

## 'Spare the Air' effort spotlights high-ozone days

By Jed Chernabaeff, Staff writer

Visalia Times-Delta, Wednesday, June 6, 2007

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District hopes Tulare County residents leave their cars at home and stop using gas-powered machinery and lighter fluid on certain days this summer.

Those are some of the actions the air district is asking residents to take during Spare the Air season, a campaign that begins this week and ends in September.

The campaign's goal is to reduce levels of lung-damaging ozone, which soar in the summer heat.

Ozone, a key component of smog, is produced when vehicle exhaust and other components combine in the atmosphere at high temperatures.

To reduce ozone, local businesses, school districts and government agencies in the eight-county San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District are participating in the voluntary program. Eighty of those entities are in Tulare County.

The program works by allowing employers to be alerted when the Valley air district forecasts a Spare the Air Day, a day when air quality is deemed unhealthy.

Employers can then encourage their employees to use air-friendly alternatives such as riding a bike or carpooling to work instead of driving.

Last year in Tulare County, the air district called 23 Spare the Air days. In 2005, there were 18.

From Visalia to Tulare, residents say they try to do their part to help out during a Spare the Air Day.

Byron Almachar of Tulare, assistant manager at Visalia Cyclery, said he and other co-workers leave their cars at home when spring and summer come around and cycle in from as far as Oak Ranch in northeast Visalia and Exeter. Visalia Cyclery is signed up as a Spare the Air participant.

"We only get to ride our bikes at least once a week during the winter," Almachar said. "We try to do our part."

Aside from riding bikes to work, other businesses encourage employees to carpool.

Angela Bouma, spokeswoman for the Kaweah Delta Health Care District, said an incentive program is used to get employees to car pool and cycle to work.

"We have a healthy mix of both," Bouma said. "We have our usuals who do one or the other."

Other entities prefer that their employees take the bus.

Mike Miller, a senior civil engineer for the city of Tulare, said the city encourages employees to carpool, but public transportation is also encouraged.

Miller said the city held a Dare to Spare Day in May. The day offered free fixed-route transit to everybody in the community.

"We make sure our employees are aware that it's a Spare the Air Day," Miller said.

While the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is asking residents to comply with certain guidelines, it has placed restrictions on other businesses that contribute to poor air quality.

San Joaquin Valley farmers will have to deal with tighter restrictions for burning orchard debris.

Valley air district officials voted to prohibit most, but not all, burning of orchard removals - including branches or uprooted trees - starting June 1.

Farmers must turn to alternatives such as chipping or mulching.

The new ruling is expected to eliminate about 2,400 tons of particulate emissions in the Valley each year.

Orchard removals represent about 50 percent of all agricultural burning in the Valley, according to the air district.

State law mandates the phasing out of agricultural burning, but the rule adopted Thursday allows for exceptions in situations where alternatives to burning don't exist.

Air-sparing tips

- Bring your lunch to work.
- Run errands in groups, not just one at a time.
- Use electric rather than gas-powered lawn-care equipment.
- Use an electric briquette lighter instead of lighter fluid to light your grill.
- Keep your car tuned up and running efficiently.
- Air information: (800)766-4463 or [www.valleyair.org](http://www.valleyair.org).
- An index forecasting air quality can be found each day on Page 2A.

### **Spare the Air days begin today**

Hanford Sentinel, Tuesday, June 5, 2007

A voluntary summertime campaign to cut air pollution begins today in the San Joaquin Valley.

Called "Spare the Air," the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District program asks people to cut pollution-generating activities on high smog days throughout the summer months.

People are asked to do the following:

- Share a ride, vanpool or take mass transit instead of driving alone.
- Postpone the use of gas-powered lawn mowers, blowers and other equipment.
- Use an electric lighter instead of fluid to ignite charcoal briquettes.
- Keep the car well-tuned.

When the district forecasts a Spare the Air Day, it sends notice to employers who have registered with the program. They, in turn, notify their employees and encourage them to adopt air-friendly behaviors that will help reduce pollution levels.

Despite years of air quality improvement efforts, the Valley is still one of the nation's worst smog areas.

For more information, log onto [www.valleyair.org](http://www.valleyair.org) or call 230-6000.

### **High winds provoke health warning**

Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, June 6, 2007

Pollution spurred by high winds throughout the San Joaquin Valley can cause serious health problems, according to a health warning today by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Residents in the the valley portion of Kern, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings and Tulare counties and are advised to use caution through Wednesday morning.

"Strong northwesterly winds with localized areas of blowing dust can create unhealthy concentrations of particulate matter," district meteorologist Shawn Ferreria said in a written statement.

Exposure to particle pollution can aggravate lung cancer, cause asthma attacks and acute bronchitis and increase risk of respiratory problems, according to the district.

People with heart or lung diseases should follow their doctors' advice for dealing with unhealthy air, said the district.

## **Winds prompt air district to issue pollution warning**

Staff reports

Visalia Times-Delta, Tuesday, June 5, 2007

Gusting winds across the Central Valley have prompted the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to issue a health warning due to the rising levels of particulate matter in the air.

The air district's cautionary statement warns that residents in the entire San Joaquin Valley air basin will experience elevated particulate-matter air pollution levels through tonight into Wednesday morning.

The winds are the result of a late-season storm moving in across the Pacific Ocean today, according to the National Weather Service in Hanford.

Winds are expected to dwindle throughout the day Wednesday, and temperatures and winds should return to seasonal norms by the weekend, according to Jim Bagnall, meteorologist with the National Weather Service.

## **Wind to affect asthma sufferers**

By Nick McClellan, Staff writer

Visalia Times-Delta, Wednesday, June 6, 2007

The breezy weather that swept into the Valley on Tuesday should begin to move out of the area later today, but not before causing trouble for Valley residents at higher risk of respiratory illness.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issued a health warning spanning Tuesday evening into this morning because of elevated particulate matter swept up by the gusty weather. Tuesday's warning covers the entire San Joaquin Valley air basin.

Exposure to particle pollution can be hazardous for asthma sufferers and can aggravate existing lung diseases and cause acute bronchitis. The air quality forecast for Tulare County today is 50, a good rating.

The National Weather Service in Hanford said seasonal winds and temperature highs in the low- to mid-90s should return by this weekend.

The sudden weather shift was caused by an unusual late-winter storm moving off of the Pacific, said Jim Bagnall, meteorologist with the National Weather Service.

"[It's] not typical in early summer," Bagnall said, but "it does happen occasionally."

The system is not expected to bring any rain to the Valley, but higher elevations could experience a few showers, Bagnall said.

Gusty winds should not be as troublesome as they were Tuesday, but Bagnall said wind gusts up to 10 to 20 miles per hour were expected for today.

Dust storms caused by the weather are not expected to be an issue today, Bagnall said.

## **High winds prompt air health advisory**

Modesto Bee, Wednesday, June 6, 2007

Air pollution officials issued a health warning Tuesday after high winds blew throughout the Northern San Joaquin Valley. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issued a "cautionary statement," which is in effect through this morning, after its monitoring station recorded elevated levels of particulate matter in the air. District officials advise those with heart or lung diseases, older people and children to avoid prolonged exposure, strenuous activities and

heavy exertion. The National Weather Service expects windy conditions to continue through this afternoon, with highs in the 70s.

## **Pelosi scuttles warming challenge**

### **Dems' plan would have blocked state's greenhouse limits**

Zachary Coile, Chronicle Washington Bureau

S.F. Chronicle, Wednesday, June 6, 2007

Washington -- House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, responding to pressure from California officials and environmentalists, has slapped down a new proposal by top House Democrats that would have wiped out California's ability to regulate greenhouse gases from cars and trucks.

In a brief but pointed statement Tuesday night, the San Francisco Democrat said, "Any proposal that affects California's landmark efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions or eliminates the EPA's authority to regulate greenhouse gas emissions will not have my support."

Her message was a shot at two House Democrats -- Rep. Rick Boucher, D-Va., and Rep. John Dingell, D-Mich., both leaders on the House Energy and Commerce Committee who have been crafting new energy legislation that would have thwarted the state's ability to set tougher-than-federal standards to cut vehicle emissions.

Her opposition means the proposal will never make it to the House floor.

California officials and environmentalists were outraged at the provision, first reported in The Chronicle on Tuesday, which would have blocked California and 11 other states from implementing laws requiring automakers to cut greenhouse gases. The bill would have specifically barred the Environmental Protection Agency from granting the states waivers to put their vehicle emissions rules into effect.

Frank O'Donnell, president of the environmental group Clean Air Watch, said the draft legislation "looks as if it could have been written in the boardroom of General Motors." California is battling in court in three states against an effort by the automakers to have the state's tough vehicle emissions limits overturned.

Pelosi's staff on Monday indicated that the speaker planned to watch the bill as it moved through committee. But the speaker came under intense pressure from environmentalists and state officials to send a stronger signal that she opposed the idea.

California Assembly Speaker Fabian Núñez, D-Los Angeles, fired off a letter to Pelosi on Tuesday saying, "Congress should not trample on California's efforts to reduce greenhouse gases. We strongly urge you to reject the efforts of those who would pre-empt California's efforts."

Even Pelosi's close friend, California Democratic Sen. Barbara Boxer, who chairs the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee and is drafting her own climate legislation, issued a statement suggesting that the speaker should -- and would -- stop the bill in its tracks.

"I am sure that Speaker Pelosi will weigh in and make this bill a step forward, rather than a step backward, on global warming," Boxer said. "Under no circumstance should any state be overridden when their environmental laws are stronger than the federal government."

Environmentalists objected to another portion of the "draft discussion" bill, which would have limited the power of the EPA to regulate greenhouse gases from vehicles, instead vesting that authority in the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, which sets federal fuel economy standards.

Rep. Edward Markey, D-Mass., the chairman of the House Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming, said the proposal appeared to contradict the Supreme Court's ruling in April that the Environmental Protection Agency has the authority and must regulate vehicle emissions as air pollutants.

"I am very concerned about preempting the rights of states to set strong standards to save energy and reduce global warming pollution and even more concerned that this legislation nullifies the recent Supreme Court ruling in Massachusetts vs. EPA," he said.

Markey also complained that the draft bill's proposed increases in federal fuel economy standards -- to 36 miles per gallon for cars by 2021 and 30 miles per gallon for light trucks by 2024 -- were weaker than President Bush's recent proposal.

"If we aren't careful, we could end up making our situation worse, not better," Markey said.

Boucher's staff could not be reached late Tuesday about Pelosi's comments.

But the Virginia congressman said, in a memo posted on the committee's Web site Friday, that the legislation "takes initial steps to address greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector and moves toward an eventual economy-wide greenhouse gas control program."

Environmentalists also raised questions about the draft bill's provisions to subsidize coal-to-liquid fuels, which emit about twice as much greenhouse gases as traditional petroleum-based fuels, unless the emissions can be captured and stored underground -- a new technology still in its infancy.

Núñez, who co-authored legislation to limit greenhouse gases emissions across California's economy, praised Pelosi for stopping the effort to kill the state's climate change regulations before EPA has had a chance to rule on the state's request for a waiver.

"Speaker Pelosi has shown she's not about to trade California's gold standard for a lump of coal," he said.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, speaking to the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce Tuesday afternoon, didn't mention the draft bill, although aides said he might make a statement today. But he told the crowd that on climate change, "The federal government has been asleep at the wheel."

## **Port drivers steer toward clean-truck program**

**'On this issue, we stand with the authorities,' one worker says of the push to curb pollution.**

By Louis Sahagun and Ronald D. White, Times Staff Writers  
L.A. Times, Wednesday, June 6, 2007

About 300 drivers of the dirtiest and oldest trucks serving the Los Angeles-Long Beach port complex gathered in Wilmington on Tuesday to support a program that would impose stricter pollution standards on harbor vehicles.

Port authorities and environmentalists were encouraged by the strong show of support for the program, part of a plan designed to cut air pollution 80% within five years by allowing only newer, low-emission diesel trucks to work the ports.

"It's a surprising turnout," said Rafael Pizarro of Coalition for Clean Air, an advocacy group. "You don't see this many truck drivers agree on anything outside of a strike."

Many of the mostly immigrant, Spanish-speaking independent drivers who filled an auditorium at Banning's Landing stepped up to a lectern and personally urged a joint panel of Long Beach and Los Angeles port commissioners to approve the program.

The proposed clean-truck program is part of the Clean Air Action Plan, which was approved in November. The program would scrap and replace the oldest trucks, and retrofit the others, with the assistance of a port-sponsored grant subsidy.

Among the speakers was Edgar Sanchez, 48, of Long Beach who said he could not afford to clean up his rig without a subsidy. Sanchez, who is among the area's 16,000 mostly low-income drivers who service the ports, said he was emboldened to speak his mind on the issue by the widespread support the program has received from environmentalists, religious workers, business coalitions and political leaders.

"Before we didn't have the courage or the confidence to tell people how we feel out of fear we'd be fired or labeled as troublemakers," Sanchez said.

"Not anymore. We see the smoke pouring out of our trucks and we breathe it all day, every day," he said. "But we also work long hours at minimum rates. We can be fired at any moment, like slaves without a voice."

Sanchez added, "Now we have the guts and the anger to say that on this issue, we stand with the authorities."

Maria Agamenon of Long Beach, 45, spoke on behalf of her husband, Raul, a port driver of 23 years who earns roughly \$7 an hour, and their three children, two of whom have asthma.

"It's sad to see how my husband is mistreated; I cry with him," she said. "He can't breathe at night. Sometimes he shares the respirator we bought for the children."

The San Pedro Bay ports spew more soot and smog than half a million cars, a refinery and a power plant combined, port authorities said. Port trucks produce 30% to 40% of that pollution, which has been linked to higher risks of cancer, bronchitis and other respiratory ailments.

Jose Rayo, 43, who has worked the port for two decades, blamed much of the area's pollution on inefficiency, which forces drivers to spend hours waiting — with engines idling — to transfer loads. Rayo, a Los Angeles resident, was among a small number of critics of the program who worried that it would "sweep away the small businessman."

"The plan opens the doors for the big trucking outfits to monopolize the port business, but who's to say they will pay fair wages?" Rayo said. "If it doesn't work out, we'll have to fight it with lawsuits."

A week ago, the California Trucking Assn., which claims 2,300 members and about 250,000 trucks across the state, said that the ports lacked the authority "to completely change our industry" as the program could.

"The California Trucking Assn. does support the objective of cleaner air and would like to see reductions in pollutions and the greening of our side of the supply, but there are two problems with this plan," said Patty Senecal, vice president of sales and marketing for Transport Express of Rancho Dominguez, who spoke on behalf of the association. "We question the legality and the constitutionality of it."

The association questioned the program's constitutionality, saying that it would illegally supercede interstate commerce laws. The group also said it was unfair to single out port trucks. Studies have shown that the average age of a California cargo truck is 12.2 years, or just seven

months younger than a port truck.

But German Merino, 53, said that his 1996 Freightliner Condo, which has several hundred thousand miles on it, was a heavy polluter. "I smell the oil burning and the diesel all day, and I work 14 to 16 hours a day," the Bellflower resident said. "For 23 years I have been part of this awful system. It has to change."

## **China Expects Pollution to Improve Soon**

By ANITA CHANG, Associated Press Writer

In the S.F. Chronicle, N.Y. Times and other papers, Wednesday, June 6, 2007

BEIJING, China (AP) -- China should see a "turning point" this year in its fight against pollution and will likely meet its clean air and water goals in coming years, an environmental official said Tuesday in an unusually optimistic assessment.

Zhang Lijun, vice minister of the State Environmental Protection Administration, said that while the amount of ammonia and nitrates in waterways increased in 2006 and overall air quality declined, pollution control facilities and stepped-up enforcement would have an impact.

"It is true that last year the total pollutants discharged was still rising," Zhang said. But he pointed out that the increase in the amount of pollutants in 2006 was smaller than the increase in the previous year.

"I'm confident that in this year, the total pollutants discharged will come to a turning point," Zhang said, adding he expected a decrease in the amount of pollutants discharged, although he did not provide a specific figure.

China has some of the world's most polluted cities after more than two decades of high-speed economic growth. While the country's communist leaders have repeatedly promised a cleanup, they say they are constrained by the rapidly expanding economy and a lack of technology.

Last month, Zhang's agency reported that China's environmental situation was deteriorating, with several major rivers and lakes clogged by industrial waste. In February, it said China had failed to reach any of its pollution control goals for 2006 as the economy picked up speed.

The reduction goals last year were part of an eight-step plan to cut emission of major pollutants by 10 percent in the five-year period ending in 2010, but Zhang said he was "confident" the targets would still be met.

The measures include phasing out facilities or technologies that are heavy polluters or energy consumers, speeding up the establishment of pollution control facilities, and strengthening supervision and enforcement of environmental laws.

He pointed to first-quarter data reported by local authorities that showed sulfur dioxide emissions were down 0.3 percent this year. Though chemical oxygen demand, a water pollution index, had grown 0.4 percent, Zhang said further adjustments to high-polluting industries would reduce both levels.

Zhang's comments were specifically about two substances where things may be getting better, but overall the situation has not improved, Ailun Wang with Greenpeace China said in a telephone interview.

The amount of sulfur dioxide going into the air is decreasing with enforcement of pollution control policy and because inefficient coal power plants are being closed. But carbon dioxide — the major culprit in global warming — remains a big problem, Ailun said.

"They (the government) are making substantial efforts to tackle environmental issues and they should be acknowledged for that. But there is still a long way to go," she said.

On Monday, Beijing also unveiled a program outlining steps it would take to meet its goal of boosting overall energy efficiency in 2010 by 20 percent over 2005's level. Two-thirds of China's electricity is generated by burning coal — one of the most polluting fuels.

Yvo de Boer, the U.N.'s top climate official, said Tuesday that China's plan to improve efficiency in its notoriously dirty energy sector is a positive move, despite the fact it does not include any concrete steps it will take to reduce emissions.

"It really is an indication that the Chinese government sees acting on climate change as being part of a larger development agenda," he said.

### **Kern County tries new way to keep dust pollution down**

The Associated Press

Sacramento Bee, Monday, June 4, 2007

BAKERSFIELD, Calif. -- Officials hope to use an enzyme-and-water solution to reduce Kern County's dust pollution and save taxpayers the cost of paving miles of road.

This summer, the county will try the mixture on the shoulder of roads, which are one of the largest sources of particulate matter pollution, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The county is required to pave the shoulders on half of its urban roads and 25 percent of its rural roads by 2010 under an air regulation. That would cost about \$60 million - money the county doesn't have, officials said.

It costs about \$125,000 to pave a mile of road versus \$10,000 per mile for the enzyme-and-water solution, said Andy Richter, a maintenance engineer with the roads department.

The mixture, which helps bind dirt and forms a hard surface, seems durable enough to withstand breaking and cracking when driven on, but more testing will be done this summer, he said.

Most communities in the San Joaquin Valley struggle with particulate matter, which is made up of tiny particles of dust, ash and soot less than the width of a human hair and can cause respiratory problems, heart attacks and lung cancer.

Officials in Merced, Kings, Tulare and Fresno counties also said they don't have the funds to pave all their road shoulders, Richter said.

### **Ethanol lawsuit is threatened**

**Full environmental review demanded for Keyes site**

By MICHAEL G. MOONEY

Modesto Bee, Wednesday, June 6, 2007

They're not opposed to ethanol, just the way Stanislaus County has "fast-tracked" a proposal to build an ethanol plant in Keyes.

After failing Tuesday to persuade supervisors to slow the process, attorney Richard Harriman, who represents Valley Advocates, said the group would sue.

Harriman said a lawsuit, if successful, would force the county to thoroughly examine the project's potential environmental effects.

"Staff did an excellent job," Harriman said. "But we have an honest difference of opinion on what the law requires. We'll let the court decide it."

He made the comment after supervisors unanimously denied an appeal of an earlier Stanislaus County Planning Commission decision. That appeal was filed by Harriman on behalf of Valley Advocates.

Unless a court intervenes, the board's action Tuesday keeps the project moving forward.

The proposal by Cilion Inc. and A.L. Gilbert envisions a manufacturing plant capable of producing as much as 55 million gallons of ethanol a year. It would be built next to A.L. Gilbert's grain mill at Jessup Road and Highway 99.

Ethanol is derived from corn and blended with gasoline to reduce toxic emissions spewing from the tailpipes of automobiles, trucks and buses.

Under the plan, corn would be shipped by rail to the Cilion-Gilbert plant, where it would be milled, fermented and distilled into ethanol for use in gasoline.

The remaining corn pulp, known as "wet distiller's grain," would be sold by A.L. Gilbert for cattle feed.

Harriman raised a number of objections related to the county's decision to allow the project to proceed without filing a "focused" environmental impact report, including concerns over air and water pollution, and traffic safety and congestion.

The new plant would process 571,000 tons of corn a year, producing 55 million gallons of ethanol and 306,000 tons of wet distiller's grain in the process.

Harriman said other companies also plan to build ethanol plants in California and are willing to conduct full-scale environmental reviews.

"That's all we want here," he said.

Kirk Ford, the county's assistant planning director, and other county officials have said there was no need to do a formal environmental review because the property on Jessup Road already is zoned for industry.

Ford led the staff presentation at Tuesday morning's board meeting.

As for potential traffic issues, county officials have said studies were done in 1998 as part of the Keyes Community Plan update.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, meanwhile, has found no significant effects that could not be reduced to acceptable levels.

During the earlier planning commission hearing, Harriman argued that the air district standard was too lax with an emissions threshold of 10 tons of nitrogen oxides per year.

Harriman, at that time, said the standard should be zero, given the county's status of extreme noncompliance with air quality standards for ozone, a key component of smog.

Valley Advocates has filed a lawsuit against the air district in Fresno County Superior Court, raising the same issues. The court set an Oct. 5 hearing.

While conceding the ethanol plant may be a good idea, Harriman said he was worried about the precedent that would be set should Stanislaus County prevail.

"They need to conduct a proper environmental review," he said. "They need to follow the law."

Cilion was formed last year as a partnership between Western Milling, a large California grain milling company, and Khosla Ventures, a venture capital firm.

The company is based in Goshen and has plans to build eight ethanol plants nationwide, including at least three in California.

Oakdale-based A.L. Gilbert makes feed for dairy cattle, poultry and other animals at its grain mills. It was founded 115 years ago and still is family-owned.

[S.F. Chronicle editorial, Wednesday, June 6, 2007:](#)

### **An energy plan full of smoke**

IT STRAINS reality -- even the reality of Washington politics -- to think that some Democrats would attempt to float an energy bill that would derail global-warming controls or higher mileage standards.

Yet a congressional panel -- dominated by smokestack-state Democrats -- is headed in this wrong-way direction. An early-stage portion of the party's energy bill would roll back a series of climate-control measures in ways usually favored by the White House.

The ingredient catching the most fire would bar smog-choked states from setting tougher tailpipe emission rules than the federal norm. A total of 12 states, including California, are lined up for such waivers, which carry a powerful message to Detroit to build cleaner-burning vehicles. For two years, California has fought the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for the right to set its own pollution standards.

This statehouse rebellion against lax Washington clean-air enforcement is a major issue with environmentalists, state agencies and politicians, including some Republicans such as Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

The proposals from the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee contains another curious feature. It proposes an increase in mileage requirements, but the figure is lower than many Democrats want. The suggested change moves the needle from the current 27.5 miles per gallon to 35 by 2021, a more modest change than Democrats favor.

The suggestions are coming from a panel run by Rep. Rick Boucher, whose Virginia district is in coal country. Also connected to the plans is Rep. John Dingell, a Michigan veteran and auto industry supporter.

The ideas aren't likely to go anywhere because most Democrats, including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, oppose them. But the outmoded thinking could still become a bargaining chip or a way of watering down the genuine need to overhaul energy policy.

With Democrats in charge of Congress, it's time for a genuine energy bill that will cut emissions and produce more efficient cars and trucks. Anything less just won't do.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Wednesday, June 6, 2007:](#)

### **High-speed vision**

#### **Bipartisan congressional support of rail proposal is gratifying.**

A majority of California's congressional delegation went on record Monday in support of the high-speed rail system proposed for the state. Such strong backing from this bipartisan group is a gratifying signal that the high-speed system has friends in Washington -- where much of the funding must come from.

Two-thirds of the state's representatives signed a letter to Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger asking for 10 times the funding the governor has proposed in this year's state budget for planning the system.

Schwarzenegger asked for a little more than \$5 million; the Congress members want to see at least \$50 million spent this year.

The difference is important. Much work has already been done -- and \$30 million spent -- on preliminary planning for high-speed rail. Environmental and engineering work must proceed apace, or it risks being rendered moot by delay. Schwarzenegger's puny request would barely be enough to keep the offices of the state's High Speed Rail Authority open; it wouldn't fund much actual progress.

The Legislature has shown signs it understands, and is likely to approve much more than the governor requested. Then it will be up to Schwarzenegger -- who wrote of his passionate support for high-speed rail in a recent commentary for *The Bee* -- to put his signature where his sentiments lie on the funding for high-speed rail.

Then it's time to begin beating the drums for the \$9.9 billion bond measure on the November 2008 ballot. Passage of that funding would allow actual construction to begin.

This is a crucial time for California, and the high-speed rail proposal will be a telling measure of the courage and vision of leaders and citizens alike. Its construction would address a host of environmental and economic problems, but perhaps more important, it would signal to the world that the Golden State, tarnished by neglect for so many years, is polishing its future and means to shine brightly once more.

[Sacramento Bee Editorial, Wednesday, June 6, 2007](#)

### **Editorial: Clean up contractors State can have public works, purer air, too**

Over the next 20 years, Californians will see increased levels of construction activity because of the \$42.7 billion in infrastructure bonds that voters approved in November.

Get ready to see fleets of bulldozers, cranes and earthmovers doing the gritty work of upgrading the state's transportation network, improving levees and building schools.

That's fine. People and workers near these construction sites can put up with a little dust and inconvenience to help improve the state's public works. But they shouldn't have to breathe clouds of toxic diesel soot from this equipment -- especially when contractors have access to technology that can reduce pollution.

This week in Sacramento, lawmakers and the Schwarzenegger administration are fighting over the diesel pollution that could waft from infrastructure spending.

In its budget bill, the Senate has proposed that all contractors receiving funds from the infrastructure bonds use diesel-particulate-matter filter devices on their older equipment. According to testimony provided to the Senate, such filters cost about \$7,000 to \$20,000 per piece of equipment. Studies show they can eliminate 85 percent of diesel soot -- highly toxic particulates that, when inhaled, lodge deep in the lungs and are particularly dangerous for children and the elderly.

The Senate proposal offers both exemptions and incentives to deal with the state's mix of large and small construction firms. The proposal exempts contractors who can demonstrate, to the satisfaction of the California Air Resources Board, that available filters are incompatible with their equipment.

The bill also adds \$20 million to the existing "Carl Moyer" program to retrofit diesel trucks and construction equipment. The extra money would help small contractors offset the cost of installing filters.

Even with those concessions, the construction industry and some of its friends in the administration are fighting the Senate proposal. Officials with Caltrans and the Business, Transportation and Housing Agency say the measure could limit the contractors eligible to bid on the bond projects, and drive up costs.

There's no doubt that cleaner air comes with a price, but clouds of diesel pollution are also costly. The Air Resources Board says uncontrolled diesel soot adds to premature deaths and ailments that cost billions of dollars.

Ballot arguments for Proposition 1B -- the \$19.9 billion transportation and congestion bond that voters approved in November -- promised that the measure would "reduce air pollution and improve air quality."

If lawmakers don't adopt the Senate language, they will break their promise to voters and ignore some of the most valuable infrastructure in California -- the health of 37 million residents.

[Bakersfield Californian, Commentary, Wednesday, June 6, 2007:](#)

### **Driver converts old car into a fry-brid**

BY ROBERT PRICE, Californian columnist

That smell isn't hot tempura. It's Richard Malicdem's social conscience.

Richard Malicdem's '83 Mercedes runs on used cooking oil, and it gets the same mileage as any older diesel-engine Mercedes. His "veggiemobile" seems to run fine - even if it smells vaguely like old french fries.

Yes, a ride in the front seat of Malicdem's 24-year-old Mercedes Benz might conjure up visions of the luncheon special at Tokyo Garden, but he's not driving a catering truck.

He's driving a statement.

Malicdem, a Bakersfield real estate agent and data processing analyst, is the proud owner of a veggiemobile -- a diesel-engine vehicle converted to run on used cooking oil. On either or both fuels, actually.

While you're at the gas pump, filling up on \$3.70-a-gallon fuel, he's out in back of the neighborhood Thai restaurant, humming the theme song from "Veggie Tales" as he pumps a different sort of crude oil from the kitchen's rendering bin into a plastic container. Miles per gallon: about the same as a regular diesel sedan. Price per gallon: zilch.

Well, until you factor in the start-up costs. Malicdem (pronounced muh-LICK-dim) bought a conversion kit for about \$850 and installed it himself in his chocolate-brown 1983 Mercedes Benz 300 D. He had to obtain special insurance to protect the restaurants that allow him to take their oil, and a special state license. The tax man still has his number, too: He's liable for 18 cents a gallon in state fees, presumably on the honor system. All told, he figures it'll take a couple of years for the system to pay for itself. But then he didn't do it to save money.

"I wanted to do something for the environment," says Malicdem, a 34-year-old Illinois native. "This produces absolutely no sulphur. It's considered carbon dioxide neutral. And it sends fewer particulates into the air" than gasoline- and diesel-powered vehicles.

Fine, but doesn't that make him the only soprano in a chorus of environmental baritones? If almost everybody else is using gasoline and other fossil fuels, how much impact can his wonton express have?

"It doesn't matter," said Malicdem, who believes his Mercedes is actually one of three or four veggiemobiles operating in Bakersfield. "At least I'm doing my part. We're the types to recycle everything anyway. There's basically one or two small bags of garbage in our can at the end of the week. Everything else is separated out."

You've got to have that sort of patience to operate a veggiemobile. Malicdem, who's married to Cal State Bakersfield religious studies assistant professor Liora Gubkin, first gathers a few gallons of used oil from one of a couple of Asian restaurants he frequents anyway.

He takes the oil home and pours it into a storage drum, where it sits for about two weeks, its contents heating, settling and separating. After removing the sediment and unusable liquids from the bottom, he pours the contents through a 25-micron filter, followed later by a 5-micron filter and eventually a 2-micron filter. Can't have any chicken bones in the fuel line.

"The convenience factor is not there," he admits. "I spend hours on this stuff. You give up all the trunk space in your car (for the oil collection and fuel tanks) and then there's all the drums at home. A person who lives in an apartment complex is going have a hard time doing this."

He's only been running his car on cooking oil for a couple of months, so he doesn't have the battle wounds just yet, but he knows what to watch out for.

"You can get salt in your lines if you don't filter properly," he says. "You can get water in there, which can damage your engine. There's a risk I'm taking just by using this stuff. That's why you try it on an older car. I don't know if you want to do this on a \$50,000 car."

But he's got good company. The inventor of the diesel engine, Rudolph Diesel, was a big advocate of vegetable-oil fuel, and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger is among the modern-day celebrities interested in its potential. Malicdem believes about 1,000 people are collecting used cooking oil for fuel statewide, and he may have recently won a new convert to the cause.

Just the same, if Bakersfield had a biodiesel refueling station, Malicdem says, he'd be taking that approach instead.

If he did, though, he'd miss out on that distinctive aroma. "To me, it smells like barbecue," Malicdem says, "but some people say they can smell Chinese food."

Most would agree it also smells like principle -- deeply instilled, and deep-fried too.

[Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Wednesday, June 6, 2007:](#)

### **Heal the soil**

The "Governator" is boasting about his "clean-air leadership" and the Democrats are pushing for a national global warming law like the one Arnold autographed. Such people once tried to scare us about "global cooling." Well, God heard them and turned up the thermostat.

Whipping up a frenzy is a weapon used by evil men to gain control of the population. I lived under Nazi occupation for five years. In a town where someone killed a German policeman or soldier, the Germans rounded up 20 of the most prominent citizens and executed them in the town square. Hitler knew how to gradually gain control of the population. Similarly, Americans are being charmed and propagandized into submission to their government.

We're told that global warming is caused by cattle-producing gas. I was in the dairy business for 10 years and I never met a cow that flatulated. Cows produce gas because they're fed wrong. Grain is unnatural. Cattle should be pasture-fed. Then they won't moo from the wrong end.

I don't claim there's no global warming because I'll never be convinced there's no sun. Welcome to Bakersfield. I say, "first, heal the soil." A healthy soil reduces the overall heat. When the ground absorbs heat and the weather gets cold, the heat radiates, meaning warmer nights and crop protection. Healthy soil equals healthy crops, and thus healthy people.

Once we get in touch with nature and learn how it functions we, and not bureaucrats, will solve our problems.

-- ED DE BOER, Bakersfield

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Wednesday, June 6, 2007:](#)

### **Driven from town**

Cathy Rehart, Fresno's own dedicated historian, must move away from our city [Valley Voices June 2]. Cathy has spent her life lovingly collecting, researching and preserving stories, big and small, about the history of Fresno. She has shared her knowledge and stories with all of us through her many books, the radio and in person.

Now, according to her doctor, the air in this city is making her very sick and she must move away. This is very ironic. Cathy loves this town so much, but the air quality in Fresno is forcing her out. Sad!

I wonder how many other people are in a similar situation. Seventeen years is a long time to wait to breathe cleaner, safer air.

*Dee Dee Hall, Fresno*