

[Fresno Bee commentary, Wed., May 16, 2007:](#)

SEYED SADREDIN: Air district's decision right for the Valley

Air quality in the San Joaquin Valley is better than it has ever been in recorded history. With tough regulations, innovative measures and investment by businesses and residents, air pollution has been reduced significantly throughout the Valley. Despite this tremendous progress, the Valley's pollution-retaining geography and meteorology make meeting new, federal ozone and particulate standards a challenge unmatched by any other region in the nation.

Having already reduced Valley smog by 80% since the 1980s, virtually eliminating the remainder will not be cheap and cannot happen overnight. On April 30, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's governing board adopted the first eight-hour ozone plan in California. This overarching and comprehensive plan is designed to help the Valley attain cleaner air, as measured by the federal smog standard, as expeditiously as practicable. The regulatory cost to businesses will be about \$20 billion. The board members should be commended for their courage, resoluteness and commitment to clean air.

In fact, an objective assessment of the board's work on air quality gives Valley residents a great deal to be proud of. A child born today in the Valley breathes air that is 8% cleaner than it was 25 years ago and that now meets the federal standard for particles 10 microns and smaller. The Valley is the only "serious" noncompliant area in the state to meet the standard for airborne particles of this size, and we did it five years ahead of the federal deadline. The Valley also is on track to meet the one-hour ozone standard by 2010, making it the only "extreme non-attainment" area in the state on track to do so. Meeting this health-based standard will further diminish the proven respiratory and health-related ailments associated with strong ozone concentrations.

The district's recently adopted plan to meet the new, federal, health-based ozone standard is the first of its kind in the nation. Under the plan, 50% of the Valley's population will live in "attainment" areas -- that is, areas without any recorded violations of the air-pollution standard -- by 2015; that number will increase to 90% by 2020. By law, the Valley cannot claim attainment because in a couple of areas, air pollution still will violate the standard at least a few days each year until 2023.

Undisputed analysis by experts shows that even if money were no object and we ignored all logistical constraints, the technology available today and in the foreseeable future could not reduce smog-forming emissions enough for these areas to attain the clean-air standard any sooner than 2023. In this situation, the only option provided under federal law is to seek an "extreme" designation and incorporate future technology when it becomes available -- thus, the proposed deadline of 2023. All local measures that can be adopted by the air district will be in place by 2010. As a result, every area in the Valley will see significant, steady reductions in ozone concentrations and the number of days above the standard.

The measures contained in the ozone plan also will help the Valley meet the federal standard for fine particles by 2015. (Fine particles are 2.5 microns and smaller.) This makes the Valley the only non-compliant area in the state on track to meet this standard by the deadline. Doing so will eliminate more than \$3 billion per year of the estimated \$3.1 billion annual health-related costs attributed to airborne particles in the Valley.

With public health as the foremost priority, the air district's governing board also acted to seek other innovative and creative strategies to clean the air. These measures, which focus on alternative modes of goods- and people-movement, as well as alternative fuels and energy, will require broad support from the general public, as well as business and government.

About 80% of our smog-causing pollutants come from mobile sources over which the air district has no jurisdiction. We need the state and federal government to do their share for the Valley by providing funding and regulatory assistance to reduce emissions from cars, trucks and locomotives.

By any objective measure, the plan adopted by the air district is a comprehensive effort that leaves no stone unturned to bring the Valley into attainment with federal air-quality standards as quickly as possible. Those who champion clean air are invited to join us on this challenging but fulfilling journey to cleaner air in the Valley.

Seyed Sadredin is the executive director/air pollution control officer for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Air officials don't get expected pollution fees

Lodi News Sentinel, Contra Costa Times and SF Chronicle, Wednesday, May 16, 2007

STOCKTON - A program that charges San Joaquin Valley builders for air pollution blamed on sprawling developments has raised less money than officials had expected.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District estimated it would make about \$200 million in the program's first three years.

But the program has only raised \$13 million since it passed last year. A slowdown in development may have led to the lackluster start, air officials said.

The fees collected so far were used to upgrade farmers' diesel irrigation pumps, reducing pollution by about 855 tons, officials said.

The fees are intended to offset pollution from the increased traffic linked to new neighborhoods, shopping centers and other developments. Builders must pay if their developments do not include environmentally friendly features such as bike paths and energy-efficient appliances.

A group of builders has sued the air district, claiming the rule is unfair because developers are being asked to pay for indirect pollution.

Toxins permeate town in Central Valley

Groups find elevated levels of pesticide in Tulare County

By Douglas Fischer, STAFF WRITER

Tri-Valley Herald and the Contra Costa Times, Wednesday, May 16, 2007

LINDSAY - The spraying starts at night, tractors pulling fans that blow the neurotoxin over the tops of dense leafy orange trees.

The trees surround this tiny farm community deep in the San Joaquin Valley. The chlorpyrifos - banned for domestic use since 2000 yet still used widely on crops - falls like a lethal mist, first paralyzing then killing insects seeking a portion of Tulare County's \$4.3 billion in agriculture sales. But the nights are hot, the fans are powerful, and the mist travels.

And so, invariably, swamp coolers straining against the smoggy heat pull the poison into Lindsay's homes.

Some residents smell the pesticide's slightly sweet, slightly acrid odor and figure it will pass. Some complain of headaches and nausea. Some chalk up the asthma and balky breaths to another day in the worst air in the nation.

Many will never notice.

But all are likely breathing it.

Initial results of a pilot program in this Central Valley farming community suggest that no matter the location, Lindsay's residents have more chlorpyrifos in their bodies during the monthlong spraying peak than the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency considers acceptable for pregnant and nursing women.

The program, a collaboration with Pesticide Action Network, the nonprofit environmental research firm Commonweal, and the community group El Quinto Sol de America, tested the urine of 12 adults in various locations throughout the town during peak spraying season last summer. All but one had chlorpyrifos concentrations above the EPA's recommended threshold of 1.5 parts per billion, equivalent to a grain of salt seasoning 150 pounds of mashed potatoes.

The results pair with air monitoring data, also done by the group, that show for three years running chlorpyrifos in the air in town and near schools exceeded the EPA's acceptable level for short-term exposure.

The results for the first time shed light on a problem residents suspected but could not prove: That a pesticide banned for household use was drifting off nearby fields and into their homes, with unknown long-term health consequences.

"The most important thing is we don't know," said Ana Gonzalez, who lives in one of the six houses where air was sampled. "The fear, the danger of having the pesticides right near us - we could fight against something we could see: A robber, a poison right here at home.

"But this we can't see."

The results of the study, released today, are notable on several fronts.

-The study highlights gaps in state and federal pesticide regulation. The EPA banned chlorpyrifos for household use seven years ago amid concerns that its potent neurotoxicity presented too much of a risk for young children. One study of New York homes found that children exposed in the womb had poorer mental and motor development by the time they were 3 years old.

Yet commercial growers can legally apply it to plants abutting homes within one-quarter mile of a field or orchard. Advocates seek a quarter-mile spray zone as a buffer.

-The study also shows the considerable potential biomonitoring - the testing of humans directly for evidence of pollution or other compounds - offers in guiding public health decisions.

California is in the midst of establishing the first-ever statewide program to probe its residents' blood, hair and urine for various chemicals. The program will provide a benchmark of sorts for the state, but many advocates want more.

They want the program to test communities facing environmental health threats. But industry has balked.

Said Margaret Reeves, a senior scientist at the Pesticide Action Network and the Lindsay program's coordinator: "The fact that we can demonstrate that it's out there and that it's in their bodies and that it's associated with all these known health effects gives power to the community's demands.

"It makes them look real reasonable."

The state takes these concerns seriously, said Glenn Brank, spokesman for the California Department of Pesticide Regulation.

The group's air monitoring data is in line with other levels the department has seen in other communities. "We do not see an imminent health threat from the chlorpyrifos based on the levels we've found in the air," he said Tuesday.

But its presence in so many air samples has prompted the agency to take a harder look. It has launched its own pilot study in the Fresno County community of Parlier, which suffers from some of the valley's worst air quality. Those results should be ready later this fall, Brank said.

"We do see ongoing exposures at very low levels," he added. But "as of now, we don't see anything from the air standpoint that represents a concern."

Irma Arrollo arrived in Lindsay from Mexico 19 years ago. She spent her first two months in America in her house, too terrified of authorities to go out. Eventually she started helping in her son's school and learned other immigrants were in even worse shape, unable to read or write and with little support.

She founded El Quinto Sol a decade ago to help Lindsay's immigrants adjust to America and to fight for their health and rights.

The lessons they have learned here applies to any community fighting against poor environmental health, she said: Cities have diesel pollution. Pesticides don't just drift only over Lindsay.

"This is a crisis," she said. "People don't listen to us when we say we have these concerns."

Farmers spread about 2 million pounds of chlorpyrifos, often sold as Dursban, over 1.7 million acres in California in 2005, mostly on cotton, oranges and walnuts. Humans pass it quickly, but the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates 75 percent of all Americans have some in their blood, suggesting exposure is continuously occurring and widespread.

Side effects of breathing the chemical are similar to nerve gas, a chemical cousin: Dizziness, nausea, inability to concentrate, numbness or tingling in the limbs.

Meanwhile, more than half of Tulare County's children attend a school that sits within a quarter-mile of a field or a dairy, a figure educators put on par for most rural areas.

Sunnyside School District sits five miles south of Lindsay. The "district" is really a dusty collection of buildings and turf hemmed on all sides by agriculture: Oranges to the east, north and west; olives to the south.

Superintendent and principal Steve Tsuboi has spent all his life in Tulare County. The biggest change, he notes, is that the Sierra foothills, less than 10 miles east, have faded from view, obscured by hazy smog.

The growers, he said, are "pretty good" about not spraying while kids are around.

But Arrollo recounted the day last November when students invited their grandparents to school. A grower was spraying nearby groves that day - without many required safety precautions, Arrollo later discovered. A few grandparents felt dizzy. One or two fainted, she said.

"Children in Tulare County aren't good in education," she said. "They don't learn fast. They have low test scores."

In a region where one out of five children have asthma, where the sky is so smoggy that nearby hills have disappeared from the horizon, chlorpyrifos is just a tiny part of the problem. The chemical accounts for 2 percent of nearly 18 million pounds of pesticides applied in the county annually, and identifying the community's chemical body burden won't cure any woes, Arrollo said.

But it has emboldened residents. And that's the point, activists note.

Ana Espinoza was eight months pregnant when she tested for chlorpyrifos. Her first reaction upon getting the results, she said through a translator, was to say to her husband "let's get out of here."

"Then I thought going away is not going to solve the problem."

Today little Ximena is a year old. She's got two pigtailed, pierced ears, and a sibling on the way: Ana is pregnant again.

A few months ago Ana, her husband and Ximena moved from their home in Lindsay to a mobile home so close to the fields they can pick walnuts from their porch.

"I moved, but I didn't escape it," she said with a grin. "It's better to get united with the community. It can get better."

Target seeks southwest site

Company, with three locations in Bakersfield, submits application to build super complex at Gosford, Panama

BY RYAN SCHUSTER, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, May 16, 2007

Target Corp. has plans to add a massive store and other retail development to a vacant parcel at the northwest corner of Gosford Road and Panama Lane.

The company submitted an application two weeks ago to the city of Bakersfield's planning department to build a Target store and three other retail stores.

The national retail chain has not finished purchasing the land, and the project has not yet received approval from the city planning department.

"It's in the early stages," said Paul Hellman, a principal planner with the city of Bakersfield.

Hellman said the company's application is not complete and the property still has to go through the environmental review process. Hellman said public hearings on the development have not yet been scheduled.

Plans submitted to the city's planning department call for an approximately 207,000-square-foot SuperTarget. SuperTarget stores include an in-store grocery store with a bakery, deli, meat and produce departments, a pharmacy, photo processing and one or more restaurants, according to target.com.

Target spokeswoman Brie Heath said in an e-mail Tuesday that the company is "exploring our options for a new store at Gosford Road and Panama Lane."

Heath said Target has not finalized plans for a new store at that location and added that "part of the exploration process is gauging the entitlement process."

The almost-20 acres are owned by local developer Castle & Cooke, which is in the process of selling it to Target, according to Bill Sampson, Castle & Cooke's senior vice president of commercial properties. Sampson said the land is in escrow.

Target approached Castle & Cooke about the land, Sampson said.

"They wanted to be there and we wanted to sell some land, so we made a deal," Sampson said. "They want to serve that quadrant (of the city)."

Minneapolis-based Target, which operates about 1,500 stores in 47 states, currently has three locations in Bakersfield: on Wible Road near Valley Plaza, on Mall View Road near East Hills Mall in the northeast and on Rosedale Highway in the northwest.

Jim Eggert, assistant city planning director, said recently that Target has shown interest in commercial properties around town. Eggert also said Target has looked into possibly expanding its Wible Road location.

Hellman said the land is zoned for industrial uses and would not require a zoning change for a Target or other retail stores.

The proposed Target is just south of a proposed Wal-Mart Supercenter on Gosford that has been delayed by legal challenges.

Hellman said some of the same concerns about the Wal-Mart -- such as traffic and [air quality impacts](#) -- would be addressed in the review process of the proposed Target store. A new Target of that size would also require an urban decay study mandated by a recent planning commission ordinance on so-called big box retailers, Hellman said.

Smog-ridden LA outlines plan to reduce greenhouse gases

By MICHAEL R. BLOOD - Associated Press Writer
Sacramento Bee, Wednesday, May 16, 2007

LOS ANGELES -- The nation's smog capital is joining the broad fight against climate change.

Los Angeles - a city devoted to cars and polluted by the exhaust that comes with them - announced Tuesday an array of steps to sharply reduce greenhouse gases by 2030.

Some ideas appear easy, like planting trees and giving each household a couple of energy-saving fluorescent light bulbs. Others are speculative at best, like expanding the city's mostly ignored subway and slowing water use at a time when the city's population is growing.

"We're setting the green standard," said Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, who called the plan the most ambitious of any major American city.

The city's goal is to reduce its carbon footprint in 2030 to levels 35 percent below those in 1990 - a target that goes beyond the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, the international pact to reduce greenhouse gases that was later spurned by the Bush White House.

It would be achieved in part by moving away from coal-fired energy and increasing the city's use of power from wind, solar and other environmentally friendly sources.

Villaraigosa will detail the plan Wednesday in New York at an international climate summit, where mayors from Seoul to Sao Paulo are sharing ideas on how to reduce gases linked to global warming.

The city has an advantage in attempting to throttle back such emissions, because it owns some of the major culprits - several airports, the massive Port of Los Angeles and its own utility, the Department of Water and Power, which gets about half its energy from coal-burning plants.

But about half the carbon dioxide in the city comes from its notorious traffic.

The American Lung Association this month placed Los Angeles at the top of its list of cities with the most polluted air. The association found that the Los Angeles metropolitan area, which includes Long Beach and Riverside counties, had the worst air based on 2003 through 2005 figures.

How can you get commuters out of their cars, when three of four people in the region drive to work? The city proposes building more high-density housing near transit lines, for one.

Joel Reynolds, a senior attorney with the Natural Resources Defense Council, credited the mayor with taking "a big step forward" but noted the plan leaves open the question of how rail and other transit development would be funded.

"We have to get people out of cars, we have to give them an alternative, and that means rapid transit," Reynolds said.

School bus company falsified emissions test data, suit says

Jane Kay, Chronicle Environment Writer
S.F. Chronicle, Wednesday, May 16, 2007

Public-interest groups say the company that operates school buses for San Francisco and other Bay Area cities has falsified emissions tests on the diesel exhaust-belching vehicles and should be forced to post signs on its 4,000 school buses statewide to alert students to the dangers of the toxic exhaust.

In legal documents filed Tuesday by Oakland's Environmental Law Foundation, two former Laidlaw Transit mechanics say they were ordered to falsify emissions tests and repair orders at the company's San Francisco maintenance yard.

The nonprofit group sued Laidlaw last year, saying the nation's largest school-bus operator violated the state's Proposition 65 anti-toxic law by not warning that children were exposed to carcinogenic chemicals as they rode the buses.

In the group's additional documents filed Tuesday, mechanics Manuel Contreras and William Padilla said Laidlaw supervisors had ordered employees to falsify documents.

The men, who worked at the San Francisco yard for nearly two decades, now work at United Parcel Service. Contreras was fired from Laidlaw in 2005, and Padilla quit last year.

The former workers said mechanics were ordered to sign off on required repair jobs when the work hadn't been done. Padilla said he was ordered to manipulate emissions tests.

Tiffini Bloniarz, a Laidlaw spokeswoman, said the company would not comment directly on the lawsuit or respond to the accusations by the former employees. She said the company had not had a chance to review the documents.

"We will investigate promptly any allegations once we have reviewed the court documents filed by the plaintiffs," Bloniarz said.

She noted that school districts that own buses don't have to post Prop. 65 warnings because they are public entities, nor do the operators of small companies. Prop. 65 was approved by voters in 1986 and requires companies to notify consumers when products might cause unsafe exposure to chemicals known to cause cancer or birth defects.

Under an \$18 million-a-year contract with the San Francisco Unified School District, Laidlaw transports 6,209 children on 189 school buses five days a week. That includes 4,655 children in kindergarten through fifth grade and 1,554 disabled children.

A group called Parent Voices has pushed the school board to require Laidlaw to meet clean-air standards. And by last December, Laidlaw had replaced its aging San Francisco fleet with buses

manufactured in 2005. It's unclear whether the buses that Laidlaw supplied the district contain particulate traps, devices needed to meet 2007 standards for particulate pollution. Laidlaw didn't respond to Chronicle requests for the information.

Maria Luz Torre, a San Francisco coordinator for Parent Voices, said parents often are unaware of how dirty the buses can be.

"We assume because the buses are provided by the school district that they are safe. Parents aren't aware that the kids can be exposed to really bad stuff coming from diesel fumes that get inside the bus," Torre said.

Exposure to diesel exhaust is one of the most significant risks to public health, state medical researchers say. The exhaust contains more than 40 chemicals identified as toxic air contaminants. Fifteen of them also are classified as carcinogens.

State laws govern school buses and require daily inspections by drivers, maintenance inspections every 45 days or 3,000 miles and completion of repairs before the vehicles may return to the routes, said Michael Chaffee, a spokesman for the California Highway Patrol's commercial vehicle section. The state Air Resources Board requires tests of emissions.

Laidlaw's Bloniarz said in a statement that the company is committed to working with federal and state governments, bus manufacturers and customers to ensure the health of the 2 million children that the company transports in North America.

But in his declaration filed with the San Francisco Superior Court on Tuesday, Contreras said his Laidlaw managers "routinely ordered mechanics to sign (inspections) before repairs were made to the buses.

This policy did not sit well with the mechanics, and we complained about it. We were concerned that Laidlaw was putting buses that should have been grounded on the road to transport kids. We were also very concerned that we would be held responsible if something were to happen to the kids."

Ultimately, the mechanics were told that they had to sign or would lose their jobs, Contreras said.

Padilla said he was told to conduct the emissions tests, but the company wouldn't buy the special filters needed to check the calibration of the testing instrument before every test. Over eight years, the instrument likely was calibrated only twice, he said.

"I was ordered by every one of my managers on many occasions to make buses that were excessively smoking pass the opacity test by falsifying the test," said Padilla. "In other words, I was ordered several times to make buses that were not passing pass the test anyway."

Faulty equipment noted by school bus drivers on their daily vehicle inspection reports often would go ignored, the men said.

The mechanics complained that Laidlaw hires too few mechanics to maintain all of its buses -- the company says it now has seven mechanics in San Francisco -- and lagged behind on state-required 45-day inspections. The company wouldn't order the parts required to repair cracked exhaust pipes, which exacerbated the smoky pollution inside the bus, they said.

Contreras was fired in 2005 after his supervisors said he didn't meet a deadline to take a test to obtain a Class 2 driver's license. For the last 12 years of his employment, he was the union shop steward. He contacted the Environmental Law Foundation after reading about the lawsuit.

Padilla said he quit in 2006 because he became discouraged after being told to sign off on incorrect repair orders and falsify emissions tests.

In addition to skimping on safety, the former workers said, the company allowed buses to idle for hours as they recharged batteries after a summer of disuse, sending exhaust into the Jerrold Avenue yard and nearby community.

"Whether Laidlaw is doing something bad somewhere else, I can't say," said David Goldin, the school district's chief facilities officer.

"But my director of transportation assures me that they are providing the equipment that they are supposed to provide and are performing the duties that they're supposed to perform under the contract. If we find out that Laidlaw is not fulfilling the terms of its contract in any way, we would pursue those investigations with full energy," Goldin said.

In California, diesel particulate matter is the largest contributor to the health risk posed by toxic air pollutants, constituting about 70 percent of the total statewide risk, according to state officials.

Children are particularly vulnerable. The young are more susceptible to cancer and other disease because they have developing systems. The microscopic diesel particles, 1/500th of the size of a human hair, lodge in lung tissue and lead to disease and loss of lung function. The exhaust can irritate the eyes and throat, aggravate allergies and intensify asthma attacks.

In his recent budget revisions, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger proposed using \$96.1 million of the \$200 million bond measure passed by voters last year to upgrade or replace diesel school buses. More than half of the nation's 30,000 school buses are more than 10 years old, according to a study by the Union of Concerned Scientists.

In 2006, Laidlaw applied for grant money to upgrade its school buses. The Bay Area Air Quality Management District approved a grant of \$1.7 million to buy particle traps and help to pay for electrical infrastructure. But two months ago, Laidlaw declined the grant money. The statement issued by Laidlaw on Tuesday did not address why it turned down the money.

The way school buses are constructed makes them more apt to expose passengers to pollutants than other types of vehicles, diesel exhaust experts say.

Arthur Winer, a professor of environmental health sciences at UCLA's School of Public Health, said the chassis of school buses have open seams around windows and pinhole leaks in the metal.

"They are not constructed to the same standard of other vehicles," he said.

Winer and other diesel exhaust experts speculate that transit buses are better constructed because people pay to ride.

"Children are captives," Winer said.

The South Coast Air Quality Management District, which has the nation's worst particulate pollution, adopted a school bus fleet rule in 2001 requiring school districts to switch to natural gas-fueled buses, which emit less nitrogen dioxide and particulate emissions and no diesel exhaust.

The diesel industry's Engine Manufacturers Association sued to block the rule and lost in a lower court. The case went to the U.S. Supreme Court, which sent it back to the trial court, where the industry lost again. The diesel industry appealed again to the Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, which has yet to hold a hearing.

In the meantime, using state subsidies of close to \$100 million, the South Coast district will have put 700 compressed natural gas school buses on the road out of about 10,000 buses. The Bay Area schools, as well as the transit districts, haven't yet pursued alternative fuel-powered buses.

Asian dust plume might sway U.S. climate-scientists

By Deborah Zabarenko, Environment Correspondent
San Diego Tribune Tues., May 15, 2007

WASHINGTON - Asian desert dust and city pollution is swirling in vast plumes across the Pacific to North America, interacting with storms and possibly spurring climate change, an airborne scientist said Tuesday.

Jeff Stith of the National Center for Atmospheric Research communicated with reporters via Web chat from a research jet flying 40,000 feet above the ocean as part of a mission to track dust and pollution particles blown from Asia to the United States.

"We have found enhancements in pollution levels in some of the upper regions of the storm clouds we studied, just yesterday for example," Stith wrote.

Stith and his ground-based colleague, V. Ramanathan of the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, aimed to study the interaction between the pollution and dust with high-altitude clouds bearing ice crystals.

Ice crystals are found in extremely cold clouds, and when the crystals are composed entirely of frozen water, they reflect lots of sunlight - that's why these clouds look so white, Ramanathan said by telephone after the Web chat.

However, if particles of dust and a dark pollutant known as black carbon managed to get inside the crystals, these clouds might absorb more solar energy rather than reflecting it all, Ramanathan said.

The high-flying jet, a specially equipped Gulfstream V, has a range of 6,000 miles and is needed to monitor the dust plumes, which speed across the ocean and occur every few days, the scientists said.

FAST-MOVING POLLUTION

"We are finding that the entire Pacific Ocean is just a hop, skip and a jump away from North America; the dust and pollution plumes are traveling fast and Hiaper (the scientists' name for the plane) is able to keep up with the plume," Ramanathan wrote in the Web chat.

The plane's sophisticated instruments monitor the dust and pollution, but it is also visible to scientists traveling through it, Stith wrote.

"The dust itself will be yellowish in color; but when it is mixed with BC (black carbon) it gets brownish; Normally when you are above the dust layer and you look at the sky sideways it will be brown in color," Stith wrote.

The plume begins forming when dust is lifted from the Mongolian and Taklamakan deserts, according to Stith. When it passes over East Asia, it picks up aerosol particles from burning fossil fuels, cooking fires and other fires where biomass goes up in flames.

The experiment only tracks the plumes as they travel across the Pacific but Ramanathan said high-altitude pollution - above 1.9 miles - should be able to travel across North America and out over the Atlantic Ocean.

"This is why dust and soot getting into the higher layers is so important," Ramanathan wrote. "This is what makes a local (problem) into a global problem."

Images of Asian dust and pollution clouds, the research aircraft and its route across the Pacific can be seen online at www.ucar.edu/news/releases/2007/pacdexvisuals.shtml.

Clinton foundation program to give 16 city skylines a green makeover to cut carbon emissions

By Sara Kugler, ASSOCIATED PRESS
San Diego Tribune Wed., May 16, 2007

NEW YORK - Sixteen cities around the world will begin cutting carbon emissions by renovating city-owned buildings with green technology under a program spearheaded by former President Clinton's foundation.

Bill Clinton was to announce the partnership Wednesday, joined by mayors of several of the cities, as part of an international climate summit he is hosting this week in New York City.

Clinton's foundation described details to The Associated Press ahead of the announcement. Major global banking institutions have committed \$1 billion to finance the upgrades of municipal buildings in participating cities, which include New York, Chicago, Houston, Toronto, Mexico City, London, Berlin and Tokyo.

The makeovers will include replacing heating, cooling and lighting systems with energy-efficient networks; making roofs white or reflective to deflect more of the sun's heat; sealing windows and installing new models that let more light in; and setting up sensors to control more efficient use of lights and air conditioning.

Clinton's foundation said the planned changes have the potential to reduce energy use by 20 percent to 50 percent in those buildings. The reduction could mean a significant decrease in heat-trapping carbon emissions, as well as cost savings on utility bills.

Buildings often represent a city's worst culprits in contributing to emissions. In New York, for example, the consumption of electricity, natural gas, fuel oil and steam needed to operate buildings generates 79 percent of the city's total carbon count.

Ira Magaziner, chairman of the Clinton Climate Initiative, said cities and private building owners would like to build and renovate with more energy efficiency, but often cannot put up the initial costs.

The partnership with Citigroup Inc., Deutsche Bank AG, JPMorgan Chase & Co., UBS AG, and ABN Amro will make that possible and benefits everyone involved, he said.

"They're going to save money, make money, create jobs and have a tremendous collective impact on climate change all at once," Clinton said in a statement.

With the money from the banks, cities will get the green technology at no cost. The program assumes that cities already have money in their budgets set aside for building operations and will pay back loans, plus interest, through the energy savings that the projects achieve over several years.

To ensure those savings are realized, Honeywell International Inc., Johnson Controls Inc., Siemens AG and American Standard Cos. Inc. will conduct energy audits of the buildings, complete the makeovers and guarantee the energy savings.

If the expected savings are not realized, those companies will pay the difference or make the changes in the buildings to achieve the savings, the foundation said.

To expedite the project, the bank paperwork and building permitting will be streamlined so that the work can begin on groups of buildings, rather than one at a time, Magaziner said. That could happen as soon as this summer.

"By bringing together cities and partnering with the private sector, President Clinton and the Clinton foundation are providing the tools to help cities achieve our goals," New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg said in a statement.

London Mayor Ken Livingstone called the agreement a "considerable breakthrough."

"This procurement alliance will make it financially feasible for cities to radically cut emissions from buildings," he said in a statement.

The other cities are Rome; Delhi, India; Karachi, Pakistan; Seoul, South Korea; Bangkok, Thailand; Melbourne, Australia; Sao Paulo, Brazil; and Johannesburg, South Africa. The foundation expects the partnership to expand to more cities and companies after the first round.

The agreement comes during the second meeting of the C40 Large Cities Climate Summit. During the first day of the summit on Tuesday, mayors and local leaders from all of the participating cities said it was up to them to take action on climate change, and that they could not afford to wait for their countries to enact national policies.

"Unfortunately, it has fallen to the mayors to do it because at the federal level in this country and other countries, they seem to be tied up," Bloomberg said.

The motivation behind the gathering is the concept that cities bear a significant responsibility to address climate change because they cover less than 1 percent of the Earth's surface but are overwhelmingly responsible for polluting it, generating 80 percent of heat-trapping greenhouse gases.

[Tri-Valley Herald, Guest Commentary, Wednesday, May 16, 2007:](#)

Step on the bike pedal - not the gas

THE designated National Bike Month and the Bay Area's Annual Bike to Work Day on Thursday provides a wonderful opportunity for local residents and those who work in San Mateo County to experience the many benefits of getting out of their cars and onto a bicycle. Bike to Work Day will allow tens of

thousands of Bay Area residents to save on their commute costs, feel the positive health effects of cycling and help preserve the environment.

One of the benefits you will find from participating in Bike to Work Day is the reduced cost of your commute. By not driving your car as a solo driver you prevent the wear and tear on your car and save money on your gas costs (Who wants to pay close to \$4 a gallon?). According to the American Automobile Association, the average cost of commuting by car for 2006 was \$7,834 per year (\$653 per month), or 52.2cents per mile based on 15,000miles of driving. Why not bike to work?

Another benefit to cycling is improved health and well-being. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 65percent of Americans are overweight or obese. In addition, the Surgeon General recommends 30minutes of moderate physical activity most days of the week. So why not incorporate bicycling into your routine? The beauty of bike commuting is that you can make it a part of your lifestyle and it can be a great way to get outdoors and enjoy your community.

Car emissions, as we all know, adversely affect our environment. Each time we step on the gas pedal we contribute to global warming. According to the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, our car emissions are the source of 75percent of the Bay Area's air pollution. More than 70percent of the 3.3million people who commute each day in the Bay Area drive alone. A short four-mile bike ride, rather than driving, keeps 15pounds of pollutants out of the air. Clearly, we have an opportunity to make a difference in reducing air pollution by driving less and using alternatives such as biking.

For those commuting to work from greater distances, consider taking public transit and utilizing your bicycle for the last mile to the office or to your destination. After the freeway collapse in the East Bay, more commuters crossed the San Mateo Bridge to avoid traffic. This caused more congestion on the county's freeways. By biking, you can avoid this.

Bike to Work Day provides you with the opportunity to use an alternative commute method as well as the chance to join those who regularly commute by bike. Volunteers at the 23 Energizer Stations throughout San Mateo County will cheer you on and provide you a tote bag with bicycle related items. Go to the Peninsula Traffic Congestion Relief Alliance's Web site, <http://www.commute.org>, for more information on Bike to Work Day and the Energizer Station locations.

Christine Maley-Grubl is executive director of the Peninsula Traffic Congestion Relief Alliance. Its mission is to reduce the number of single-occupancy vehicles traveling through San Mateo County.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Wed., May 16, 2007:](#)

Don't kill the dream of high-speed rail in state

The governor's revised budget contains woefully inadequate funding for continuing work on the proposed high-speed rail system for California, but that may not be the last word. Let's hope so.

The same thing happened last year, when the Legislature added more than \$100 million to keep crucial studies and planning alive. The governor let that money escape his blue pencil, and the project lived for another year.

The governor's budget surprised some, especially in the wake of his glowing endorsement of high-speed rail in a commentary written for The Bee and published May 4. But there were caveats in that endorsement, including the governor's insistence that a financing plan with strong private sector involvement be crafted before major state funds are committed.

That's a little curious, given that high-speed rail is the only state project that's been asked to meet such a standard. The governor has no problems committing large amounts of money for dams, for instance, despite the fact that financing mechanisms haven't been proposed. In fact, sites for dams haven't been narrowed down and necessary environmental studies haven't even been started in some cases.

With high-speed rail, by contrast, the environmental studies are done, the route is set and the stops have been chosen. All that work -- and the millions spent doing it -- could be lost if the steam runs out of the project because funding is lacking.

This may be the crucial year for high-speed rail. If the Legislature fails to give the project sufficient funds, or if the governor vetoes the money, it will likely mean the end of the high-speed dream for at least a generation. That would be a tragedy for the Valley and the state. California's freeways are a crucial element of our transportation system, and they need a great deal of work because of past neglect. But to continue building freeways indefinitely isn't the answer. We can't address 21st century transportation needs with mid-1950s vision.

[Tri-Valley Herald, Editorial, Wednesday, May 16, 2007:](#)

California bullet train belongs on back burner

FOR THOSE of you waiting at the station for the bullet train to arrive, well, your trip appears delayed.

Then again, maybe not.

Reading Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger on this issue is like a game of red-light, green-light.

At first, Schwarzenegger signaled his skepticism about high-speed rail, which he should've done when he asked the Legislature in his 2007 budget to slash money for the California High Speed Rail Authority, the group putting the bullet train proposal together. Schwarzenegger also asked lawmakers to essentially pull the plug on a \$9.95 billion rail bond issue scheduled to appear on the November 2008 ballot.

Now Schwarzenegger has jumped in the conductor's chair and changed routes. In a recent op-ed column, the governor talked about the virtues of a bullet train, how it could relieve freeway congestion, [improve air quality](#) and create greater mobility.

State lawmakers, meanwhile, visited France in April to see a passenger train set a world rail speed record of 357 mph. That might've been impressive for them, but the gesture was premature for California taxpayers. Perhaps lawmakers forgot - and Schwarzenegger, too - that it's going to take \$40 billion to put this dream together - a nightmare for any state budget.

State Sen. Dean Florez, a San Joaquin Valley Democrat, originally called out the governor on the bullet train project, accusing Schwarzenegger of not being up-front about his stance on the high-speed train. Florez's district stands to benefit greatly from this project, and Schwarzenegger caved.

The authority already has spent more than \$40 million, and it has taken more than a decade just to plan the rail line. And, the bond issue the authority pitched would cover only a quarter of the cost - where's the rest of the money coming from?

The bullet train, at this point, is a novel idea but not one we are depending on. It's not as urgent as a new span for the Bay Bridge or other infrastructure projects that need immediate attention. We're not even convinced that the cost of a bullet train is in our best interest. Florez sees a windfall of jobs in his district, but there's no concrete evidence that will materialize.

It takes foresight to find innovative ideas. If a significant part of the cost can be covered, high-speed rail could gain some steam in California. We suggest a public-private partnership - how about hitting up some firms in Silicon Valley? Some might want to pay to put their name on the train. How does the Google Line or the Oracle Bullet sound?

California has an abundance of higher priorities. Forty billion dollars is quite an investment, and the cost will only rise in the future. Put the bullet train on the back burner until the funding is there, and a solid plan is in place.

[Fresno Bee commentary, Wed., May 16, 2007:](#)

JAY AMBROSE: Global-warming oppressors have it wrong

On the "The News Hour with Jim Lehrer" recently, a global-warming expert was discussing how cap-and-trade agreements might work, and while she was perfectly pleasant, there was something in her cool, technocratic description that made me feel I might be glimpsing a terribly oppressive future.

The scheme she spoke of is often presented as a free-market means of curtailing fossil-fuel consumption, but listen carefully and you realize it would instead be a vast bureaucratic arrangement controlling significant operations of whole industries.

In setting the terms for some businesses to sell a portion of their allotment of gas emissions to other businesses, it would amount to an unrelenting regulatory regimen.

It's only part of what we might face in a world whose leaders are increasingly in agreement that our planet is doomed if we don't reduce the release of greenhouse gases -- mainly carbon dioxide -- into the atmosphere. To thwart the coming apocalypse, many seem prepared to institute restrictions affecting virtually every aspect of our lives while seriously risking the productivity of modern, relatively undirected economies that have done so incredibly much in alleviating human misery.

Among those signing up for this mission are a majority of our Supreme Court justices, who recently ruled that greenhouse gases are pollutants under the law -- they aren't -- and that the Environmental

Protection Agency must therefore regulate them or explain why not in terms the court finds acceptable. To legitimize one aspect of this ruling, the court had to say a failure by the agency to lower tailpipe emissions of these gases could result in damaging rises of sea levels.

It's a laughable, absurd proposition with no more scientific backing than the existence of unicorns.

But because of that decision, President Bush had to do something, and so he recently announced that he was ordering four federal agencies to study ways to cut greenhouse-gas emissions from motor vehicles and to have a plan ready by the end of 2008, as his term concludes. In other words, as his Democratic opponents correctly concluded, all he has come up with is fancy footwork signifying nothing on his watch.

What they incorrectly concluded is that this is bad. It's bad only if you applaud rules that achieve nothing but higher costs for consumers.

The Democrats themselves are becoming so eager to have other issues revolve around the issue of warming that some in the House are even planning to use a portion of intelligence funds for study of the phenomenon, rerouting them from such mundane purposes as spying on terrorists. If the party captures the White House in '08 while also extending its power in Congress, watch for cap-and-trade regulations and a host of other coercive interventions intended to mark America as a leader in the fight against global warming.

Even if you buy the idea of a preventable, human-induced catastrophe headed our way, there are better answers, such as a straightforward, simple carbon tax, or looking to voluntary actions and technological innovations while plowing billions into research, as Bush has done. We can help solve other problems with some such moves, such as making the country less dependent on outside energy sources, and they work. A report from the Congressional Budget Office has said a tax could be more effective than regulation, and the Bush administration, it's worth noting, has reduced the rate of greenhouse-gas emissions more than some of the European signatories of the Kyoto accords.

Meanwhile, there are those who argue that while Earth is indeed warming, there is no direct evidence that greenhouse gases are primarily responsible. Solar activity is the major factor, contend some scientists, who add that climatology cannot begin to take account of all the variables, making it impossible to predict what happens next. One theory is that we are at the tail end of a solar cycle and will soon be cooling off, a possibility that brings me to a final, irritating thought.

Suppose natural causes do in fact usher in cooler weather around the world, but that the alarmists were first able to put all their unnecessary impositions in place. As chillier days dawn, they will be like the fabled rooster that crows and watches the sun rise and supposes himself responsible.

[Modesto Bee, Letter to the editor, Wednesday, May 16, 2007:](#)

Can't use fireplace -- what next?

I just paid a fine in May for using my fireplace on Jan. 24. My fireplace is my company when I'm alone; I crochet and knit by it. I check the paper every day to see if I can use it.

I recycle, I water certain days and have my car tested and smogged. This is what I do for the environment. It breaks my heart when I can't use my fireplace, which helps reduce my \$300 PG&E bill. What will be taken away next?

BONNIE OLSON, Modesto

[Lodi News Sentinel, Letter to the Editor, Tuesday, May 15, 2007:](#)

Documentary shouldn't be dismissed as silly

I'm writing to comment on an article from the editorial section entitled, "'An Inconvenient Truth,' showing was a silly although minor lapse of judgment," dated March 31, 2007.

I know this goes back some five weeks ago, but the issue of global warming still remains. Global warming did not go away because the editor wishes it would or thinks it silly to educate the public about the causes and consequences of global warming.

Scientists from around the world and from different disciplines have been discussing global warming long before Al Gore made his documentary. If you don't like the politics of Al Gore or the Democratic party, that's one thing. But if you dismiss "An Inconvenient Truth" as a silly although minor lapse of judgment for showing it at our public library, then you are missing the point of the film and are being a disservice to the community.

Global warming is upon us just as air, land and water pollution is upon us. Global warming is a result of air pollution and our excessive use of energy from oil and coal, for transportation and electric energy.

We need to use alternative forms of energy. All people in the world need to conserve precious resources and care more about the environment and each other.

John Minnehan, Lodi

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses Southern California Association of Governments vote to urge President Bush and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger to declare a state of emergency in the region. For more information, contact Maricela \(559\) 230-5849.](#)

Reafirman emergencia por contaminación, gobiernos en el sur de California

Noticiero Latino, Fresno, CA

Radio Bilingüe, Wednesday, May 16, 2007

La Asociación de Gobiernos del Sur de California reitera que la región vive una emergencia por la contaminación, aun si el gobernador, Arnold Schwarzenegger o el gobierno federal permanecen sin declararla.

El presidente ejecutivo de la asociación, Mark Pisano dijo que el 80 por ciento de las emisiones de contaminantes están bajo control del gobierno federal, y que el deterioro del aire contribuye a más de cinco mil 400 muertes prematuras al año en el estado.

La referida asociación pidió la semana pasada una declaración de emergencia luego de presentar un reporte anual.

El análisis dice que cientos de barcos, miles de camiones y decenas de trenes que contaminan la región, desde los puertos de Long Beach y Los Ángeles, abaratan mercancías para los estadounidenses, pero el sur de California paga las consecuencias con su salud.