

Quarry may add 300 trucks a day to Hwy. 198

By Hillary S. Meeks

Visalia Times-Delta, Tuesday, Oct. 23, 2007

Up to 300 more trucks could be entering and exiting Highway 198 at an intersection in Lemoncove if a foothills granite quarry is granted a permit to expand its operations.

The California Department of Transportation limited the amount of truck trips Lemoncove Granite Quarry could make to 50 per day - 25 entering and 25 exiting - almost three years ago, said Tom Cairns, owner of the quarry.

A permit application submitted by the company asks for an increase from that number to 400 trucks a day - 200 entering and 200 exiting. There would be an hourly limit of 80 truck trips.

Cairns said it isn't likely the quarry will ever need that many truck trips, but he said he wanted that as a maximum limit in case of an emergency.

If approved, the permit would also allow the quarry to expand its hard-rock granite operations from 22 acres to 28 acres and increase its maximum annual production limit from 400,000 tons of rock to 1 million. Cairns would not release the actual amount of rock his company sells each year, but said it is much less than 1 million.

In order to get a new permit, the quarry company will have to spend \$40,000 to \$100,000 on intersection improvements where the quarry trucks enter and exit Highway 198 at Avenue 328, Cairns said.

These improvements include bringing Avenue 328 up to Tulare County's standard pavement width of 24 feet, creating a left-turn lane on Highway 198 for southbound traffic and creating a right-turn deceleration lane for northbound traffic on Highway 198. The quarry is about one mile east of Highway 198 on Avenue 328.

None of this construction will encroach upon private property, said Emily Magill, associate environmental planner for Quad Knopf. Magill helped write the draft environmental impact report Lemoncove Granite submitted to the county in order to get a new permit.

"[The width of Avenue 328] varies because it's an old county road and originally it was 24 feet," she said. "We're just putting it back to where it was."

Cairns said his company will also be required to add curbs and gutters to the intersection.

Dave Harrald, owner of Kaweah River Rock Co., said his larger quarry has about 320 trucks exiting and entering the site daily. The site, which is just south of Woodlake, is 288 acres and has a projected annual production of 1 million tons per year.

But Harrald's company is not limited on how many trucks can enter or exit the site, he said. An access road the company built from the site to Highway 245 lets trucks enter and exit traffic smoothly.

"We just spent quite a bit of money building turn lanes and deceleration lanes," he said.

Lemoncove Granite has submitted its draft environmental impact report to be reviewed by the public until Nov. 19.

After the public comment review, the Tulare County Planning Commission will set a public hearing for this matter.

MID sees future: Clean air at a cost Lowering emissions means higher rates

By MICHAEL G. MOONEY

Modesto Bee, Tuesday, October 23, 2007

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions, a key premise in the global debate about climate change, isn't just another talking point in California -- it's the law.

Just ask the folks at the Modesto Irrigation District, who by 2012 must figure out a way to slash up to 20 percent of the carbon dioxide and other pollutants the MID releases into the air as it generates power.

Today, MID power plants emit about 1 million tons of carbon dioxide a year.

Achieving the state-imposed goal to reduce that amount will be an expensive undertaking, adding perhaps as much as \$7 million per year to MID costs.

That figure is an estimate, but MID officials say this much is certain: Cost increases will be passed on to MID customers. The MID serves more than 110,000 commercial and residential electric accounts.

Many of the primary energy alternatives to coal and natural gas -- geothermal, wind and solar -- are much more expensive to operate. It's also expensive to retrofit existing power plants with pollution-curbing technology.

Roger VanHoy, the MID's assistant general manager for electric resources, estimated that reducing greenhouse gases could add 30 percent or more to electric bills over the next decade. That translates into a 3 percent -- or higher -- bump up every year for the next 10 years.

There is no "average" monthly bill for business or residential customers because the amount owed reflects energy used.

For example, a small office uses far less electricity than a cannery.

An average residential household, according to the MID, uses about 800 kilowatt hours a month. That amounts to about \$102 per month.

VanHoy admits his 30 percent rate hike estimate is "soft" because so many price and cost variables are unknown. The California Energy Commission still is in the process of writing the rules.

"There are two laws," he said. "One affects us near-term, Senate Bill 1368, which prohibits new (electricity) generation from coal-fired plants.

"The other, Assembly Bill 32, the Climate Change Solutions Act, is longer-term. It requires reducing greenhouse gas emissions and takes effect in 2012."

A variety of chemical compounds -- some naturally occurring in the atmosphere -- are called greenhouse gases because they trap heat in the air.

As sunlight passes through these gases and strikes the ground, some of the energy is reflected back into the air as infrared radiation. Greenhouse gases absorb the radiation and hold it in the air. As a result, surface temperatures climb.

Some of these gases -- water vapor, carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide, for example -- occur naturally.

They also result from human activity or products.

Greenhouse gas emissions aren't just an MID problem, however.

All electric utilities in the state must comply, VanHoy said, whether they are publicly operated like the MID or investor-owned companies such as Pacific Gas & Electric Co.

The difficulty for the MID is that government-imposed mandates usually don't come with a funding source, said VanHoy, General Manager Allen Short and other district leaders.

So, MID customers will end up footing the bill.

"When you're already running lean and mean, there just isn't a lot of fat or waste to cut," said MID spokeswoman Kate Hora said. "The only place to go (for increased revenue) is the rates, our main source of revenue."

The MID's electric rates are among the lowest in the state.

Hora also pointed out that the MID uses a two-tier system, charging one rate for those who use less than 500 kilowatt hours per month and a second rate for more than 500 kilowatt hours per month.

Other utilities, she said, may use three or four different tiers, with rates escalating as usage rises.

Unlike city and county governments, Hora and VanHoy said, the MID doesn't receive state or federal tax revenue or grants.

"The ratepayers assume all the costs," said Hora, "and all the benefits."

In a theoretical world, paying an extra few cents per kilowatt hour to reduce greenhouse gas pollutants makes sense. In the real world, it's a different story.

Without worldwide participation, many scientists say, California's effort to reduce greenhouse gases likely will be buried under tens of thousands of tons of harmful emissions emanating from India and China.

Numerous government agencies, research groups and independent scientists worldwide have watched Asia's economic expansion and concluded that its virtually unregulated coal-burning power plants are polluting at an alarming clip.

Pollution coming from China

Earlier this year, a number of environmental watchdog organizations reported that China has eclipsed the United States as the world's largest polluter.

Short and VanHoy, during the MID board's latest budget workshop, suggested that money earmarked to reduce greenhouse gases in California might be better spent in China, whose coal-fired electric generating plants are a major source of emissions.

VanHoy cited a recent presentation by John Doggett of the McCombs School of Business at the University of Texas.

Using a variety of studies, Doggett contends that "on some days, almost a third of the air over Los Angeles and San Francisco can be traced directly to Asia."

"With it, comes up to three-quarters of the black carbon particulate pollution that reaches the West Coast," Doggett wrote.

The prevailing winds, according to experts Doggett cites, carry from Asia vast clouds of dust layered with man-made sulfates, smog, industrial fumes, carbon grit and nitrates.

The MID, meanwhile, is contemplating selling its part ownership of a coal-fired electric generating plant in New Mexico. Despite spending millions to clean up emissions at the plant, it apparently runs afoul of SB 1368, which bars the MID from importing the power.

There is no timetable for such a sale, and the MID continues to pursue a state exemption that would allow it to continue to use electricity generated in New Mexico, which provides about 19 percent of MID's annual power needs.

If that source is lost, VanHoy and other MID leaders say, the district will be forced into the marketplace to find replacement power, which could be more expensive.

The Modesto Irrigation District Board of Directors will continue budget discussions this morning. Board members meet at 9 a.m. today in the district boardroom at 1231 11th St.

PCCP West Park makes cut

Short-haul rail on preliminary list of top priorities for state bond money

By Tim Moran

Modesto Bee, Tuesday, October 23, 2007

STOCKTON -- The good news for PCCP West Park developer Gerry Kamilos is that his short-haul rail proposal is included in a preliminary staff list of top-priority projects in the San Joaquin Valley for state trade corridor bond money.

The bad news is that there are a lot more projects proposed than there is money to fund them.

Kamilos is negotiating with Stanislaus County to build a 4,500-acre industrial and business park surrounding the county-owned Crows Landing Air Facility. The project is dependent on building a short-haul rail link to the Port of Oakland. That rail link, in turn, depends on West Park getting \$26 million from the state's \$2.1 billion trade corridor bond fund.

"We have too few dollars chasing too many needs," California Business, Transportation and Housing Secretary Dale Bonner said Monday at a hearing in Stockton.

The hearing was to gather thoughts on the proposed criteria for choosing which projects get funded and the timeline for making decisions. It was one of eight such hearings held around the state.

California Department of Transportation Director Will Kempton said Southern California interests have identified projects that would total \$1.7 billion. Northern California requests total \$839.8 million.

San Joaquin Council of Governments Executive Director Andrew Chesley identified five "hot list" projects for the San Joaquin Valley. They are:

- An extension of the Highway 4 Crosstown Freeway to the Port of Stockton, with a bond fund request of \$90 million
- An Altamont Pass Rail Corridor-Central Valley Rail Freight Shuttle project in San Joaquin County, with a bond request of \$75 million
- The Crows Landing Air Facility short-haul rail project, with a bond request of \$26 million
- A similar short haul rail proposal in Shafter, with a bond request of \$15 million
- A project to double track the rail lines through the Tehachapi Pass, with a bond request of \$42.5 million

Each of the projects will require a 50 percent match with local funding.

Chesley said the West Park short-haul rail proposal teams with the Altamont Commuter Express operation to create "an interesting synergy of passenger rail and freight."

San Joaquin Partnership president Mike Locke said San Joaquin and Stanislaus counties have become integral parts of the Bay Area. He cited the 11 component manufacturers in San Joaquin County feeding the New United Motor Manufacturing Inc. plant in Fremont and the need to move parts quickly to that plant.

An initial phase of a short-haul rail project would bring trains to the Port of Stockton, Locke said, with a second phase bringing trains south to Stanislaus County, "possibly Crows Landing."

Chesley argued for significant trade corridor funding for the San Joaquin Valley. The valley historically has lagged behind the rest of the state in funding, Chesley said. The trade corridor money is an opportunity to make up for that, he said.

"We aren't expecting an entitlement, but we do recognize the historic imbalance," Chesley said.

The removal of truck traffic in the valley would help [improve its poor air quality](#), he said.

Several other projects were promoted by government representatives at the hearing. They included deepening channels at the ports of Stockton and Sacramento and improving Highway 152 as a major east-west corridor.

D.J. Smith, a transportation consultant working with Kamilos, attended the hearing but did not speak.

Applications for the bond money are due Nov. 26 to the California Transportation Commission under a proposed time-table, with a preliminary list of projects for funding due Dec. 12. A final list would be chosen by July, under the timetable.

Dole fined \$86,000 for ammonia leak

The company failed to report the incident within 15 minutes as required by the EPA.

By Victor A. Patton

Merced Sun-Star, Tuesday, October 23, 2007

ATWATER -- A recent ammonia leak at a plant operated by Dole Packaged Foods will cost the company about \$152,000 in fines and related costs, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency officials said.

The fines stem from a July 2006 incident at the company's Atwater plant at 7916 West Bellevue Road, where a pressure buildup in a closed valve resulted in 477 pounds of ammonia leaking from the facility.

EPA officials said the company violated federal statutes when it failed to properly report the release and did not have written operating procedures for its ammonia refrigeration system.

No one apparently was hurt during the incident, and Dole vowed quicker turnaround time in reporting any future events.

Dole's settlement with the EPA means the company will pay \$86,930 in fines, in addition to \$53,000 for emergency response equipment for the Merced County Department of Environmental Health and the Merced County Fire Department. The company has also agreed to pay \$12,000 to sponsor one-day safety and compliance trainings on ammonia refrigeration systems.

Under existing federal guidelines, local facilities that have an ammonia leak of 100 pounds or more must notify the National Response Center, California Office of Emergency Services and the Merced County Department of Environmental Health within 15 minutes, said Michael Massey, EPA assistant regional counsel. It took Dole officials more than three hours before all of the agencies were properly notified, Massey said.

Under the federal Clean Air Act, facilities are required to have written procedures in place to prevent and mitigate accidental releases. By not reporting the leak, Dole also violated the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act and the Emergency Planning Community Right to Know Act, Massey said. Federal law requires immediate notification of a reportable ammonia release to allow emergency response teams ample time to evaluate the hazardous substance release and prevent exposure.

"We think (the fines) are sufficient to deter any future violations from Dole in these particular areas," Massey said.

Marty Ordman, Dole's vice president of marketing and communications, said the resolution of the case was fair, adding that no residents or employees were injured during the chemical release. He said the leak never presented any danger to the public and the company has re-trained all operators to prevent future incidents or violations from occurring. "We did report (the leak)," Ordman said. "They wanted it reported sooner, so in the future, if anything like this happens again we'll be sure to report it as soon as possible."

Exposure to high concentrations of ammonia can cause severe burns on the skin, eyes, throat and lungs. Breathing low levels of ammonia can cause coughing, as well as nose and throat irritation. Ammonia also plays a role in the formation of particulate air pollution, which has been linked to a variety of health problems, including chronic bronchitis and lung disease, according to the EPA.

Krin Graves, EPA enforcement and compliance officer, said an ammonia leak of 477 pounds can be dangerous -- although the leak at the Atwater Dole facility does not appear to have harmed anyone. "In this particular case, they were lucky in that their release came from a pipe that was

outside of the building, so it spouted directly up into the air where no one was around," Graves said. "But that does not mean that there wasn't the potential for it to have caused more harm, had the leak stemmed from another place in the system."

Dole reported approximately \$6.2 billion in sales in 2006, Ordman said.

Massey said a number of factors are considered when reaching a settlement amount, such as the size of the violator, the duration of time that the violation lasted and the potential risk posed by the violation to the surrounding community. The violation was the first of its kind that Dole has received, Graves said.

Dole's Atwater plant processes frozen fruit and has about 900 employees; it is the only Dole facility in Merced County.

State to sue EPA for delay on emissions standards

By Samantha Young, Associated Press

In the N.Y. Times, S.F. Chronicle, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Tuesday, October 23, 2007

SACRAMENTO -- Attorney General Jerry Brown says California has waited long enough for the federal government to take action on global warming.

Brown said Monday that he will sue the Environmental Protection Agency for stalling on a decision about whether to let California and 11 other states force automakers to produce cleaner cars.

The lawsuit, to be filed in federal court in Washington, D.C., on Wednesday, comes 22 months after California first asked the EPA to let California impose tougher regulations on emissions of greenhouse gases from cars, pickups and sport utility vehicles.

"Unfortunately, the Bush administration has really had their head in the sand," Brown said. "In this case, there has been an unreasonable delay."

California wants to implement a 2002 state law that would require automakers to begin making vehicles that emit fewer greenhouse gas emissions by model year 2009. It would cut emissions by about a quarter by the year 2030. But the law can take effect only if the EPA grants the state a waiver under the Clean Air Act.

The auto regulations are a major part of California's plan to reduce greenhouse gases statewide by a quarter by 2020.

The EPA held hearings this summer on California's waiver, and Administrator Steven Johnson told Congress that he would make a decision by the end of the year. The schedule has not changed, EPA spokeswoman Jennifer Wood said Monday.

In the meantime, the agency is also crafting national standards that it will propose by the end of the year, Wood said.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger warned the EPA in April that he would sue if the agency failed to act on the waiver within six months. That deadline is today.

"We feel like it's a reasonable request," Schwarzenegger spokesman Aaron McLearn said. "They've delayed for a long time, and it's time to take action."

Connecticut, Pennsylvania and Washington state also plan to join California's lawsuit against the EPA.

Although the federal government sets national air pollution rules, California has unique status under the Clean Air Act to enact its own regulations -- with permission from the EPA. Other states can then follow either the federal rules or California standards, if they are tougher.

Eleven other states -- Connecticut, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington -- are ready to implement

California's emissions standards if it gets the waiver. The governors of Arizona, Florida and New Mexico have said their states will adopt the standard.

Calif. attorney general vows to sue EPA to force emission standards decision

By Samantha Young, Associated Press

In the San Diego Union-Tribune, Modesto Bee and other papers, Tuesday, Oct. 23, 2007

SACRAMENTO - The state's attorney general said Monday that he would sue the Environmental Protection Agency in an attempt to force it to decide whether to let California and 11 other states impose stricter standards on certain vehicle emissions.

The lawsuit, expected to be filed Wednesday in federal court in Washington, D.C., comes 22 months after California first asked the EPA to let the state impose tougher regulations on emissions of greenhouse gases from cars, pickup trucks and sports utility vehicles.

California wants to implement a 2002 state law that would require automakers to begin making vehicles that emit fewer greenhouse gas emissions by model year 2009. It would cut emissions by about a quarter by the year 2030. But the law can take effect only if the EPA grants the state a waiver under the Clean Air Act.

"Unfortunately, the Bush administration has really had their head in the sand," Attorney General Jerry Brown said. "In this case, there has been an unreasonable delay."

The EPA held hearings this summer on California's waiver request, and administrator Steven Johnson told Congress he would make a decision by the end of the year. The schedule has not changed, EPA spokeswoman Jennifer Wood said Monday.

The agency is also crafting national standards that it will propose by the end of the year, Wood said.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger in April warned the EPA he would sue if the agency failed to act on the waiver within six months. That deadline is Tuesday.

"We feel like it's a reasonable request," Schwarzenegger spokesman Aaron McLearn said. "They've delayed for a long time, and it's time to take action."

Connecticut, Pennsylvania and Washington also plan to join California's lawsuit against the EPA, officials in those states said.

While the federal government sets national air pollution rules, California has unique status under the Clean Air Act to enact its own regulations - with permission from the EPA. Other states can then follow either the federal rules or California standards, if they are tougher.

Eleven other states - Connecticut, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington - are ready to implement California's emissions standards if it gets the waiver. The governors of Arizona, Florida and New Mexico have said their states will adopt the standard.

The Association of International Automobile Manufacturers, which represents Honda, Nissan, Toyota and 11 other foreign car companies, has sued to block the standards from taking effect.

It argues that the tougher standards would raise the cost of cars and could force manufacturers to pull some sports utility vehicles and pickup trucks from showrooms. Their case is pending in federal court in Fresno.

The Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers has asked the EPA to deny the waiver, arguing there should be one federal standard for tailpipe emissions.

Carbon Dioxide in Atmosphere Increasing

By Randolph E. Schmid, AP Science Writer

In the N.Y. Times, S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Monday, October 22, 2007

WASHINGTON, (AP) -- Just days after the Nobel prize was awarded for global warming work, an alarming new study finds that carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is increasing faster than expected.

Carbon dioxide emissions were 35 percent higher in 2006 than in 1990, a much faster growth rate than anticipated, researchers led by Josep G. Canadell, of Australia's Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization, report in Tuesday's edition of Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

Increased industrial use of fossil fuels coupled with a decline in the gas absorbed by the oceans and land were listed as causes of the increase.

"In addition to the growth of global population and wealth, we now know that significant contributions to the growth of atmospheric CO₂ arise from the slowdown" of nature's ability to take the chemical out of the air, said Canadell, director of the Global Carbon Project at the research organization.

The changes "characterize a carbon cycle that is generating stronger-than-expected and sooner-than-expected climate forcing," the researchers report.

Kevin Trenberth of the climate analysis section of the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colo. said the "paper raises some very important issues that the public should be aware of: Namely that concentrations of CO₂ are increasing at much higher rates than previously expected and this is in spite of the Kyoto Protocol that is designed to hold them down in western countries," Alan Robock, associate director of the Center for Environmental Prediction at Rutgers University, added: "What is really shocking is the reduction of the oceanic CO₂ sink," meaning the ability of the ocean to absorb carbon dioxide, removing it from the atmosphere.

The researchers blamed that reduction on changes in wind circulation, but Robock said he also thinks rising ocean temperatures reduce the ability to take in the gas.

"Think that a warm Coke has less fizz than a cold Coke," he said.

Neither Robock nor Trenberth was part of Canadell's research team.

Carbon dioxide is the leading "greenhouse gas," so named because their accumulation in the atmosphere can help trap heat from the sun, causing potentially dangerous warming of the planet.

While most atmospheric scientists accept the idea, finding ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions has been a political problem because of potential effects on the economy. Earlier this month, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and former Vice President Al Gore for their work in calling attention to global warming.

"It turns out that global warming critics were right when they said that global climate models did not do a good job at predicting climate change," Robock commented. "But what has been wrong recently is that the climate is changing even faster than the models said. In fact, Arctic sea ice is melting much faster than any models predicted, and sea level is rising much faster than IPCC previously predicted."

According to the new study, carbon released from burning fossil fuel and making cement rose from 7.0 billion metric tons per year in 2000 to 8.4 billion metric tons in 2006. A metric tons is 2,205 pounds.

The growth rate increased from 1.3 percent per year in 1990-1999 to 3.3 percent per year in 2000-2006, the researchers added.

Trenberth noted that carbon dioxide is not the whole story - methane emissions have declined, so total greenhouse gases are not increasing as much as carbon dioxide alone. Also, he added, other pollution plays a role by cooling.

There are changes from year to year in the fraction of the atmosphere made up of carbon dioxide and the question is whether this increase is transient or will be sustained, he said.

"The theory suggests increases in (the atmospheric fraction), as is claimed here, but the evidence is not strong," Trenberth said.

The paper looks at a rather short time to measure a trend, Robock added, "but the results they get certainly look reasonable, and much of the paper is looking at much longer trends."

The research was supported by Australian, European and other international agencies.

Windblown soot, gas and dust pose threats

Air quality in spots is called 'very unhealthy.' Officials warn against breathing particles.

By David Pierson, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

L.A. Times, Tuesday, October 23, 2007

Health officials urged the young, the elderly and those with breathing problems to stay indoors until further notice as Southern California's wildfires continued to pollute the air with smoke, gas and dust.

Even healthy adults were told to avoid exerting themselves outdoors, while schools from San Diego to San Bernardino were urged to cancel open-air gym classes -- a recommendation that schools in Los Angeles and Long Beach quickly followed.

We're doing this because the air quality is deteriorating," said Jonathan Fielding, director of Los Angeles County Department of Public Health.

Gray plumes of smoke that were visible from space blanketed San Diego and Malibu on Monday and launched a haze of soot particles into the atmosphere. Officials warned that the tiniest particles posed the greatest health risk and threatened to aggravate emphysema, asthma, heart disease and other medical conditions.

"The very small particles are the ones that can penetrate deeper in the lungs and have harsher health effects," said Michael Kleinman, professor of community and environmental medicine at UC Irvine. These "particles, when deposited in the lungs, can cause tissue damage, inflammation and irritation. They can also penetrate and enter the bloodstream and change the way that blood coagulates, so people at highest risk of stroke have worse problems."

People and pets alike headed indoors at the site of falling ash. Even the San Diego Chargers canceled workouts.

Those residents who found themselves in the path of billowing smoke plumes improvised their own protective gear.

In Foothill Ranch, a community in Lake Forest, teenagers strapped on ski goggles and draped bandannas over their faces to temper the sting of smoke. Some people handed out gauze masks to their teary-eyed neighbors.

Air quality officials said it was rare for so many Southern California communities to be affected at the same time.

"What we're seeing today is a combination of smoke from the many wildfires, as well as dust that's being kicked up by high winds," said Sam Atwood, a spokesman for the South Coast Air Quality Management District. "This is obviously a very large-scale event that is affecting our entire four-county region in air quality."

The district, which encompasses Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino counties, issued "unhealthy" and "very unhealthy" air quality readings in regions close to fires or downwind of them.

Individuals who experienced difficulty breathing were advised to contact their doctor, while those with asthma were urged to keep their inhalers within reach.

For some, bad air was reason enough to get away. Kalpana Singh Rhodes, her husband, three children and father spent Monday preparing to leave their home in La Jolla. Their plan was to stay with relatives in Seattle.

Singh Rhodes, 34, said she was worried about her father's weak heart and her middle child's breathing difficulties. Both were coughing.

"I'm laboring, and I'm the healthy one," Singh Rhodes said. "My backyard is full of ash. We thought it was pollen. Now there are big, long fingers of ash, like cinders."

Singh Rhodes said she went to a Home Depot at 8 a.m. to buy air purifiers, but found the shelves empty. She persuaded a manager to sell her three floor models. By afternoon, she decided that no air purifier would help.

Health officials stressed that the smell of smoke alone was not cause for concern, but that people living near the wildfires or fields of soot should exercise the most caution, because they were more likely to be exposed to carbon monoxide.

The San Bernardino Department of Public Health asked residents to be vigilant about smoke levels as a result of the Grass Valley fire in Lake Arrowhead and the Walker fire in Ontario. People were urged to wear eye protection and to resist rubbing their eyes. They should let their tears wash the irritants away instead, officials said.

[Fresno Bee commentary, Tuesday, Oct. 23, 2007:](#)

DONNY ROLLIN: Give dairies credit for innovations

Fresno County District 3 Supervisor Henry Perea says "the issue of regulating dairies is a matter of public health, not politics" (column Oct. 4). Unfortunately, by ignoring the facts about dairy regulations today, it is Supervisor Perea favoring political rhetoric over public health.

These days, it's simply indisputable that dairies in the Valley are the most regulated in the nation. Dairies are required by law to obtain operating permits and adopt practices and technologies to reduce air emissions -- just like any other business in the Valley. Dairies are also under the nation's strictest water quality regulations, and are required to implement measures to protect surface water and groundwater.

Perea characterizes the position of the dairy industry as "leave dairies alone. They're just a minor contributor to air pollution." The only problem with this is it simply isn't true and the record speaks for itself. The industry does not characterize its emissions as insignificant nor does it suggest that no actions be taken. The public record is clear on this:

In 2004, the dairy industry supported passage of regulations to reduce dust and particulate emissions from dairies and farms. Now the Valley is in attainment for federal particulate-matter standards.

In 2006, dairy groups unanimously supported passage of regulations to reduce ozone precursors, even though these regulations resulted in new costs for many dairies. Now, emissions from dairies have been cut by 25%.

In 2007, the dairy industry widely supported passage of the most sweeping water-quality regulations in the nation's history. Don't take my word for it: Read the 128 pages of regulations at www.waterboards.ca.gov <<http://www.waterboards.ca.gov>>.

Support for education

The industry has also provided financial assistance to support education programs so individual dairy producers can learn about the regulations and to come into compliance. The industry has also worked cooperatively with air regulators to jointly fund research to better understand and reduce air emissions.

Apparently wishing to prove the adage that "no good deed goes unpunished," Perea dismisses all of these efforts by air and water quality public health agencies -- and the dairy families of California -- as "watered down by special interests."

Perea claims that the air district doesn't "demand that dairies use proven technologies that best mitigate air pollution." However, this is precisely what the air district requires -- in fact, this is exactly what it is called -- Best Available Control Technology, or BACT. BACT is already required for all new or expanding dairies in the Valley, including Fresno County.

Who's being political?

At the end of the day, who really is being political here? The air and water quality agencies are doing their jobs -- protecting our air and water. Dairy families are simply trying to make a living by providing milk, cheese, butter and ice cream to the nation's tables. Could it be that it is the politicians themselves who are favoring politics over public health?

Donny Rollin is a third-generation Riverdale area dairyman/farmer.

[Bakersfield Californian, Editorial, Tuesday, Oct. 23, 2007:](#)

Keep focus on mega-dairies

It's too bad that some cows and some dairymen aren't happy these days. But we should be more concerned about making the people who live and breathe in Kern County happy.

Earlier this month, a group of dairymen complained to Kern County supervisors about the county's delay in processing their permits to construct new mega-dairies.

After receiving about two dozen applications to build additional mega-dairies in 2004, county officials put the brakes on their approvals until the environmental consequences of having 200,000 cows share the air with Kern County residents could be evaluated.

Rather than evaluate the environmental consequences of individual dairies, county planners launched a more comprehensive review of the air, water and land impacts of all the proposed dairies.

While it delayed the processing of applications, it was a good deal for the dairies. The comprehensive review spread out the study costs. And the state contributed an additional \$400,000 for the study.

But completion of the study has been repeatedly delayed. State requirements added the need to consider the contributions dairies make to global warming. Cows produce a large amount of methane, a greenhouse gas that has been linked to global climate change.

Staff vacancies in the Planning Department and the death of a key consultant working on the review also have contributed to delays.

County planner Lorelei Oviatt estimates it could take an additional seven months to complete the review and begin processing applications.

Patience. A rush to complete this critical study and begin building more mega-dairies in Kern County will serve no purpose.

Inaccurately assessing and addressing the impacts of these factory farms will erode the quality of life in the southern San Joaquin Valley. No one wants to see the air get more polluted, the ground water contaminated or the stench of dairy cows attack nostrils.

Dairymen who insist on pushing these concerns aside could set themselves up for legitimate challenges from environmental groups.

Consider the plight of Kern County's C&R Vanderham Dairy. Last month, a federal judge ruled it was illegal to allow the dairy to be built without first obtaining a permit from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Air district officials earlier had determined a permit would not be necessary. But an inconsistency in the district's rules and the air cleanup plan the district had submitted to the federal government snagged the dairy and exposed it to legal attack from dairy opponents.

The dairy now faces civil penalties and the possibility it will have to shut down until it obtains air district permits.

Dairy opponents' eyes are focused on Kern County's review of the cumulative impacts of adding hundreds of thousands of cows to the existing number already being milked here.

Now is not the time to cut corners and push for a quick-and-dirty review.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Tuesday, Oct. 23, 2007:](#)

State taking on the EPA

Agency's dawdling

California has run out of patience with the foot-dragging of the federal Environmental Protection Agency, and will proceed with a lawsuit to force action on a crucial air-quality measure. Good for Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

The state asked the EPA way back in 2005 for a waiver to allow enforcement of new rules against vehicle emissions that are a cause of global warming. California's new standards are tougher than federal rules, and have also been adopted by 11 other states.

California alone among the states is allowed to write tougher clean air laws than the federal government's, because the state's standards were already in place when the less strict Clean Air Act was adopted by Congress. Other states may follow California's rules or the weaker federal standards. But first, the EPA must grant California a waiver.

That's never been a problem before. The EPA has never failed to grant such a waiver to California -- until now.

The Bush administration's ties to the auto industry have led to the stalling on EPA's part. The auto makers have sued to stop California's new rules, with little success to this point. A federal judge in Vermont ruled against the auto companies last month. Vermont's new law is identical to California's. A federal judge in Fresno will hear the case involving California's law next month.

In addition, White House officials have been actively lobbying members of Congress against California's new rules.

Prior to that, the EPA and the auto industry sought to kill the new rules by arguing that greenhouse gases are not air pollutants, and thus not subject to federal clean air laws. The Supreme Court, usually quite willing to do the administration's bidding, smacked down that silliness in April.

But the EPA has ignored that ruling, and the Bush administration continues to oppose mandatory limits on vehicle emissions.

Schwarzenegger, whose campaign against greenhouse gas emissions has garnered worldwide attention, set a deadline back in April for the EPA to act on California's waiver request. That deadline has come and gone, so it's off to court for the state and the EPA.

It would have been better for the EPA to do its job and help states fight air pollution, rather than present obstacles in that struggle. But if it takes a judge's gavel upside the EPA's head to straighten the agency out, so be it.

[Tracy Press Editorial, Monday, October 22, 2007:](#)

Barbs & Bouquets

Council should say what led to Hobbs' quitting

BARB: To the Tracy City Council, for agreeing to muzzle all public comments on the sudden resignation Wednesday of Tracy City Manager Dan Hobbs and the process and issues that led to Hobbs' resignation. How will Hobbs' next employer evaluate his potential without candid remarks from his past public employers?

BOUQUET: To Franklin High School Principal Scott Luhn, for benching three suspended football players during Franklin's 35-28 loss Friday to Chavez High School. The trio is connected to the sanctions handed to the Stockton school for improper recruiting and residency violations. Luhn's reasoning? There are sanctions in place and the Sac-Joaquin Section of the California Interscholastic Federation has declared the students ineligible.

BOUQUET: To Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, for announcing that California will sue the Bush administration on Wednesday to force the Environmental Protection Agency to allow the state to issue greenhouse gas regulations for autos. The EPA hasn't acted on the state's request for a waiver to allow California to [require automakers to cut emissions](#) of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases by 30 percent between 2009 and 2016 - as mandated by a law the state passed in 2002. Fourteen other states have identical laws.

BOUQUET: To President Bush, for proposing legislation that would let the parents or spouses of seriously wounded combat veterans take as much as six months of unpaid leave to help with care without fear of losing their jobs. Respite care and the use of home attendants would be expanded. And all Iraq and Afghanistan veterans would be allowed to receive care for post-traumatic stress disorder without having to demonstrate its connection to their service. These measures should get immediate bipartisan support in Congress.

BOUQUET: To the White House for agreeing to give Senate intelligence committee members and staff access to internal documents related to its domestic surveillance program, something that President Bush should have allowed from the beginning in 2001.

BARB: To gay-rights opponents, for immediately seeking to override six new laws protecting and supporting homosexual, bisexual and transgender Californians through the initiative process. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signed the measures sponsored by Equality California this year, including two measures that provide important protections for youth.

BARB: To congressional Democrats, for supporting a \$1 million pork-barrel earmark for an upstate New York museum memorializing the 1969 Woodstock music festival. If the federal government spends \$1 million for that rockfest, it should do likewise at the Altamont speedway. Remember the infamous Rolling Stones' concert? That created the tone for banning most free, overnight music festivals for nearly four decades.

BOUQUET: To Western Union and cell phone providers, for developing a system that would all consumers to transfer money from country to country using mobile phones.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Tuesday, Oct. 23, 2007:](#)

'Only in America'

Let me try to put in perspective what our great nation has been reduced to.

We live in a country where food is plentiful and yet people still find ways to complain about how it is grown.

Many people complain about pollution and yet they refuse to give up their automobiles and air-conditioned 3,000 square foot houses.

People complain about the war, yet all they offer is name-calling and finger-pointing.

Finally, we live in a country where a manager of a professional baseball team turns down a guaranteed \$5 million with additional incentives because he didn't feel appreciated.

I'm weeping as I write. As Don King used to say "Only in America!"

George Delgado Jr., Kerman