

Thumbs up for Salida hulling plant **Stanislaus supervisors side with ag despite critics' traffic worries**

By Tim Moran

Modesto Bee, Wednesday, October 24, 2007

The Salida Hulling Association won approval from the Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors for its proposed hulling plant at Maze Boulevard and Dakota Avenue on Tuesday after several hours of sometimes emotional testimony and debate.

The project has been pending for four years and went through the Planning Commission and county board approval process twice. It is the only hulling proposal in the state to have gone through a California Environmental Quality Act review process, according to county planning staff.

The board approved the plant on a 3-1 vote, with Supervisor Dick Monteith voting against it and Supervisor Tom Mayfield recusing himself because he owns a hulling operation.

Residents near the proposed hulling plant formed a group called Friends of the Central Valley to oppose it. They have objected to the plant on safety concerns, the additional truck traffic it would generate, and the [air pollution](#) and noise they say it would cause.

The group's attorney, Marc Chytilo, questioned whether the environmental review adequately addressed traffic issues. He contended that traffic information surfaced at Tuesday's hearing that should have been used in the environmental review.

Thomas Terpstra, an attorney for the Salida Hulling Association, said the group has offered to pay the full cost of a traffic light at the intersection to mitigate traffic concerns. A berm, landscaping and a buffer zone of almond trees will shield neighbors from noise and the sight of the processing plant, he said.

Dr. Raymond Cimino, a Modesto trauma surgeon, gave an emotional speech on having to deal with accident victims. He said he opposes the project because of traffic safety concerns.

"It's a very sad job. I'm called every time there is a bad car accident," he said. "Tragedy occurs over and over again in this county. ... This is one example where we can take a lead role in making traffic safer," he told the board.

Wayne Zipser, executive manager of the Stanislaus County Farm Bureau, went through a history of the county's efforts to support agriculture, from the "Right to Farm" ordinance to the agricultural element of the county's general plan.

"We believe this is closely related to agriculture," Zipser said of the hulling plant proposal. "Let's not turn back 35 years of work for our No. 1 industry."

Monteith noted that 2,000 people live near the plant, in homes built many years ago.

"Maybe those homes shouldn't have been built," he said, "but they are there." He predicted that Modesto will be building more homes in the area within five to seven years, compounding the problems.

The proposed traffic signal needs approval from the California Department of Transportation, Monteith said, and there is no guarantee it will be approved.

"I don't want to put Stanislaus County on the hook. We should know what the alternative (to the traffic light) is before we vote on this," Monteith said.

Supervisor Jeff Grover said he believed objections to the environmental review were moot because the review wasn't required by law. The hulling association volunteered to go through the process to clarify the issues.

Rejecting the plant would set a bad precedent, Grover said.

"If a group of citizens with a narrow focus can change an allowable use, it changes the way agriculture goes forward," he said. "We are trying to grow an ag economy."

Supervisor Jim DeMartini said ag uses such as hulling plants are part of the tradeoff ranchette owners make to live in farm areas.

"Farmers not only have the right to farm, but to process their crops," DeMartini, himself a farmer, said.

Board Chairman Bill O'Brien said he was torn between the property rights of nearby residents and those of the hulling association, but ultimately sided with the association.

Chytilo said after the vote that Friends of the Central Valley would evaluate the conditions the board placed on the project before deciding whether to challenge the decision in court.

"Time will tell," he said. "We are disappointed the supervisors were willing to overlook such significant issues in approving this project."

Health crisis keeps hopeful out of race for Merced Council seat

By Leslie Albrecht

Merced Sun-Star, Tuesday, October 23, 2007

A last-minute medical emergency changed the course of Merced's City Council race Friday.

Alicia Bohlke, 41, had planned to register as a City Council candidate at the County Elections Office, but instead found herself in the hospital for emergency kidney stone surgery.

Unable to complete the necessary paperwork -- which must be signed in the presence of an elections official or notarized -- by the 5 p.m. deadline, Bohlke bowed out.

That will mean a different tone for the council race. Even before the contest's official start, Bohlke distinguished herself by taking a strong stand on two hot city issues: air quality and the proposed Wal-Mart distribution center.

Bohlke, chair of the Merced-Mariposa Asthma Coalition, said she would make cleaning Merced's air a top priority if elected. She was also staunchly opposed to Wal-Mart's plan to build a distribution center in southeast Merced. Opponents of that project say Wal-Mart's diesel trucks will worsen Merced's already poor air quality. Proponents say it will bring sorely needed jobs to the city.

Bohlke's other top concern was preventing brain drain in Merced. In other words, making sure that the educated professionals graduating from UC Merced will stay and work here.

Bohlke is director of clinics at Mercy Medical Center Merced.

Mary-Michal Rawling, program manager at the Merced-Mariposa Asthma Coalition, called Bohlke's pull-out a disappointment.

"Being from the world of healthcare and the mother of two asthmatic sons, the issue of asthma and clean air has always struck a chord with (Bohlke) on a personal level," said Rawling. "That's a whole new perspective that we've never had come into play before."

Auditor Stephen Jones, the county's top election official, chalked Bohlke's plight up to procrastination. "It never pays to wait to the last minute," said Jones. "We keep telling people, but they never listen."

Bohlke could still run as a write-in candidate, said Jones.

Wildfires force California to postpone EPA lawsuit

By Samantha Young, Associated Press Writer

In the S.F. Chronicle, Contra Costa Times, Modesto Bee and other papers, Wed., Oct. 24, 2007

SACRAMENTO, (AP) -- California's attorney general said Tuesday he will postpone a lawsuit against the Environmental Protection Agency because of the massive wildfires in Southern California.

Attorney General Jerry Brown told The Associated Press that California would not sue the agency on Wednesday as he had planned. Instead, he will likely sue next week.

"The governor would rather do this next week," Brown said. "He's totally focused on the fires."

California intends to sue the EPA in federal court to force a decision on whether California and 11 other states can impose stricter vehicle standards.

The state has waited 22 months for a response from the agency to its petition to be allowed to regulate greenhouse gas emissions from cars, pickup trucks and sports utility vehicles.

California regulators need an answer because they want to implement a 2002 state law requiring vehicles sold in California to emit fewer greenhouse gases starting with model year 2009.

The proposed standard would cut emissions in California by about a quarter by the year 2030, according to the California Air Resources Board. But the law can take effect only if the EPA grants California a waiver under the federal Clean Air Act.

The EPA held hearings in May on the state's request, and administrator Steven Johnson has said he would make a decision by the end of the year. Meanwhile, the agency is also crafting national standards that it plans to propose by the end of the year.

California's lawsuit will allege there has been an "unreasonable delay" by the EPA in deciding on the waiver request, which the state first applied for in December 2005.

Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island 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. The governors of Arizona, Florida and New Mexico also 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 the 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.

Governor postpones suing EPA over vehicle emission standards

Bob Egelko, Chronicle Staff Writer

S.F. Chronicle, Wednesday, October 24, 2007

With Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger tending to the Southern California wildfires Tuesday, his office delayed until next week a lawsuit demanding action from the Bush administration on the state's long-stalled request to enforce its global warming law.

Schwarzenegger said last week he would sue the Environmental Protection Agency in a Washington, D.C., federal court Wednesday, immediately after the expiration of a 180-day notice he served in April. The suit would seek a court order requiring the EPA to decide promptly on California's plan to limit vehicle emissions of gases that contribute to climate change.

In a statement Tuesday, Mary Nichols, director of the state Air Resources Board, the plaintiff in the lawsuit, said she and Schwarzenegger would postpone the suit until next week "so that all state and federal resources can remain focused on fighting these devastating wildfires."

The statement did not say how the filing of a lawsuit by the state attorney general's office would affect the resources needed to fight the fires. Asked for an explanation, Aaron McLearn, Schwarzenegger's press secretary, said the governor has led the state's effort to combat global warming and considers the suit very important.

"He feels all the state's resources, his attention and the full attention of the state government needs to be on protecting our citizens during this crisis," McLearn said. He denied that the postponement had anything to do with public relations.

The California law, passed in 2002, requires vehicle manufacturers to limit emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, starting with the 2009 models. The state needs EPA approval to enforce air pollution standards that are stricter than those in federal law. The federal agency has granted all such requests by California in the past but has not acted on the current request, pending since December 2005.

EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson held a public hearing this spring and has promised a decision on California's request by the end of this year. His action will affect at least 11 other states whose laws are modeled on California's. Automakers oppose the state's request and have challenged the law in federal court.

States Set to Sue the U.S. Over Greenhouse Gases

By Danny Hakim

N.Y. Times, Wed., October 24, 2007

ALBANY, Oct. 23 - New York is one of more than a dozen states, led by California, preparing to sue the Bush administration for holding up efforts to regulate emissions from cars and trucks, several people involved in the lawsuit said on Tuesday.

The move comes as New York and other Northeastern states are stepping up their push for tougher regulation of greenhouse gases as part of their continuing opposition to President Bush's policies.

On Wednesday, Gov. Eliot Spitzer's administration is to issue regulations requiring power plants to pay for their greenhouse gas emissions, part of a broader plan among 10 Northeastern states, known as the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, to move beyond federal regulators in Washington and regulate such emissions on their own.

"I believe that states have to step into a void created by a failure of federal action," Mr. Spitzer said in an interview on Tuesday. "The global warming issue is one where the current administration has first denied the scientific evidence and only recently begun to discuss the matter in a serious way."

Attorney General Andrew M. Cuomo, in a statement on Tuesday, said, "New York State is moving forward on all cylinders to take aggressive action to curb global warming from both power plants and cars."

"I stand with the governor to support these policies, and I will take vigorous action both to defend these important initiatives from any challenge and to sue the Bush administration if the federal government tries to block us," he added.

The legal move by the states to sue the Environmental Protection Agency is aimed at prodding the Bush administration to remove obstacles to more than a dozen states seeking to regulate global warming emissions from cars and trucks. In 2005, California sought a waiver from the E.P.A. that would allow it to implement the first regulation in the United States requiring reductions of greenhouse gas emissions from cars. The E.P.A. has not yet granted the waiver, keeping the regulation from taking effect.

New York, Massachusetts and a number of other states have since moved to adopt California's measure. They cannot proceed until the E.P.A. moves on the waiver.

If implemented, the measure would first affect 2009 models; automakers have said it would make it harder to sell the largest and least fuel-efficient sport utility vehicles and pickup trucks in states that adopt the rules.

The lawsuit against the E.P.A. was expected to be filed on Wednesday, but will be delayed until next week as California continues to deal with wildfires, aides to Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger of California said Tuesday.

The states have won several key court challenges in recent months. In September, a federal court in Vermont rejected attempts by automakers to block the regulation. And in April, the United States Supreme Court ruled that the Environmental Protection Agency has the authority to regulate heat-trapping gases like carbon dioxide.

After the April ruling, the agency's administrator, Stephen L. Johnson, made a commitment to deciding on the waiver issue by the end of the year.

"We're interested in a good decision, not a good headline," said Jennifer Wood, a spokeswoman for the agency. "The agency moved expeditiously after the Supreme Court decision."

States will argue in the forthcoming suit that the E.P.A. has violated legal requirements that federal agencies act on such requests within a reasonable time. But environmentalists said they were more concerned with what the decision would be.

"The administration has promised an answer by the end of the year," said David Doniger, a top lawyer at the Natural Resources Defense Council. "This is an insurance policy to keep them honest."

"The real issue is, will he block the states or let the states go forward?" he added.

By contrast, the move to regulate power plants in the Northeast is set to take effect next year.

The regulations will seek to cut global warming emissions from power plants 16 percent by 2015, but that reduction is based on 1990 emissions levels. The regulations will favor alternative energy approaches, like wind power, and will not be favorable for coal producers. The plan will both cap the amount of emissions permitted and force producers to purchase allowances for their carbon emissions, encouraging them to lower their emissions.

The multistate effort was begun during the Pataki administration and involves nine other states in principle, though Massachusetts is the only other state to have put forward a similar regulation.

"Of course, the renewable energy companies love this," said Judith Enck, a top energy policy adviser to Governor Spitzer. "If you're wind, you don't have to pay anything. If you're natural gas, you don't have to pay a whole lot."

"Anyone who operates coal plants is going to hate it," she added.

National Grid, the largest investor-owned power generator in New York, supports the plan, and does not operate coal plants in the state.

"There's not only a business case for it, but increasing public support for it," said David Manning, an executive vice president at National Grid. "We're certainly being fully consulted by the state as we go along, and that's the only way it's going to fly."

But the Independent Power Producers of New York, a trade group whose members include coal plant operators, favors a national approach.

"We don't want to put more burden on the rate payers of New York, and the last thing I would think this governor wants to do is send the message that investment should go in other states," said Gavin J.

Donohue, the group's chief executive. "You can build plants in other states and send the electricity back into New York."

California postpones EPA lawsuit

Wildfires prompt delay until next week for suit over stricter vehicle standards.

The Associated Press

In the Orange County Register, Wednesday, Oct. 24, 2007

SACRAMENTO -- California's attorney general is delaying a lawsuit against the Environmental Protection Agency because of the massive wildfires.

Attorney General Jerry Brown told The Associated Press that California would not sue the agency Tuesday as it had planned. Instead, he says, he'll likely sue next week.

California wants to force the EPA to decide whether California and 11 other states can impose stricter vehicle standards.

California asked the EPA nearly two years ago to let the state regulate greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles.

EPA Administrator Steve Johnson has said he would make a decision on the waiver by the end of the year.

Local fire crew traverses hills to fight blaze

BY James Burger, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, Oct. 24, 2007

Three major fires, and at least one smaller one, filled the air with smoke above Santa Clarita Tuesday. Firefighters chased the Ranch fire up into the hills north of Val Verde, hoping to contain the blaze inside a loop of firebreaks.

A helicopter drops water on the Meadow Ridge fire near Highway 14 and Interstate 5 southeast of Santa Clarita as Santa Ana winds kicked up Tuesday afternoon.

A firefighter takes control of a busted hose on the Meadow Ridge fire near Highway 14 and Interstate 5 southeast of Santa Clarita.

An air tanker drops water near fire trucks working the Meadow Ridge fire. The fire flared up as Santa Ana winds kicked up Tuesday afternoon. The Meadow Ridge fire is near Highway 14 and Interstate 5 southeast of Santa Clarita.

Ground crews with the Los Angeles County Fire Department work the Meadow Ridge fire near Highway 14 and Interstate 5 southeast of Santa Clarita.

Some of the 45 Kern County firefighters working the Ranch fire were there -- up in the hills out of reach of vehicles.

The voracious Buckweed fire, which had claimed homes and a ranger station east of Interstate 5 by Monday morning, still burned, moving away from the incident command post at Castaic Lake.

Some 12 Kern County firefighters were battling that blaze as of Tuesday evening.

The Magic Mountain amusement park's roller coasters were framed Tuesday against a backdrop of smoldering hillsides left by the third blaze, the Magic fire.

And that was only the northern section of a storm of blazes that have claimed lives and homes across Southern California from Santa Barbara to the Mexican border.

A handful of other Kern County firefighters were scattered at those other blazes -- including the notorious Witch fire in San Diego.

A smaller blaze

Kern County Chief Deputy Bob Klinoff said he is not surprised to see the scores of fires sweeping through the Southland.

A bird shorting out a power line or a spark from a lawnmower can trigger a huge blaze in the dry brush of Southern California, he said. And the fire can explode into a conflagration when fanned by the Santa Ana winds.

The Meadow Ridge fire was small when it started at 4 a.m. Tuesday.

Kern County fire spokesman Chris Stroub said crews had locked down the small blaze -- tamed it -- early Tuesday morning.

But the winds came up after sunrise, Stroub said, and the small fire flared up and took off.

By early afternoon, the fire was clawing its way up a ridge in a maze of wild hills and gullies that sit in the V-shaped hollow where Interstate 5 and Highway 14 meet.

Los Angeles County Fire Department crews mustered at the top of the ridge. Behind them were the green lawns of a cemetery -- directly in the fire's path.

Firefighters held the line.

For them it was one victory in a sea of losses suffered across the southern half of the state.

And the fight is far from over.

Command post

Klinoff is stationed at Castaic Lake, in charge of developing plans and escape routes that will keep fire crews safe if the winds rise and the Ranch fire turns from hunted to hunter.

During the first days of the fire, firefighters worked 30-hour shifts, Klinoff said, trying to hold the blaze while fire agencies across the state rallied to the aid of Southern California.

Now the shifts have eased back to between 12 and 16 hours.

For now, the fire is on the run back up in the hills.

But if the Santa Ana winds rise again, Klinoff said, the flames of the Ranch fire could once again race down onto homes.

Air quality problems expected to linger

Smoke, ash could remain an issue for several weeks

By Robert Krier, Union-Tribune Staff Writer

San Diego Union-Tribune, Wednesday, Oct. 24, 2007

Decreasing winds should help firefighters today, but smoke and ash are expected to continue to accumulate, worsening already unhealthy conditions in much of the county.

"It's going to be many days before these particles are out of the atmosphere," said Bill Brick, senior meteorologist with the San Diego County Air Pollution Control District. "We won't have good air around the county until probably Saturday or Sunday."

Rain or a strong marine layer would help dilute the growing concentrations of airborne particles and wash the pollutants out of the air, but no such weather pattern is expected to develop this week, said Ed Clark, warning coordination meteorologist for the National Weather Service in Rancho Bernardo.

Early in the week, forecasters thought a storm could bring rain by Saturday.

"We're going to have air-quality issues - potentially - for several weeks," Brick said.

On Thanksgiving Day 2003, weeks after the Cedar, Paradise and Otay fires were mostly extinguished, winds kicked up dust and ash in the backcountry and created unhealthy conditions all the way to the coast.

Since the latest blazes began, winds blowing generally from the east have blown particulates - the term for dust, dirt, soot and smoke - more than 1,000 miles over the Pacific Ocean.

Some of that smoke could be sent back over the coast if the winds shift as expected tomorrow Clark said.

"It will be diluted somewhat, but it will still be an onslaught of dirty air," Brick said.

Several days after the start of the 2003 wildfires, a similar wind shift carried a blanket of smoke back over nearly the entire county.

Yesterday, some flames were pushed eastward, but not because of a shift in large-scale wind patterns, forecaster Noel Isla said. The fires actually create their own weather because the heat causes the air to rise and more air rushes in below, creating an underdraft.

According to air monitoring stations, Escondido has experienced the worst air quality so far this week. Particulate levels have been considered very unhealthy to hazardous at times. Nearly a dozen people were admitted to Palomar Medical Center in respiratory distress, Palomar Pomerado Health spokesman Andy Hoang said.

Fans and special industrial filters were set up along the corridors of every floor of the Escondido hospital. But it still smelled of smoke. Staffers said wafts of sooty air seemed to fill the halls when the winds changed or the elevator doors opened. Masks were available as a courtesy to visitors.

Prolonged exposure to unhealthy air can lead to respiratory, vision and other health problems, said Brick, the meteorologist. But many people initially feel no symptoms.

"You may feel all right now, but these things are cumulative," said Brick, who advised that people remain indoors as much as possible and limit physical activity.

The Santa Ana winds, which peaked near 70 mph Monday, are expected to diminish. Winds should be in the 10 mph to 15 mph range today, and should be fairly calm tomorrow.

That would give firefighters a break. But humidity levels are expected to remain dangerously low today, and temperatures are expected climb into the 90s in the inland valleys.

Week's schedule canceled; games will not be made up

By Steve Brand, Union-Tribune Staff Writer

San Diego Union-Tribune, Wednesday, Oct. 24, 2007

Games ceased to be games this week. Literally.

High school athletic events in the region have been canceled through Saturday, and, according to San Diego Section Commissioner Dennis Ackerman, will not be rescheduled.

With the county's schools closed this week because of the fires and poor air quality, Ackerman declared there would be no games or practices after a conference call yesterday with district superintendents.

Even sports in which rescheduling events would be fairly easy, such as cross country, will not be permitted to do so, said Ackerman, in an effort to maintain what he considers "an even playing field."

Among the fall sports, football clearly has the highest profile.

There were 43 games scheduled this week, including the annual parochial school showdown between Catholic powers St. Augustine and Cathedral, plus numerous homecoming contests.

"Schools are closed and we're not even sure if they'll be able to return on Monday," said Ackerman, who was forced to evacuate his home in Poway. "With all of the fires we have going, our main concern is for the students' health because of the air quality.

"In an effort to make it equal for everyone, even the Imperial Valley schools, which are not affected by the smoke from the fires, will not be playing."

Poway football coach Damian Gonzalez, who learned that his standout tight end Ryan Deehan lost his home in the blaze, agreed with the decision.

"I'm absolutely OK with it," said Gonzalez, whose team was scheduled for a Palomar League showdown with La Costa Canyon. "So many people are displaced right now and this is the right thing to do. We need to make sure everyone is OK and make sure our community is OK. This is so much bigger than worrying about football."

Four years ago, an entire week of high school competition also was wiped out by wildfires. The football regular season was extended by one week, and the playoffs were condensed, with the championships being played just two days later than originally scheduled.

This time, the section has two reasons for wanting to stick with its original championship date of Dec. 7 at Qualcomm Stadium. The Chargers are scheduled to play Detroit at home Dec. 16, and there must be about 10 days between the high school games and the Chargers' next home game. Plus, participants in the State Football Championship Bowls will be chosen Dec. 9, and the San Diego Section wants to have its champions decided before then.

Keeping the championship date and adding a week to the regular season would require a condensed postseason that isn't being considered.

Since this week lands in the middle of league play for football, there could be fallout.

"There will be more ties for league championships," predicted Bruce Ward, director of physical education, health and interscholastic athletics for the San Diego Unified School District.

"But if the superintendents say to close down the schools, just the thought of playing games seems so trivial. There obviously is concern about air quality, even inside."

Few dispute that this week's games should have been called off, even those teams scheduled for activities outside the section. Beyond this week is where there are differences of opinion.

Although Ackerman said none of the canceled events would be made up, some could easily be accommodated without an extra competition.

Rancho Buena Vista and Fallbrook, two of the top boys and girls cross country teams in the section, were scheduled to meet Friday. RBV coach Tom Lux, whose home was threatened not once but twice by the Witch Creek fire, said they would do what they did four years ago.

"We just pulled out the performances of the two schools' runners from the league championship meet and used that score," said Lux.

All six Avocado League schools meet at the end of the year. By simply comparing the two schools' performances, a winner can be determined.

Not the same as head-to-head, acknowledged Lux, but better than nothing.

Even those whose football games are in the spotlight said the decision not to play at this time is warranted.

"Considering what has been happening, I didn't anticipate playing (Saturday)," said St. Augustine coach Jerry Ralph, who lives in Oceanside and said ashes from the Fallbrook fire were "falling like snowflakes" in his yard.

"Right now my thoughts are toward my family, my friends and my players. I just hope we can get back on the (practice) field as soon as possible."

Since the Saints-Dons game annually attracts about 7,000 spectators, Ralph was asked if the Eastern League matchup could replace another game on the two teams' schedules.

"We could do anything," said Ralph, "I don't think public schools are that flexible. We're a much smaller community and we're more responsive, but we've had at least one player lose his house and that's our priority.

"We'll just wait and see what happens with the fires - right now football is on the back burner."

Health officials warn of unhealthy air caused by SoCal fires

By Alicia Chang, AP Science Writer

In the S.F. Chronicle, Modesto Bee, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Wednesday, October 23, 2007

Los Angeles (AP) -- Out-of-control wildfires polluted Southern California skies with acrid smoke and falling ash for a third straight day and public health officials urged the elderly and people with breathing problems to stay indoors.

Satellite images showed thick smoke from more than a dozen wind-driven blazes blanketing a wide swath from Malibu to the Mexican border. State air regulators warned that the region's air quality has deteriorated since Sunday with concentrations of soot particles at unhealthy levels.

The South Coast Air Quality Management District has received dozens of calls from concerned parents wanting to know how to protect their children from the pollution.

"Our answer is to use common sense. If you can see smoke or falling ash, that means it's time to start curtailing your outdoor activity," said agency spokesman Sam Atwood.

The unhealthy air was expected to linger as long as the wildfires burn. It can take up to two days for the smoke to clear once the blazes are put out, experts say. The last time the air was this polluted was in 2003 when massive wildfires raged around the state.

Workers at the Del Mar Fairgrounds near San Diego put out a call Tuesday for more face masks for evacuees.

Kina Paegert, who has asthma, made sure to carry her inhaler and was told by paramedics to change her mask every four hours.

"You can hear it in my voice. I'm not usually this raspy," said Paegert, an information officer for the Del Mar Fairgrounds.

At the Henry Mayo Newhall Memorial Hospital in the Santa Clarita Valley north of Los Angeles where fires were burning, 22 people arrived at the emergency room complaining of respiratory problems, most likely from the smoke. At least two stayed overnight, hospital spokeswoman Bhavna Mistry said.

Sixteen patients, including four firefighters, were treated for burns at the University of California San Diego Medical Center. Of those, five also suffered from smoke inhalation.

Hospital spokeswoman Nancy Stringer said the medical center expected to see more people come in with breathing difficulties in the coming days.

"As the fires die down and people start going out, there will still be lots of dust and ash in the air," Stringer said.

Health experts say the most dangerous byproducts of wildfires are the fine particles that are not visible to the naked eye. The particles can flow into the lungs and worsen symptoms of asthma, bronchitis and emphysema.

In addition to the public warnings, health officials urged schools to cancel outdoor sports activities until the air improves.

The Los Angeles Unified School District, the nation's second largest with more than 708,000 students, suspended all outdoor activities Tuesday.

Hospital staff at Mountains Community Hospital in the resort town of Lake Arrowhead helped several travelers refill their oxygen tanks "to give them a peace of mind," said Susan Lowell, the hospital's director of patient care services.

The hospital also decided to open its kitchen and offer food to travelers who needed a break just like it did in 2003 when the area was besieged by the devastating Old Fire.

**When Southern California burns, Long Beach gets the smoke
Because of topographical quirks, Santa Ana winds funnel particulates to the beachfront
community, even if fires are nowhere near.**

By Marla Cone, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer
L.A. Times, Wed., October 24, 2007

Long Beach is more than 40 miles from the nearest wildfire raging in Southern California. But its air pollution levels surged in recent days beyond the "unhealthy" level set by air-quality regulators.

Because of Southern California's quirky topography and wind patterns, neighborhoods with no danger of wildfires are often the ones most affected by wind-driven smoke.

Long Beach sits at the neck of a wind "funnel" that, during strong Santa Ana conditions, carries smoke and ash to the coast from fires in distant mountain and desert areas. Since the wildfires ignited Sunday, the city has suffered some of the region's worst levels of airborne particulates.

Clouds of smoke "carry enormous amounts of matter, and they fumigate in the area where it is cooler: right next to the ocean," said Joseph Cassmassi, a meteorologist at the South Coast Air Quality Management District. "You can see plumes of smoke from Santa Barbara all the way to the Mexican border, blowing from the east to the west offshore. It's very dramatic."

Particulates, mainly microscopic pieces of soot, smoke and dust, can trigger asthma episodes, bronchitis, pneumonia, heart attacks, strokes and other life-threatening problems. Particulates from wildfire smoke tend to be very small and capable of lodging deep in lungs.

Monday's level lingered in the unhealthy range in Long Beach, with a noontime peak of 161 on the national air pollution index, before subsiding to moderate levels Tuesday. The trigger for "unhealthy" is 150. The Norco-Corona area registered near 500 before dawn Monday, although its readings dropped to moderate levels later in the day and continued to be moderate Tuesday, according to the AQMD. A level of 200 is considered hazardous, capable of causing immediate breathing difficulties.

Although everyone in the Los Angeles Basin "gets a little dab here and there," Cassmassi said, the smoke from wildfires driven by Santa Ana winds "tends to wind up in Long Beach at a fairly good frequency." Similar pollutant levels are likely from Torrance to Huntington Beach, although there are no air-quality monitors there.

"With all the windblown dust and smoke, we can run into situations where the monitors can read up to 900. We've seen numbers as high as that," Cassmassi said. Other nearby areas, he said, may experience lower levels because they lie in a topographic "wind shadow."

When Santa Ana conditions die down, particulate pollution will concentrate in a more typical pattern, closer to mountain ranges and away from shore areas. Forecasters expect the winds to die down today.

In the meantime, health officials have advised residents of Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino counties to avoid exercise or exertion outdoors. Children, the elderly and people with respiratory or cardiovascular diseases should take more precautions, remaining indoors if possible.

Schoolchildren in Long Beach were in virtual lockdown for a second day Tuesday. As she picked up her fifth-grade daughter after school at Lowell Elementary School, about half a mile from the ocean, Madonna Cavagnaro said, she saw many of the children lift their shirts to cover their noses.

"The look on the children's faces was like they were coming out of a bomb shelter," Cavagnaro said. "There is debris all over our yards, the sky is gray, the air has a stink of fire, and there is a thick layer of gray soot all over the plants, the shrubs and the patio furniture."

During the 16 days after the region's wildfires in 2003, hospitalizations for asthma in Southern California increased 34%, according to a new study by UC Irvine environmental epidemiologist Ralph Delfino. In addition, bronchitis increased in preschool-age children and the elderly, and pneumonia cases were up, Delfino's study showed. Hospitalizations from cardiovascular problems also increased, although not as much as respiratory ailments.

Symptoms can come days later, when the cumulative effects take a toll on airways, lungs or hearts.

In Long Beach, particularly near the ocean, some people said they coughed, had headaches and felt their eyes burning just from walking their dogs around the block.

Joanne Irish, who lives about half a mile from the ocean in Long Beach, said her children, ages 10 and 13, "had horrible headaches yesterday, starting about midday."

Dr. Helene Calvet, Long Beach health officer, warned residents, especially those with asthma, other lung diseases or respiratory allergies, to take extra precautions during the fires. Youth sports practices were canceled Monday and Tuesday.

The Environmental Protection Agency advises people in smoky areas to close windows, run air conditioners, use air filters and avoid using gas stoves or burning wood or candles, which increase particulates.

Climate change linked to health

By Frank Davies, MEDIANEWS STAFF

Tri-Valley Herald, Wednesday, October 24, 2007

WASHINGTON - Using careful qualifiers such as "potential effects," scientists and doctors Tuesday linked climate change to health problems during a Senate Environment Committee hearing.

Dr. Julie Gerberding, director of the Centers for Disease Control, warned that extreme heat waves and other events could threaten public health systems and required stepped-up preparedness, both nationally and internationally.

"Extreme events are devastating, especially to vulnerable people," said Gerberding, adding that the death toll of 25,000 to 40,000 during the European heat wave of 2003 shocked health officials. "In the developed world, that should never be the case."

Still, Gerberding and Susan Cooper, Tennessee's health commissioner, were cautious about predicting dire health consequences from global warming, talking about a range of risks and possibilities that required more planning.

"Climate change may expand the geographic range of (insect-borne) diseases," such as malaria, Cooper testified. "The impact of climate change on disease occurrence is uncertain."

When Sen. Barbara Boxer, the Bay Area Democrat who chairs the committee, pressed Gerberding to discuss the "worst effects" of global warming, the CDC director responded: "Yes, there's a range of potential things you could expect. The question is if."

But Gerberding also showed skepticism when Sen. John Barrasso, a Wyoming Republican, told her that an investment analyst concluded that \$1 to combat AIDS generated \$40 in social benefits, while \$1 spent to limit carbon emissions produced 20 cents' worth of benefits.

"I'm a scientist, not an economist," the CDC director said. She then referred to a Harvard Business Review article warning that climate change "was a big issue for corporate security and economic security."

Boxer hopes that such hearings will build a case for mandatory emissions controls.

Several Republicans on the committee complained that emissions controls could have unintended consequences, driving up energy costs and indirectly causing health problems for the poor.

"We could inflict more harm on the American people than the problem of global warming," said Sen. Kit Bond, R-Mo.

Proponents of emissions controls such as Boxer are hoping that a bill sponsored by Sens. John Warner, R-Va., and Joe Lieberman, I-Conn., will gain momentum, starting with a hearing today in Lieberman's subcommittee.

That measure would establish a federal program that would set emissions targets by allowing companies to earn credits and trade permits to reduce overall emissions. The complex plan was criticized by Bond and other Republicans.

Boxer rebuked global warming skeptics for "keeping their heads in the sand," and said the testimony of health experts showed the need to act.

"You should heed the people who are healers," Boxer said, "and get off your duffs and move on this."

The full testimony from health officials can be found at the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee Web site at epw.senate.gov.

White House edited CDC climate testimony

By H. Josef Hebert, Associated Press Writer

in the Modesto Bee, Contra Costa Times, Wednesday, October 24, 2007

WASHINGTON - The White House significantly edited testimony prepared for a Senate hearing on the impact of climate change on health, deleting key portions citing diseases that could flourish in a warmer climate, documents obtained by The Associated Press showed Wednesday.

The White House on Wednesday denied that it had "watered down" the congressional testimony that Dr. Julie Gerberding, director of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, had given the day before to the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee.

But a draft of the testimony submitted for White House review shows that six pages of details about specific disease and other health problems that might flourish if the Earth warms were not delivered at the hearing.

The draft noted that "scientific evidence supports the view that the earth's climate is changing" and that many groups are working to address climate change. "Despite this extensive activity, the public health effects of climate change remain largely unaddressed. CDC considers climate change a serious public health concern," the draft declares.

That paragraph was not in Gerberding's text as approved by the White House.

The draft document was obtained Wednesday by The Associated Press from a source other than the CDC, the Atlanta-based agency considered the government's premier disease tracking and monitoring agency.

Two people familiar with the documents told the AP on Tuesday, after the Senate hearing, that the White House Office of Management and Budget edited the CDC director's congressional testimony, removing specific scientific references to potential health risks.

Gerberding told a Senate hearing on Tuesday that climate change "is anticipated to have a broad range of impacts on the health of Americans."

But her prepared testimony was devoted almost entirely to the CDC's preparation, with few details on what effects climate change could have on the spread of disease. The prepared remarks covered six pages. The draft submitted for OMB was twice as long.

Referring to the draft, one CDC official familiar with both versions, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitive nature of the review process, said that "it was eviscerated."

White House press secretary Dana Perino said the prepared testimony went through an interagency review process and the Office of Science and Technology Policy did not believe that the science in the testimony matched the science that was in a report by the International Panel on Climate Change.

"She testified yesterday. Her spokesperson said that she was able to say everything she wanted to say," Perino said. "It was not watered down in terms of its science. It wasn't watered down in terms of the concerns that climate change raises for public health."

The CDC official said that while it is customary for testimony to be changed in a White House review, these changes were particularly "heavy-handed."

The deleted sections of the draft, covering more than half of the original text, included a list of specific impacts on which "climate change is likely to have a significant impact on health." The list included the effect of more frequent hot spells on vulnerable populations, the impact of extreme weather, more air pollution in drought areas, and greater likelihood of vector-borne and waterborne diseases as well as mental health problems.

While these impacts would be expected to be less significant in the United States than in the developing world, one deleted section says, "nevertheless many Americans will likely experience difficult challenges."

"Climate change-driven ecological changes such as variations in rainfall and temperature could significantly alter the range, seasonality and human incident of many zoonotic and vector-borne diseases," the draft says in another section deleted.

At Tuesday's hearing, Gerberding appeared to try to address some of those issues during questioning from senators after she delivered her prepared remarks.

Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., committee chairman, produced a CDC chart, listing many of the same concerns - deleted from Gerberding's draft text - that could be exacerbated by global warming.

"These are the potential things you can expect," replied Gerberding when asked about the items by Boxer. "... In some of these areas its not a question of if, it's a question of who, what, how and when."

Attempts to reach Gerberding for comment were unsuccessful late Tuesday as she was returning to Atlanta. CDC spokesman Tom Skinner called Gerberding's appearance before the Senate panel "very productive" and said she addressed the issues she wanted during her remarks and when questioned by the senators.

The Bush administration has been trying to defend itself for months from accusations that it has put political pressure on scientists to emphasize the uncertainties of global warming. Earlier this year a House committee heard testimony from climate scientists who complained the Bush administration had sought frequently to manage or influence their statements and public appearances.

The White House in the past has said it has only sought to provide a balanced view of the climate issue.

[Sacramento Bee Editorial, Tuesday, October 23, 2007](#)

Editorial: Air Resources Board can take dramatic steps

Wide array of early-action measures will lead to major cuts in greenhouse gases.

California's global warming law - Assembly Bill 32 - sets tight deadlines for enacting regulations to reduce greenhouse gases 25 percent by 2020.

One such deadline required the California Air Resources Board, by July of this year, to approve "early-action" measures to reduce emissions in advance of a more comprehensive program.

The air board met the July deadline, but by anyone's standard, the board's proposals were not nearly as far-reaching as the law intended. Partly because of disputes with the Schwarzenegger administration, the board approved a mere three items in June. Soon afterward the governor fired the board's chairman, and its executive officer resigned.

Since taking the helm in July, CARB Chair Mary Nichols and her staff have worked to expand the agency's strategies. On Thursday and Friday, the board will consider an additional 41 early-action measures - some fairly simple, others more complex. If all were enacted, the 41 actions and the

three earlier ones would reduce California's greenhouse gases by 42 million metric tons - about a quarter of the tonnage the state must cut by 2020 to meet the law's requirements.

While there's not enough space to detail all 41, three of these measures deserve special attention and should be approved by the air board when it meets:

- **Retrofitting of long-haul trucks and trailers:** Heavy duty trucks consume more than 3 billion gallons of diesel fuel each year. That means even small improvements in fuel economy could mean big reductions in both greenhouse gases and air pollution. To improve fuel economy, the air board staff has identified a mix of side skirts, roof fairings and other devices that can make trucks and trailers more aerodynamic.

By phasing in retrofits of these devices on truck-trailers that are registered in California and travel through it, the state could reduce greenhouse emissions by an estimated 20 million metric tons a year, including 2 million metric tons generated in California yearly, according to estimates by the air board's staff. They also would reduce air pollution, particularly in the Central Valley.

- **Electrification of ports:** When cargo ships dock at California's ports, they often run auxiliary engines to power refrigeration and other equipment. These engines spew massive amounts of pollution, including greenhouse gases and diesel soot.

The board's proposal would require ports to make electrical outlets available so ships could power their equipment while docked without running their engines. Such a measure would reduce about 500,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide yearly by 2020.

- **Forestry protocols:** Owners of timberland are becoming interested in programs that would reward them for managing their land in ways that reduce and sequester carbon dioxide. Companies and nonprofits, for instance, are interested in investing in "offsets" that will produce real, verifiable and permanent CO2 reductions.

To encourage this trend, the board should approve protocols by the California Climate Action Registry that will guide owners of timberland on how to manage their forests if they want to receive such credit. Purchases of bogus offsets is already a huge problem worldwide. These protocols will help encourage some integrity.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Wed., Oct. 24, 2007:](#)

'Total control'

Accumulation of massive amounts of wealth in a globalized market remains the prime motivating force in this new industrialized world. Since the wealthy can make money without much effort, and that wealth benefits the rest of us with jobs, opportunity and security, our society does not complain much, and will even assist the wealthy with their imposing exploitations. Most believe that free trade is not inappropriate, but rather the natural expansion of a dwindling domestic market.

However, the formation of a well-designed social organization that we all envisioned 50 years ago is suffering the consequences and is heading into gradual decline. The extent of its eventual decline is difficult to predict, since there are solutions not currently being considered.

The ultra-rich have long planned to protect themselves from the slow collapse of the capitalistic system brought on by the predictable depletion of low-cost energy. This, coupled with world demand for conservation, pollution control and curtailment of fossil fuels, is causing a conscious effort from the power center to expedite the total control of money, resources and technology for their own protection and without regard for alternative measures that would help us all.

David L. Drown, Oakhurst

[Note: The following clips in Spanish discuss the Southern California fires, air quality, health effects and the precautionary measures one can take if they are impacted by smoke or ash. For more information, contact Maricela \(559\) 230-5849.](#)

Alertan sobre polución extrema en el aire de Los Ángeles por el fuego

Impacto USA, Wednesday, October 24, 2007

San Diego (EE.UU.), - Las autoridades de Los Ángeles advirtieron hoy de la extrema contaminación del aire en los puntos del condado más afectados por los incendios, y recomendaron a los vecinos que eviten salir al exterior de sus viviendas.

La Oficina de Salud del Condado de Los Ángeles informó hoy de que el aire en las zonas de Santa Clarita, Malibu Canyon y Canyon Country, las más devastadas por el fuego, está contaminado con partículas en suspensión, humo y gases, lo que puede causar "problemas en la salud".

"A pesar de los significativos esfuerzos realizados para contener los incendios, la calidad del aire en algunas zonas del condado ha sido afectada adversamente por el fuego", dijo el director de la Oficina de la Salud, Jonathan E. Fielding.

"Las partículas en suspensión en el aire pueden tener un efecto adverso en la salud de algunos individuos especialmente sensibles. Estas personas deben evitar realizar actividades en el exterior de sus casas".

En general, las autoridades sanitarias han recomendado a toda la población que eviten, en la medida de lo posible, permanecer mucho tiempo en zonas de exterior, con especial incidencia en los niños.

Pero la atención más especial se ha centrado en las personas que sufren enfermedades del corazón y respiratorias, como enfisemas y asma, así como en los ancianos.

"Permanecer en recintos cerrados reduce, en cierta manera, la exposición al humo y el polvo, y poner los sistemas de aire acondicionado con puertas y ventanas cerradas es una buena idea", recomendó hoy el departamento de salud.

Advierten sobre enfermedades por aire contaminado de los incendios

Carlos Quintanilla, Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Wednesday, October 24, 2007

Expertos en salud de la Universidad de California en Los Ángeles (UCLA, por sus siglas en inglés), advirtieron sobre los peligros del humo contaminado que han dejado los incendios en el sur del estado. En opinión del doctor, David Hayes Bautista, del Centro para el Estudio de la Salud y Cultura Latina, de la citada universidad, las partículas de humo y las cenizas contribuyen a aumentar los ataques de asma. Otros especialistas en salud han recomendado a los que salen a practicar algún deporte o simplemente a hacer ejercicio, que no lo hagan en estas condiciones. El aire en el sur de California está contaminado y los niños y ancianos pudieran ser las principales víctimas si no se toman medidas preventivas, advierten los expertos en salud.

Dejan insalubre el aire los incendios en el sur de California

Noticiero Latino, Fresno, CA

Radio Bilingüe, Wednesday, October 24, 2007

El director de la oficina distrital de Control de Contaminación del Aire en el condado de San Diego, Bill Brick declaró hoy insalubre el aire en la región del sur de California, y advirtió que aún cuando terminen los incendios tendrá que pasar muchos días para que el ambiente se despeje.

En promedio, una de cada cuatro personas que debe salir a la calle usa mascarilla para respirar. Las escuelas ampliaron de dos días a toda la semana la suspensión de actividades. El Departamento de Salud de California asiste prioritariamente a heridos y personas de edad avanzada con problemas respiratorios.

Brick advirtió además esta mañana que habrá un impacto de la contaminación en los residentes durante por lo menos varias semanas.