to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 25 percent by 2020.

Known as the Global Warming Solutions Act, the bill passed the Legislature on the strength of Democratic votes and was signed into law by the Republican governor. This strange marriage gave the governor "green credentials," while empowering legislators to advance their environmental agenda.

But now the marriage is splitting apart as the Schwarzenegger administration tries to develop strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and clean up the air.

Last month, Schwarzenegger fired the chairman of the California Air Resources Board and the agency's executive officer quit over the governor's interference.

Staffing for CARB, which is the state's air cleanup agency, now is being held hostage in stalled state budget negotiations, with Democrats insisting on greater focus on enforcement and regulation, and the administration insisting on incentives.

Thrown into the middle of this squabbling is Mary Nichols, CARB's new *well, actually returning* chairwoman.

Nichols ran CARB under former Democratic Gov. Jerry Brown and was secretary of the state's Resources Agency under former Gov. Gray Davis.

Nichols used incentive programs, like the cap-and-trade system Schwarzenegger is proposing, to achieve breakthrough air pollution reductions under previous administrations.

Cap-and-trade puts a limit on how much carbon companies can release into the air and then creates a market in which firms can buy or sell "credits," allowing them to operate under the "cap."

Shortly after being returned to the post by Schwarzenegger, Nichols spoke with editorial writers.

"...you have to have a strong regulatory program if you're going to have any kind of trading, and you can't have a market without a decent regulatory framework that basically lets people know that there's something to trade that has real value," she said.

Nichols promised to do her best to "get people to focus on laying out the program for what we need to get to, where the emissions reductions are going to come from and what are going to be the best methodologies for getting there."

Democratic legislators and the Republican governor need to back off! Both are meddling in CARB's air cleanup responsibilities.

Let Nichols, her staff and CARB board members do their jobs.

[Visalia Times-Delta, Letter to the Editor, Thursday, July 19, 2007:](#)

Story on ethanol will misinform public

Your sensational headline July 7-8, 2007, "The Trouble with Ethanol" will misinform the public and create one more hurdle for our local ag-based biofuels industry as well as their local vendors, employees and investors. Currently, two local companies, Altra Biofuels-Goshen and Calgren Renewable Fuels-Pixley, will have collectively spent over \$200 million in construction and procurement on these local Tulare County projects.

Your biased article failed to mention extensive contrary research done by, among others, the Renewable Fuels Association (RFA), the United States Department of Energy (USDOE), the National Renewable Energy Laboratories (NREL) and the California Air Resources Board (CARB).

As you are aware, after more than 10 years of review, just last week CARB approved the use of up to 10 percent ethanol blend in gasoline. This was only after extensive scientific review and

modeling regarding emissions and global warming. Ethanol's replacement of MTBE as an oxygenate was as an environmentally benign substitute for a proven ground- and drinking water carcinogenic contaminant that causes damage that is virtually irreparable.

If the Times-Delta's true concerns are over public health and welfare, then you have fallen way short of extrapolating the true externalities of a locally produced agriculturally based renewable fuels industry vs. petroleum. For example, fewer vehicle miles traveled for fuel transport equal less air pollution. Fewer war casualties resulting from energy defense and security for foreign petroleum supplies; more employment to a locally depressed workforce; use of locally generated waste products (cellulosic ethanol production) are only a few.

I personally have been involved for more than 20 years in the local and national arenas developing public awareness and education regarding domestically produced sustainable renewable energy sources. My company, Wood Industries Co., has been recognized on the national level as a component of the "Biofuels Strategic Plan" - USDOE, through our waste-to-resource management of biomass materials for conversion to ethanol.

We in the industry view ethanol as a transitional fuel bridging the gap for future technologies, not as a total replacement fuel for gasoline. You have used the power of the press to undermine these local efforts and have propagated damaging public relations toward already struggling fledgling industry which offers tremendous environmental benefits for the public.

Kent Kaulfuss, Lemoncove

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses SQAQMD leaf blower trade-in program. For more information, contact Maricela \(559\) 230-5849.](#)

En beneficio del aire, trueque de sopladoras

Ofrecen cambiar las viejas y ruidosas por nuevas y menos contaminadoras

Alejandro Cano

La Opinión Digital, Thursday, July 19, 2007

CHINO.- En el lapso de un año, las máquinas sopladoras utilizadas en la jardinería emiten una cantidad similar de contaminación a la que emiten 80 autos nuevos. Según las autoridades, tan sólo 1,500 de ellas producen cerca de 14 toneladas de nube tóxica anualmente.

Con el fin de reducir el nivel de contaminación en la región, el Distrito de Administración de la Calidad del Aire de la Costa Sur (AQMD), inició ayer en la ciudad de Chino una serie de eventos para intercambiar 1,500 sopladoras de modelos antiguos por modelos nuevos que emiten hasta cuatro veces menos contaminación y 40 veces menos ruido.

"Las sopladoras actuales ponen en peligro la salud de todos, contaminan el medio ambiente y, además, son muy ruidosas", dijo Dennis Yates, alcalde de Chino. "Los nuevos modelos ayudarán a reducir el peligro de contraer una enfermedad respiratoria, así como a mantener la paz y la tranquilidad en los vecindarios".

Los propietarios de sopladoras antiguas tienen hasta el fin de mes para intercambiarlas por el modelo BR 500, manufacturadas por la compañía STIHL, que operan con menos gasolina y emiten un nivel de ruido aproximado de 65 decibeles, 14 decibeles menos que los emitidos por otras marcas.

Las sopladoras nuevas cuestan unos 470 dólares pero, con el intercambio, los propietarios solamente pagarán 200 dólares por cada una. Ayer, los empleados de Chino Mowers & Engine Service recibieron 250 sopladoras durante el inicio de la segunda jornada del intercambio. Los modelos antiguos serán destruidos.

Terry Roberts, representante de la Asociación Americana del Pulmón, Local Inland Empire, aseguró que los contaminantes emitidos por las sopladoras aumentan los casos de asma y otro tipo de enfermedades respiratorias.

Roberts aplaudió los esfuerzos y aseguró que los resultados se sentirán en corto tiempo.

"Las familias de la región sentirán los efectos, sentirán ganas de salir a caminar y correr porque el aire estará menos sucio", comentó Roberts.

La idea fue gratamente recibida por Eduardo Sosa, jardinero con 11 años de experiencia. Sosa, residente de West Covina, aseguró que las nuevas sopladoras son una ayuda significativa para el bolsillo y para la salud de los miles de jardineros que utilizan el equipo entre ocho y 10 horas todos los días.

"A la larga, las sopladoras ocasionan problemas en los oídos, pulmones y espalda. Algunas son muy pesadas y ruidosas. Cuando se quema el combustible apesta y todo eso lo respiramos", expresó Sosa. "Estas nuevas nos ahorrarán dinero y agilizarán el trabajo ya que pesan menos. Además, tienen buena apariencia".

Debido al nivel de contaminantes y al ruido que emite la mayoría de las sopladoras, alrededor de 20 ciudades en California han prohibido su uso. En 40 municipios tienen medidas para controlar el uso.

Hoy jueves, en 9654 Lower Azusa Road en la ciudad de Temple City estarán haciendo el trueque. En varias ciudades del sur de California los eventos de intercambio empezarán a las 8:00 a.m. y concluirán a la 1:00 p.m.

El programa está abierto a jardineros profesionales que residen en los cuatro condados vigilados por AQMD. Cada negocio tendrá la oportunidad de cambiar hasta 10 sopladoras. Para hacer el trueque los participantes deben registrarse llamando al (888) 425-6247.