

Rules for dairies prompt lawsuit

Fresno Co. ordinance lacks environmental report, group says.

By Dennis Pollock

The Fresno Bee, Saturday, Nov. 17, 2007

A group called Medical Advocates for Healthy Air has filed a lawsuit against Fresno County to stop it from issuing permits for building or expanding dairies until an environmental assessment is done.

The suit, filed in Superior Court in Fresno, challenges the first-ever permitting ordinance for dairies in the county, which was adopted on a 3-2 vote last month.

Patience Milrod, who represents Medical Advocates, said the county has abdicated its responsibility to safeguard the health of residents because it did not require an environmental impact report. She said the county is leaving regulation of the dairies mostly in the hands of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District and the Regional Water Quality Control Board.

The county has "unlawfully deferred to those agencies," Milrod said.

Alegria De La Cruz with California Rural Legal Assistance Inc. is representing Eugenia Melesio, a Fresno County resident, in the litigation.

County Counsel Dennis Marshall said his office is "prepared to defend our actions under [the California Environmental Quality Act] vigorously."

Supervisor Phil Larson, one of the supervisors who voted to adopt the ordinance, said the suit was "not at all unexpected. They are asking for the impossible. We have done everything with due diligence."

He said the new ordinance calls for individual environmental impact reports as dairies are established or expanded.

Supervisor Henry Perea, who opposed the ordinance and called for tighter controls, also was not surprised by the suit.

"It was pretty clear to me that this was on the horizon," he said. "The irony is that the dairy industry came to us a year and a half ago so they would not end up where they are now. They were trying to be pre-emptive" and avoid legal battles.

The suit states that Tulare, Kings and Merced counties adopted dairy ordinances or plans only after preparation of "comprehensive environmental impact reports."

It also points to the high rate of asthma and other pollution-related ailments in the central San Joaquin Valley and its standing as one of the nation's worst air-quality regions.

At a news conference outside the courthouse Friday, representatives of the advocacy group Fresno Healthy Dairy Commission called for the county to respond to the suit and to adopt tighter controls on dairies.

Mary Savala, chairwoman of the group, said the group also will seek amendments to the ordinance. "What the supervisors did a month ago is not the last word," she said.

Kevin Hamilton, an asthma education manager and member of Medical Advocates, talked of air pollution in the Valley "that strangles the throats of our children and elderly" and said "the county is abdicating its responsibility to unfeeling agencies."

Medical Advocates members include medical professionals.

Bill Van Dam, chairman of the Community Alliance for Responsible Environmental Stewardship, a dairy industry group, said the suit will "achieve nothing except possible delays in implementing tough new requirements."

Ryan Jacobsen, executive director of the Fresno County Farm Bureau, said, "Because they did not get the ordinance drafted exactly to their specifications, activist groups have chosen to waste taxpayer dollars by dragging the matter through the courts."

Savala said an EIR will show the impact that megadairies can have on air and water quality. The group she heads has called for wider buffer zones between dairies, bodies of water and cities.

It has also pressed for requirements that dairies use more costly manure lagoon liners, add methane digesters and follow other more stringent measures.

Donny Rollin, a Riverdale dairy operator, said those in his industry have been making changes to address concerns over air and water quality.

"The frustrating part is that the regulation is there, we are going forward and we are going to make a difference," he said. "We have to have the chance to put this stuff in action."

Nonprofits sue Fresno County over dairy pollution policy

In the In the S.F. Chronicle, Modesto Bee and Contra Costa Times, Friday and Saturday, Nov. 16 and 17, 2007

FRESNO, Calif. - Clean air advocates are filing suit against Fresno County, saying officials shouldn't be able to implement a new policy regulating pollution from dairies before reviewing its effect on the environment.

The county board of supervisors approved a new ordinance covering dairies last month.

Thursday, California Rural Legal Assistance and Medical Advocates for Healthy Air filed suit, saying the county shouldn't be able to make its own dairy rules before putting them through a full environmental impact review.

Clean air advocates wanted the county to set strict buffer zones to separate mega-dairies from rivers and communities, but the proposal the county approved doesn't go that far.

West Park overcomes bond hurdle

Written by Jonathan Partridge
Patterson Irrigator, Saturday, Nov. 17, 2007

MODESTO — A proposed short-haul rail project connecting the Crows Landing Air Facility and the Port of Oakland is a contender for state bond money following a decision by the Stanislaus County Council of Governments policy board Wednesday.

The policy board, which consists of elected leaders from each of the county's cities and from the Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors, voted 10-4 in favor of seeking bond money for the project, after listening to citizens stump for and against the project.

"I think it's criminal if we don't put ourselves in a position to qualify for this money," said Supervisor Dick Monteith, who voted in favor of the resolution.

PCCP West Park is negotiating with the county to develop a 4,800-acre industrial park on and around the 1,527-acre former naval airfield, now owned by the county. The project would include an inland port, from which goods could be shipped to the Port of Oakland and back.

Oakdale Mayor Farrell Jackson, Patterson Mayor Becky Campo, Newman Mayor John Fantazia and Supervisor Jim DeMartini dissented on the vote, saying that there were too many unanswered questions and that the project would harm the West Side. Ceres councilman Chris Vierra did not vote because he has worked for a company consulting with West Park.

Major undertaking

West Park seeks as much as \$26 million in state trade corridor bonds, including \$10 million to \$16 million from the California Transportation Commission for infrastructure projects and about \$10 million in environmental bond money from the state Air Resources Board.

As part of the matching funds, Stanislaus County will put up the property value of the 170 acres it will lease out for the inland port.

The resolution calls for the bond application to be completed with other Northern California planning agencies. One of those, the Bay Area-based Metropolitan Transportation Committee, has expressed reservations about the viability of the inland port.

Vince Harris, executive director of StanCOG, said after the meeting there was no denying there would be competition between projects in the Northern California corridor. Still, Northern California agencies have teamed up to provide a unified front for the region's needs.

Under fire

The board's vote drew moans, guffaws and even a few tears among the dozens of West Park opponents at the meeting.

Its decision came after city managers from Patterson and Newman discussed a joint resolution that the two city councils and the West Stanislaus Fire Protection District had approved in opposition to West Park's plans.

Several attendees tried to make the case that the plan was irrational and too big for the area. They cited anticipated traffic, air-quality issues, problems with trains, a lack of water on the West Side and a lack of interest from Bay Area agencies.

Critics included Modesto resident Eric Reimer, who noted that the Port of Oakland does not see the project as a priority. He described the project as "a rail line searching for a place to go."

"If it were a software firm, it would be known as 'vaporware,'" he said.

Farmers Norman Crow and Ed Maring questioned where the inland port would get water. Crow said West Side aquifers are dropping faster than expected and that access to surface water has become increasingly unreliable.

Local developer J.P. Smith questioned the legality of the county moving forward on West Park's proposal. He noted that the county's initial request for proposals said the project had to stay within the confines of the airfield, and West Park's proposal exceeds those boundaries.

County CEO Rick Robinson said after the meeting that he thought the selection process would "withstand any scrutiny."

"We worked with our legal counsel, who I view as exceptionally competent," he said.

Garnering support

Several supporters said West Park would bring much-needed jobs to the area, as the county is expected to grow dramatically in the coming decades. They said many fellow project supporters could not attend the meeting because they were still commuting from their Bay Area jobs.

Newman resident Laroy McDonald, a consultant for West Park, used biblical imagery to sum up his feelings, comparing the state of the West Side to the valley of dry bones described in the book of Ezekiel.

West Park could change that, he said.

He said he had gathered more than 400 signatures on a petition in support of the project.

Patterson resident Donna Worley said people who got jobs at West Park would be able to work closer to home, improving family relationships. She also described the recent slew of foreclosures, saying many people could not afford to live in their homes and that West Park could be a possible remedy.

Bill Bassitt, CEO of the Alliance, an agency that serves the economic development interests of Stanislaus County and its cities, suggested that West Park's proposal has international appeal.

"There was and is interest in this project from throughout the world," he said.

Meanwhile, Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, said the project could reduce overall air pollution in the San Joaquin Valley.

"We see inland ports as an air quality mitigation measure in the valley," he said.

Sticking to the bond issue

Despite all the talk about the project itself, county Chief Executive Officer Robinson stressed that bond money was the issue at stake. The developer and size of the project were irrelevant to the conversation, he said.

That didn't sit well with everyone. Jackson, Oakdale's mayor, noted that city government leaders throughout the county would not have a chance to vote on the overall project later on. Jackson said there were still a lot of unanswered questions, such as the legality of the request for proposal and how the project would change local air quality.

Campo said the project would hurt the city of Patterson's quality of life.

On the other hand, Monteith and Harris said they did not want to see bond money go to Southern California interests when it could go to Stanislaus County.

Kirk Lindsey, a commissioner with the California Transportation Commission, and Harris both stressed that an agency like StanCOG would need to support the project to make it eligible for bond funding.

"If you're not on the list, you're not going to get any money, period, end of report," Lindsey said.

In the end, even Supervisor Bill O'Brien, who said he still questions West Park's overall plans, supported the resolution. O'Brien said most county supervisors had agreed to give West Park a year to prove its project's worth, and giving it access to bond money would be necessary to give the plan a chance at success.

Looking ahead

Now that the resolution has been approved, StanCOG's request will be forwarded to the CTC and ARB for approval. For the county to get bond money for the project, matching funds eventually must be in place, and work on the project needs to be ready to begin by 2013.

West Park lead developer Gerry Kamilos attended Wednesday's meeting, but did not speak. However, in an e-mail sent Friday, he decried the policy board's decision as an "important milestone."

"StanCOG's vote sends a signal to the rest of the state that policy makers in the San Joaquin Valley are ready to work together to make sure the valley gets its fair share of state bond funding to generate jobs and improve air quality," he wrote, "funding that has traditionally gone to Southern California."

Meanwhile, project critics used the old adage about losing the battle, but not the war, and rifts continue to exist between some project supporters and detractors.

"The county has a long way to go to repair the damage," Patterson Councilwoman Annette Smith said after the meeting.

District files suit over EPA air standards

County officials want to set own rules

FROM STAFF REPORTS

Tri-Valley Herald, Monday, Nov. 19, 2007

The San Joaquin Valley Air District has filed a federal lawsuit against the Environmental Protection Agency over its right to set its own greenhouse-gas emission regulations.

The suit was filed this week in the District of Columbia Court of Appeals. The state of California filed a similar lawsuit against the EPA just last week.

At issue is the district's request for a waiver of federal preemption for greenhouse gas emissions regulations for "passenger cars, light-duty trucks and medium-duty passenger vehicles."

The district believes that if a waiver is granted under the Clean Air Act, California will have the right to set its own vehicle emission standards.

Other states then will have the right to adopt those standards as their own.

"The San Joaquin Valley's challenge in meeting the state and federal clean-air standards is unmatched by any other region in the state," said Seyed Sadredin, district executive director. "Action by the EPA on this

matter will yield much-needed reductions in greenhouse gases, as well as smog-causing pollutants, which are a major public-health concern for the Valley."

In June, the district sent a letter to the EPA urging it to grant California's waiver request, noting that greenhouse emissions cause a significant air-pollution problem in the Valley.

"Our support of California's request for a waiver of preemption is based on our belief that the proposed programs will not only help reduce emissions, but that they are also essential to our effort to meet the health-based standards for criteria pollutants," the letter stated in part.

According to Sadredin, the district needs to take action now to avoid future bigger issues.

"In addition to the long-term consequences of climate change, the district is concerned with the potential ramifications of more moderate but imminent changes in weather patterns," he said. "The Valley depends heavily on agriculture for its economy and has developed agricultural practices based on the last several decades of weather patterns.

"Unanticipated and large fluctuations in these patterns could have a devastating effect on the Valley's economy."

SJ Valley Air District sues EPA

Manteca Bulletin, Monday, Nov. 19, 2007

SALIDA - The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's failure to grant a request by California to set its own greenhouse-gas emission regulations has spurred the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to file a lawsuit against the federal government.

The suit was filed last week in the District of Columbia Court of Appeals. The state of California filed a similar lawsuit against the EPA last week.

At issue is California's request for a waiver of federal preemption for Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions regulations for passenger cars, light-duty trucks and medium-duty passenger vehicles beginning with the 2009 model year. Under the Federal Clean Air Act, California has the right to set its own vehicle emission standards, and other states have the right to adopt California's standards as their own, after a waiver is granted by the EPA.

"The San Joaquin Valley's challenge in meeting the state and federal clean-air standards is unmatched by any other region in the state," said Seyed Sadredin, Executive Director of the Valley Air District. "Action by EPA on this matter will yield much-needed reductions in greenhouse gases, as well as smog-causing pollutants, which are a major public-health concern for the Valley."

In June, the District sent a letter to EPA Administrator Stephen L. Johnson, urging the EPA to grant California's waiver request, noting that GHG emissions cause a significant air-pollution problem in the Valley.

In the Valley, mobile source emissions contribute more than half the total air pollution. The Valley fails to meet federal health standards for ozone (smog) and particulate matter.

For more information about the Air District , visit www.valleyair.org or call the Salida office at 557-6400; Fresno (559) 230-6000.

Air district files lawsuit against EPA

BY MARK RIVERA - Staff Reporter

Turlock Journal, Saturday, Nov. 17, 2007

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District filed a lawsuit against the federal government in light of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's failure to allow California to set its own greenhouse-gas emission regulations.

The suit was filed this week in the District of Columbia Court of Appeals. The state of California filed a similar lawsuit against the EPA last week.

"The San Joaquin Valley's challenge in meeting the state and federal clean-air standards is unmatched by any other region in the state," said Seyed Sadredin, Executive Director of the air district. "Action by the EPA on this matter will yield much-needed reductions in greenhouse gases, as well as smog-causing pollutants, which are a major health concern for the valley."

The debate stems from the state's request for a waiver of federal preemption for greenhouse gas emissions regulations for passenger cars, light-duty trucks and medium-duty passenger vehicles beginning with the 2009 model year.

Under the Federal Clean Air Act, California has the right to set its own vehicle emission standards, and other states have the right to adopt California's standards as their own, after a waiver is granted by the EPA.

In June, the district sent a letter to EPA administrator Stephen L. Johnson, requesting the EPA to grant the waiver request, and noting that greenhouse gas emissions cause a significant air-pollution problem in the Valley.

In the Valley, mobile source emissions are responsible for more than half the total air pollution, according to the air district. The Valley fails to meet federal health standards for ozone and particulate matter.

"In addition to the long-term consequences of climate change, the district is concerned with the potential ramifications of more moderate but imminent changes in weather patterns," Sadredin said.

"The Valley depends heavily on agriculture for its economy and has developed agricultural practices based on the last several decades of weather patterns. Unanticipated and large fluctuations in these patterns could have a devastating effect on the Valley's economy."

Tulare's air 'good' today

Staff reports

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Monday, Nov. 19, 2007

Hang on to your hat: Tulare County air is forecast to be "good" today by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, the district reported Sunday.

That means tiny particulate levels in the air, called PM2.5, will be at a 49 parts per billion level, district officials anticipate. That is a far cry from Saturday's observed level of 85, which was also Sunday's anticipated level.

In recent weeks, PM2.5 levels have approached more severe levels up to the 170 level, partially due to smoke from wildfires to the south. At that level, the air is actually dangerous to breathe — which makes today's forecast good news for Thanksgiving week travelers.

National Weather Service forecasts call for a breaking up of a high-pressure system that has dominated the weather locally — and winds from the northwest are expected to increase, to 10-15 mph, said Jim Bagnall, a forecaster working out of the service's Hanford office.

"That should cause a scouring effect," Bagnall said. The air will be pushed to the south, and any residual pollution should move out with it, Bagnall said.

Temperatures should cool down from a high of 70 Sunday in Visalia to the low 60s by Thanksgiving Day, Bagnall said.

Accuweather forecasts call for clear skies through Thanksgiving week, with little chance of precipitation.

Solar finds cool welcome; County permits processed slowly

By Ramona Frances

Madera Tribune, Friday, Nov. 16, 2007

Using California sunshine to generate non-polluting energy and lower utility bills while earning rebates has spurred a few people to place solar power systems on Madera County properties, but compared to other California counties there are few here.

There may be more than a few answers as to why.

Bill Camin, a consultant with Solar City, said the reason could be lack of awareness. But Sharon Kelly, who recently converted her Madera County home to solar, believes the biggest impediment is the permit process.

"The permit process in Madera County is a nightmare," said Kelly, who lives on a 20-acre parcel near Madera Ranchos. Kelly made a decision to convert to solar, signing up in early August, but the inspection was not completed until Nov. 9.

Camin, who represents Solar City's Fresno office, sells and installs solar systems in every county of California, including Madera, and agrees with Kelly.

"For (solar) roof mounts, we can get permits the same day but for ground mounts (such as the one for Sharon Kelly) it takes forever ... We had a request in for Coarsegold and one in Madera that pushed toward eight weeks," Camin said.

Dennis Cox, regional sales manager at Solar City, said the length of time to get a permit for ground mounts in Madera County is not acceptable, but Madera County has recently hired new personnel to make changes and speed up the process.

"Clovis has the second highest adoption rate of solar (energy) in the state of California after San Sebastian in the Bay area. Fresno is farther down the list and Madera is behind the curve," Camin said.

When Kurt Bridwell began inspecting solar four years ago for Madera County, requests for solar inspections were few and far between, Bridwell said.

"I inspect at least a two a week now, but I am not the only inspector. There are four or five others who do it too. When electricity is more expensive, there are more calls for solar. It's driven economically," Bridwell said.

Inspector Garth Blackburn of Madera County said he also inspects two or three a week.

With the exception of the Firm Off Grid, a mom-and-pop solar business based in North Fork, Camin said he is not aware of any other solar company in Madera County.

Solar power basics

Asked why a resident or business owner might choose solar, Camin said, "San Joaquin Valley is an area of high pollution with a high number of people with respiratory problems. For every kilowatt produced by a power plant, a half-pound of particles go into the air as pollution."

Additional information can be found on the PG&E website, which contains links to solar businesses.

"The average family uses 10 kilowatts a year, which equals 5,000 pounds of pollution per year-about the same as a large SUV," Camin said.

A solar electric photovoltaic system consists of solar panels, which convert sunlight into usable direct current electricity.

"The panels must face southwest and be free of obstacles. The optimal place is free of any shade, not even a vent pipe," said Kelly. "That is the primary reason I didn't put it on top of the shop building."

Kelly said she did research on solar companies before calling a consultant, and was impressed by a solar company that offers 24-hour monitoring of the solar system.

"If for some reason production is failing, they will let you know. They will come out and find out why - even if it's a simple thing like too much dust on the panels," Kelly said.

Another significant factor is cost.

Kelly said she paid close to \$41,000 dollars, but \$11,000 of it will be rebated from the state through PG&E.

"So my out-of-pocket expense is around \$30,000 dollars. I expect to recover that in about 20 years. That is the legacy that is passed on with the house," she said.

Once inspection and permits cleared, it only took a week for the foundation and solar panel to be placed and hooked up.

"The permit process normally takes a few days to a week in most counties, but it takes about two months in Madera County," Kelly said. "The county's record system is chaotic and archaic, but the building department has new personnel to help update their database," she said.

Solar savings

Kelly is waiting to receive her first PG&E bill.

"I called PG&E and they do not have it (the changeover) in their system yet. They sent me a form I had already filled out. There was a small revision, so I had to fill it out again," she said.

But Kelly is still optimistic about the potential for savings.

As the price of electricity continues to rise, the cost increase of electricity averages 6.7 percent a year. But that is not straight across the board.

"(The) higher your usage percentage wise, the higher your bill goes up," Camin said. "When they raise the rate, the highest (users) get the highest rate increase. The bigger users may get a 15 percent increase rather than 6.7 percent. So, if you have swimming pool, well (with an electric pump) and a lot of electronics, you are going to have a higher than average electric use."

The San Joaquin Valley has the highest electric bills in the state due to the high summer temperatures, Camin noted.

Asked what a conversion to solar power might cost, Camin said there is no easy answer.

"We design a custom system for every situation. We start by taking kilowatt usage of the customer for the year. That gives us basic information to determine the size of the system. But then we have to make adjustments for geography, the angle of the roof, the direction the home or business is facing," Camin said.

How much the of the electric bill the customer wants taken away is also part of the equation.

"This is why we do a free survey-to do the measuring, design the system and tell what its going to cost," Camin said.

Camin recommends going with a company you can trust will be around for the long haul and use brand name panels and inverters.

"Panels typically have a 25-year warranty. Make sure the manufacturer is going to be around to take care of the solar modules. Make sure there is a good warranty on the construction and labor, and have a company that can identify problems," Camin said.

"Part of our service is dealing with rebates that makes up for 25 to 30 percent of the cost of the system. That is available for residents, commercial businesses, non-profits and government installations. There is a federal tax credit of 30 percent but its capped at \$2,000 for residential use. A business would get the full 30 percent."

Berkeley firm loses suit

Plaintiffs to collect thousands in damages for smelly emissions

By Kristin Bender, STAFF WRITER

Tri-Valley Herald, Monday, November 19, 2007

BERKELEY - The last of three lawsuits against Pacific Steel Casting has been decided in favor of a group of West Berkeley neighbors who have won damages for the mental and physical distress of living near a smelly factory, the plaintiff's attorney said Friday.

Attorney Kathleen Aberegg filed a consolidated small claims suit last year on behalf of a group of 19 neighbors who claimed the smell of burning plastic in the air near the West Berkeley factory was causing headaches, nausea and tightness in their chests.

"It's good news. It's definitely a step in the right direction," said Aberegg. "The point is we won the case, and I think it's substantial for the plaintiffs. If they continue to pollute, we may continue with other actions."

Tom McGuire lived near the factory for eight months a few years ago. But the smell drove him out of his rental house and into the lawsuit.

"I told the judge in the court it wasn't about the money. I will donate the money. This is about this company that has been polluting without impunity for a while," said McGuire, the lead plaintiff.

Judge Dawn Girard ruled that nine of the plaintiffs will each get between \$2,100 and \$5,100 for the nuisance, loss of use and enjoyment of their property and mental distress.

Plaintiffs could have received up to \$7,500 each.

Five of the cases had insufficient proof of damage and five were dismissed, according to the judge's ruling.

Company spokeswoman Elisabeth Jewel said Pacific Steel was disappointed by the judge's decision and will appeal the judgments.

Pacific Steel Casting is a family-owned business that has operated in West Berkeley for 73 years. It makes steel castings for truck parts, medical equipment and sewer pipes.

Last year, under a settlement with the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, which also sued, the company installed a \$2 million carbon absorption unit to reduce odor and emissions.

The company also settled with Communities for a Better Environment in Oakland earlier this year, promising to reduce its hazardous air pollutants by at least 2 tons annually.

In September, the company installed a newer, larger filter system to capture metals on one of the three plants. The company also made interior changes to increase the efficiency of the ventilation system.

Coal addiction hinders climate cleanup

The cheap and abundant fossil fuel powers growth in Asia's developing nations and adds to global warming.

By Alan Zarembo, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer
LA Times, Sunday, Nov. 18, 2007

Coal, the dirtiest fossil fuel, is the crack cocaine of the developing world.

It is the inexpensive and plentiful fuel powering the rising economies of Asia -- and because of that, it has become one of the most intractable problems in combating global warming.

Even as the political will and grass-roots support to rein in rising carbon dioxide levels is growing, a large segment of the world is using more coal than ever.

The addiction threatens to undercut the landmark work of the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which shared the Nobel Peace Prize with former Vice President Al Gore for work on global warming.

In a series of reports this year, the panel outlined the causes and consequences of global warming, along with solutions to avoid its most serious effects. The final installment of the panel's report -- a synthesis of its key findings approved by delegates from 140 countries -- was released Saturday.

The panel's road map for action hinges on all the world's biggest carbon polluters significantly reducing their emissions over the next 20 years.

But the reality is that for many countries, coal has been too good to give up.

"A gigaton of carbon here, a gigaton there -- we've got a disjunction between the rhetoric and the reality," said David Wheeler, a senior fellow at the Center for Global Development, a nonprofit research group in Washington that recently compiled a database of the world's 50,000 power plants.

Leading the coal spree is China, which has more than doubled its CO2 emissions from coal since 2000 to more than 2.7 billion tons a year, according to the database.

Over the last eight years, China has built 603 coal-fired generators -- 64% of the new generators installed worldwide. India has added 133 generators, according to the database.

They're not the only coal addicts.

In raw numbers, China has merely caught up to the United States, according to the database. In Europe, which has led the world in greenhouse gas reductions, coal use is expected to creep up in the next several years -- driven by rising oil and natural gas prices.

But a recent analysis by MIT climate experts found that even if the U.S. and Europe could somehow stop all their carbon emissions, the developing countries are on pace to create a climate crisis on their own.

Michael Wara, a Stanford University researcher who studies the emerging markets for greenhouse gases, said: "In 20 years, if India and China aren't on board, the game is lost."

Part of the problem with coal is its chemistry.

Because it contains more carbon atoms than other fossil fuels, burning it produces more carbon dioxide for each megawatt-hour of electricity -- roughly 25% more than oil and 66% more than natural gas.

It's cheap and abundant, and as Leon E. Clarke, an economist at the Joint Global Change Research Institute at the University of Maryland, added: "Unlike conventional oil and gas, it can be treated as virtually inexhaustible over the coming century."

For many nations, the surplus of coal holds strategic allure as well because it allows them to reduce dependence on their other addiction: oil.

Coal, which now accounts for 39% of the carbon dioxide produced from fossil fuels, will soon surpass oil as the top emissions source -- and keep expanding its lead over the next two decades, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

China and the U.S. each account for about a quarter of the world's carbon emissions. In the next decade, China is expected to move well ahead of the United States, and India will move past Russia into third place.

Since 1997, China has increased its coal-burning capacity from 145,000 megawatts to 370,000 megawatts, or about 28% of the global capacity, according to the power plant database.

Coal accounts for 77% of China's power capacity, compared with 42% worldwide and 48% in the United States.

Weaning countries with that level of coal dependence is not expected to be easy.

The U.N. panel has said that worldwide carbon emissions must peak in the next decade and fall by at least 50% by 2050 to limit temperature rise to about 3 degrees Fahrenheit and prevent serious drought, sea level rise and ecological chaos.

Its main solution is placing a cap on global emissions and charging polluters for every ton of carbon dioxide beyond that point. The carbon emissions would be bought and sold on a pollution market.

As the cap was lowered, the price of polluting would go up, eventually making it cheaper for polluters to shut down their old plants and build cleaner ones or add systems that would capture and store their pollution.

The panel estimated that reducing emissions to acceptable levels would cost about 3% of the world's gross domestic product over the next two decades.

Europe has already created such a market, but other countries, particularly China, India and the United States, have rejected calls to cap their emissions.

China and India have argued that their buildup of power plants is to provide their citizens the benefits of development long enjoyed by the industrialized world.

The West uses much more energy per person, and its emissions over the last 150 years are still the main cause of the present concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

The United States has refused to endorse any plan that would not force developing countries to cut their emissions.

The result is a political gridlock on carbon emissions.

One possible solution is to rely on economic pressure from the U.N. panel's carbon market proposal.

If the price of carbon pollution got high enough, it could make it cost-effective for a company to go to China and clean up someone else's coal power plant. That reduction in emissions could then be sold on the carbon market for a profit.

It is already possible on a small scale to capture carbon dioxide emissions and pump them into underground geological formations, though it is considered too expensive now to implement on a commercial scale.

Another possibility is a process known as integrated gasification, which converts coal into a cleaner-burning gas, capturing emissions in the process.

Coal plants in China and India could eventually be retrofitted with such systems.

"We need a bolt-on solution for those existing plants," said Stanford's Wara. "It's going to be very difficult to tell those people to shut down those plants."

Some experts said a more forceful approach was needed with China and India, or for that matter the United States.

A proposal by the European Union has raised the possibility of taxing imports from countries that don't agree to mandatory emissions, said MIT economist John M. Reilly.

China and India are hardly immune from the effects of greenhouse gases.

Rising sea levels could eventually threaten coastal cities, and melting glaciers in the Himalayas are already threatening water supplies.

In addition, dirty air is already taking a toll on health in many Chinese cities.

But there is no way to determine what level of climate problems will drive developing countries to clean up.

The countries "are worried about the effects of climate change, but they're even more worried about slowing economic growth," said Stephen H. Schneider, a Stanford climatologist.

U.N. Chief Seeks More Climate Change Leadership

By Elisabeth Rosenthal

N.Y. Times and San Diego Union-Tribune, Sunday, Nov. 18, 2007

VALENCIA, Spain, Nov. 17 - Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, describing climate change as "the defining challenge of our age," released the final report of a United Nations panel on climate change here on Saturday and called on the United States and China to play "a more constructive role."

His challenge to the world's two greatest greenhouse gas emitters came just two weeks before the world's energy ministers meet in Bali, Indonesia, to begin talks on creating a global climate treaty to replace the Kyoto Protocol, which expires in 2012.

The United States and China are signatories to Kyoto, but Washington has not ratified the treaty, and China, along with other developing countries, is not bound by its mandatory emissions caps.

"Today the world's scientists have spoken, clearly and in one voice," Mr. Ban said of the report, the Synthesis Report of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. "In Bali, I expect the world's policymakers to do the same."

He added, "The breakthrough needed in Bali is for a comprehensive climate change deal that all nations can embrace."

Although Mr. Ban has no power to enforce members of the United Nations to act, his statements on Saturday increased the pressure on the United States and China, participants here said.

Members of the panel said their review of the data led them to conclude as a group and individually that reductions in greenhouse gases had to start immediately to avert a global climate disaster, which could leave island nations submerged and abandoned, reduce African crop yields by 50 percent, and cause a 5 percent decrease in global gross domestic product.

The panel's fourth and final report summarized and integrated the most significant findings of three sections of a climate-science review that were released between January and April. Because the data had not previously been reviewed as a whole, scientists said the synthesized report was more explicit, creating new emphasis and alarm.

The first section of the review had covered climate trends; the second, the world's ability to adapt to a warming planet; the third, strategies for reducing carbon emissions. With their mission concluded, the hundreds of IPCC scientists spoke more freely than they had previously.

"The sense of urgency when you put these pieces together is new and striking," said Martin Parry, a British climate expert who was co-chairman of the delegation that wrote the second report. "I've come out of this process more pessimistic about the possibilities than I thought I would."

The panel, which was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize last month, said the world would have to reverse the growth of greenhouse gas emissions by 2015 to prevent serious climate disruptions.

"If there's no action before 2012, that's too late," said Rajendra Pachauri, a scientist and economist who heads the IPCC. "What we do in the next two to three years will determine our future. This is the defining moment."

He said that since the IPCC began its work five years ago, scientists had recorded "much stronger trends in climate change," like a recent melting of Arctic ice that had not been predicted. "That means you better start with intervention much earlier."

Saturday's synthesis report was reviewed and approved by delegates from 130 nations gathered here this week. But unlike the earlier reviews, in which governments had insisted on changes that diluted the reports' impact, this time scientists and environmental groups said there had been no major dilution of the data.

For example, this report's summary was the first to acknowledge that the melting of the Greenland ice sheet from rising temperatures could result in a substantive sea-level rise over centuries rather than millennia.

"Many of my colleagues would consider that kind of melt a catastrophe" so rapid that mankind would not be able to adapt, said Michael Oppenheimer, a climate scientist at Princeton University who contributed to the IPCC.

"It's extremely clear and is very explicit that the cost of inaction will be huge compared to the cost of action," said Jeffery D. Sachs, director of Columbia University's Earth Institute. "We can't afford to wait for some perfect accord to replace Kyoto, for some grand agreement. We can't afford to spend years bickering about it. We need to start acting now."

He said that delegates in Bali should take action immediately where they agree, for example, on public financing for new technologies like capturing emissions of the main greenhouse gas, carbon dioxide, and pumping it underground. He said energy ministers should start a global fund to help poor countries avoid deforestation, which releases greenhouse gases and reduces the uptake of carbon dioxide through photosynthesis.

United Nations officials pointed out that strong policies were needed, like increasing the energy efficiency of cars and setting up carbon markets, a system that essentially forces companies and countries to pay for the cost of the greenhouse gases they emit.

The European Union already has such a carbon trading system in place for many industries, and is fighting to bring airlines into the plan.

"Stabilization of emissions can be achieved by deployment of a portfolio of technologies that exist or are already under development," said Achim Steiner, head of the United Nations Environment Program.

But he noted that developed countries would have to help poorer ones adapt to climate shifts and adopt cleaner energy choices, which are often expensive.

Mr. Steiner emphasized that the report sent a message to individuals as well as world leaders: "What we need is a new ethic in which every person changes lifestyle, attitude and behavior."

Meanwhile, the Bush administration's reaction to the report was muted. At a news conference Friday night after the report was approved, James L. Connaughton, the chairman of the president's Council on Environmental Quality, said President Bush had agreed with leaders of the other major industrialized nations that "the issue warrants urgent action, and we need to bring forward in a more accelerated way the technologies that will make a lasting solution possible."

He declined to say how much warming the administration considered acceptable, saying, "We don't have a view on that."

Mr. Connaughton acknowledged that the United States, like other nations, had tried to make some changes to the draft. Dr. Sharon L. Hays, the leader of the American delegation here, said the goal was not political but "to make sure the final report matches the science." She noted that the United States had invested \$12 billion in climate research since 2001.

Stephanie Tunmore, a member of Greenpeace International who had observer status as the countries debated the text, questioned that explanation.

She said, for example, that the United States had tried to remove a section of the report titled "Reasons for Concern," which listed consequences of climate change that are either likely or possible. One was the melting of ice sheets, which the panel said could take place more rapidly than previously thought.

The Americans argued that there was no reason to include the section, because all of it was contained somewhere in the previous IPCC technical documents, she said. But the section remained in the report.

Andrew C. Revkin contributed reporting from New York.

Edwards, Clinton aim at climate change

By MICHAEL R. BLOOD, Associated Press Writer
in the Modesto Bee, Monday, Nov. 19, 2007

LOS ANGELES - On a day when a U.N. panel warned of growing peril from climate change, John Edwards accused the oil and gas industry Saturday of deploying hundreds of lobbyists to Washington to resist efforts to free the nation from its dependence on fossil fuels.

Edwards' criticism came during a forum on global warming, where he and fellow Democrats Hillary Rodham Clinton and Dennis Kucinich outlined similar goals of curbing greenhouse gases, expanding alternative energy sources and creating jobs in a green economy.

The three appeared separately on stage, the only candidates from either party to accept invitations from sponsors Grist, an online environmental magazine, and Public Radio International's "Living on Earth," a nationally broadcast program on environmental concerns. The forum was held in partnership with the League of Conservation Voters Education Fund and other environmental groups.

Like his rivals, Edwards said climate change requires urgent action. But he argued repeatedly that measures to slow global warming are being hindered by a broken political system in Washington that bends to corporate power and feeds off its money.

"I see the oil and gas companies blocking progress by spending millions of dollars and deploying hundreds of lobbyists in Washington to make sure that America stays addicted to foreign oil and fossil fuels," Edwards said.

Edwards' comments on lobbyists appeared aimed at least partly at Clinton. He has accused her of being beholden to corporate interests that have contributed lavishly to her campaign. Clinton has accepted

\$567,950 from lobbyists, while Edwards has accepted \$18,900, according to an analysis by the nonpartisan Center for Responsive Politics.

In her remarks, Clinton credited other Democrats for making proposals to address climate warming but sought to distinguish herself as the candidate best able to bring about those changes.

Progress, she stressed, "takes more than a plan." A president needs "strength and experience to make it a reality," she said, echoing a campaign refrain.

President Bush was a frequent target of the candidates. And each talked with concern about workers, such as coal miners, who could suffer in a transition to a green-tinged economy.

But there were differences.

As part of her approach, Clinton supports a cap-and-trade plan, under which power plants or businesses that exceed pollution caps must buy or trade for additional allowances, usually from others that have been able to cut their emissions.

Kucinich called that a "phony solution."

Edwards and Kucinich talked forcefully of breaking the hold of oil and gas interests in Washington, but Clinton spoke broadly of making varied interests part of the solutions.

To build a case against global warming, "it is especially important that we figure out ways to enlist the millions and millions of Americans who make billions of decisions every year about how they use energy," she said.

In Valencia, Spain, the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warned that as early as 2020 Africa will suffer water shortages, residents of Asia's megacities will be at great risk of river and coastal flooding, Europeans can expect extensive species loss, and North Americans will experience longer and hotter heat waves and greater competition for water because of global warming. U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon called on the United States and China - the world's two biggest greenhouse gas emitters - to do more to fight it.

Edwards was endorsed last month by Friends of the Earth Action, the San Francisco-based political arm of Friends of the Earth. The group credited him with acting early to outline proposals to reduce carbon emissions by 80 percent by 2050, push for a global climate change treaty and create 1 million new jobs by investing in clean, renewable energy.

In a speech in Nevada Friday, Clinton urged the development of alternative energy to cut down on greenhouse gases, create American jobs and reduce dependence on foreign oil.

She is calling for the creation of a \$50 billion strategic energy fund, coupled with tougher fuel efficiency standards financed in part by \$20 billion in "green vehicle bonds." Her energy package calls for cutting greenhouse gases by 80 percent from 1990 levels by 2050 and cutting oil imports by two-thirds by 2030.

New Montgomery Growth Policy Formalizes Focus on Public Transit

By Miranda S. Spivack, Staff Writer
Washington Post, Monday, Nov. 19, 2007

Montgomery County's new growth policy is likely to steer the next phase of the county's development into already urbanizing areas because for the first time it allows planners to consider public transportation when deciding where to allow development.

The new rules, which the County Council approved 7 to 1 last week, will toughen standards regarding how many cars can spill onto the roads from new developments and how many new students cause schools to be deemed too crowded. But if the projects are built near public transportation, developers might be able to avoid some penalties and even move their projects to the head of the line for approval.

That was a key idea pushed by Planning Board Chairman Royce Hanson, who wrote much of the policy. Hanson has long advocated efforts to get people out of cars in order to [reduce air pollution](#) and traffic jams while allowing new development.

Many details remain to be worked out, and the council didn't go as far as Hanson recommended on public transit because members questioned whether his formula would deliver what it promised. But the policy formally begins to take the county in a new direction. The policy had not previously compelled county agencies to examine the availability of buses, subways and commuter trains when evaluating what can go where.

"Most of our new development is going to be relatively high density" near public transportation, Hanson predicted. He pointed to Bethesda, Silver Spring and Wheaton as well as along Rockville Pike as prime areas for development.

In the next 20 years, Montgomery faces several challenges as it tries to absorb the expected arrival of thousands of new residents and jobs already approved and plans for the proposed expansion of the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda. And the open land available for development is almost used up.

Under the new growth rules, taxes on new construction will increase from 70 to 125 percent, depending on the type and location. The increases are causing anxiety among developers at a time when the real estate market and the economy are slowing.

Mike Smith, a vice president of Lcor, which is planning a residential, retail and office project at the White Flint Metro station, said tax increases might cause some developers to rethink projects.

"It is the cost of doing business and an expense our tenants typically have to bear. It does push rental rates higher and make things less affordable," he said. "It does send a difficult signal for those of us who want to create new communities."

Lcor officials might already have seen the future, when it comes to building near public transit.

The company has spent the past 10 years on the proposed development near the White Flint Station, hoping to convert strip shopping centers into a walkable town center. Its proposal to cut car travel for 55 years helped it win development rights in the neighborhood even though county rules in effect at the time had deemed nearby roads too crowded to allow more building.

Its current plans include fewer parking spaces than usual, running a shuttle bus within the complex to get people to offices and stores without their cars, and extolling through a public campaign the benefits of biking, walking and Metro use.

If the White Flint project works as Smith envisions, it could be the first of what Hanson said he hopes will be several new "transit-oriented" town centers along Rockville Pike, a jumble of strip malls and indistinct high- and low-rise dwellings with few amenities within walking distance. Other developers are eyeing Rockville Pike, and the planning staff is reworking the master plan for the neighborhood near White Flint Mall and one subway stop north of the county's Strathmore concert hall.

To figure out how to cut back on cars, Lcor examined plans used by other developers, including a program at the nearby Nuclear Regulatory Commission. The NRC, along with a developer, entered into an agreement with Montgomery in the early 1990s to cut down on parking and auto commuters at its White Flint offices in exchange for the right to build more office space.

The NRC, like many federal agencies, encourages flexible work schedules that bring in commuters at different times of day, subsidizes Metro fares and limits the number of parking spaces.

Although the 10-year agreement with Montgomery expired in 2004, agency spokeswoman Holly Harrington said the NRC has continued to try to be a "good neighbor" in Montgomery and keep its transit-oriented policies in place. Nearly 1,000 employees, about a third of those working at White Flint, collect the subsidized Metro passes every month.

"We are still doing most of the things that were in the agreement with the county," Harrington said, a decision that might prove to have been prescient, given the new growth policy's emphasis.

The policy will impose even tougher standards than those Lcor and the NRC adopted. And the planning agency soon will conduct a study to revisit county rules to see whether there are ways to further limit the number of parking spaces a development must have.

Whether the changes approved will do enough to foster "smart growth" remains a matter of debate.

Ben Ross, vice president of the Montgomery branch of Action Committee for Transit, which has 1,000 members, said that although the new growth policy helps promote transit use, he worries that it still won't encourage clustering housing and jobs closer to buses and the subway. In some cases, it could inadvertently have the opposite effect, he said.

"My concern is that they are still sticking to the basic idea that you can't build" when roads are too crowded unless there also is good transit nearby, he said.

That could backfire, he said, in such far-flung areas as Damascus and Poolesville, which "have really lousy transit" but under the new rules would be able to absorb new construction because traffic hasn't hit the tipping point. That could lead to more sprawl, he said.

"The key development issue is getting more housing near Metro," he said. "If you build residential development in close, walking distance to Metro, people are going to use it."

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Commentary, Saturday, Nov. 17, 2007:

Question: Is this the best site?

By Greg Collins, Visalia City Councilman

I have appealed the Planning Commission's approval of a conditional-use permit for the Fresno Pacific University building, located on the northeast corner of Neeley and Crowley Avenues, over five miles from the center of town.

My reasons for the appeal have nothing to do with Fresno Pacific. This educational institution has a very good reputation. Visalia should do all that it can to ensure its success.

The issue is its location, which violates the spirit and intent of the general plan that discourages leap-frog development and urban sprawl and encourages compact, concentric and contiguous growth.

Its location also runs contrary to promoting the development in Visalia's core with commercial services, public services (schools), offices and employment to serve as activity centers and to minimize vehicle miles traveled.

The developer, Mr. Mangano, and Fresno Pacific have selected a site that will be convenient for students traveling from Tulare, Hanford and Lemoore.

Unfortunately, it is not especially convenient for persons living in Visalia, nor does it promote any revitalization of the downtown or its surrounding neighborhoods.

On Monday, I will offer a "win-win" opportunity to the City Council. I've identified numerous alternative sites within the core, some publicly owned and some privately owned, that would avoid many of the negative aspects of the proposed location.

I've listed 10 questions that Visalians should ask themselves prior to taking a position on this matter.

1. As a Fresno Pacific student from Visalia, would you rather drive to the proposed site more than five miles from the center of town or would you rather drive to a site in Visalia's central area?
2. As a Fresno Pacific student from Visalia who is concerned about generating more air pollution through vehicle miles traveled, would you rather drive to the site more than five miles from the center of town or would you rather drive to a site in Visalia's central area?
3. As a Visalian who is concerned about maintaining the vitality of Visalia's central core, which site would best accomplish this goal, a site more than five miles from the center of town or a site in the center of Visalia?
4. As a Fresno Pacific student from Visalia who may wish to walk, ride a bike or travel to class using public transportation, which site would best allow you this opportunity, a site more than five miles from the center of town or a site in the center of town?

5. As a Fresno Pacific student who may wish to shop, eat, visit the bank, see a movie, get a cup of coffee, or buy stamps, before, after or between classes, which site would best allow you these opportunities, a site more than five miles from the center of town or a site in or near the downtown?
6. As a Fresno Pacific student who may be concerned about their safety, especially at night, which site would be safer, one in or near the central area where police and fire personnel can respond rapidly or a site more than five miles from the center of town where response times take longer?
7. As a Visalian who might be concerned about the preservation of agricultural land, which site would you select, one on an agricultural parcel or an urban infill site that is vacant or can be redeveloped?
8. As a Visalian who might be concerned about protecting the airport from incompatible land uses, like a school, which site would you select, one that is located within the common traffic pattern (Zone C) of the Visalia Airport or one that is many miles from the Airport?
9. As a Visalian who might be concerned about global-warming, air quality and Smart Growth principles, which site would be most compatible with these concerns, a site more than five miles from the center of town or a site in central Visalia?
10. As a Visalian who might be interested in reserving land for future large-scale businesses and research companies, would you approve a college, a service station, a hotel, small offices and fast-food restaurants, on the last remaining site in Visalia designated for a Business Research Park?

Greg Collins is a Visalia City Councilman. He has appealed the decision to grant a conditional-use permit to Westland Development to build a two-story site for Fresno Pacific University as a private citizen.

[L.A. Times commentary, Monday, Nov. 19, 2007:](#)

Bring back the electric car

The state should reverse its mistake of putting its clean-air hopes in hydrogen instead of battery-powered autos.

By Sherry Boschert

Californians are being taken for a ride by state clean-air regulators, who are bringing the rest of the country along. Decisions made by the California Air Resources Board early next year will determine whether we get the option of driving zero-emission, non-polluting cars soon, or whether we'll see smoggy business as usual from the car companies for another decade.

Many consumers would love to drive cars that reduce greenhouse gases and our addiction to oil, but the automakers resist. Fortunately, the Air Resources Board has the power to compel them to make the clean cars society needs. Progress through regulation is nothing new: It took laws to get seatbelts, airbags and catalytic converters. It took laws to get average mileage standards up from 12 mpg to 27 mpg. It will take regulations to get clean cars.

The air board's first attempt to compel clean cars -- the zero-emission-vehicle mandate of 1990 -- put thousands of gas-free electric cars in the hands of consumers, who loved them. In 2001, however, the board started giving car companies partial credit toward meeting the mandate if they sold hybrids and other gasoline-dependent cars. Bad move. Automakers sued, asserting that because the 2001 standards included gas-burning cars, they were, in essence, fuel-efficiency standards. And only the federal government can set those.

At the same time, automakers were making inflated promises to build zero-emission hydrogen fuel cell vehicles -- if they could just have a few years more. So the board gutted the zero-emission-vehicle mandate in 2003 and essentially turned it into a hydrogen research program. General Motors dangled claims that hydrogen fuel cell cars would be competitive in showrooms by 2004. Daimler-Chrysler predicted that it would sell 100,000 fuel cell cars by 2006.

But since 2003, automakers have produced fewer than 200 hydrogen fuel cell cars, each costing about \$1 million, with a fuel cell lifespan of two to four years and many technological challenges left to overcome.

A few major automakers are trotting out their hydrogen hardware this week at the Los Angeles Auto Show, claiming they'll lease small numbers of them to handpicked drivers in the next few years. In a *deja vu* to 2003, automakers are hyping the promise of hydrogen just as the air board is again revising the zero-emission-vehicle mandate. Behind the scenes, car companies have convinced the board's staff that they can't meet the goal of producing 25,000 hydrogen fuel cell vehicles after 2012, so the staff is suggesting that the board ease that requirement.

There are signs, however, that the bloom may be fading from the hydrogen rose. This month, one of the biggest fuel cell companies, Ballard Power Systems, bailed out after pouring millions of dollars into fuel cell vehicles. A Toyota official predicted that fuel cell cars won't be mass commercialized until after 2030.

That's not soon enough to avoid global warming, thousands of deaths from air pollution and wars over oil.

Meanwhile, the battery electric cars produced until 2003 have shown that they can do the job. Some have passed 100,000 miles on the odometer, and the batteries are still going strong. A few hybrid owners have added batteries and converted their cars to plug-in hybrids that drive mostly on electricity but retain a gas engine for long-distance trips. Building a network of fast-charging stations would cost a fraction of the tab for building hydrogen fueling stations.

The persistent bias in favor of hydrogen among state regulators defies logic -- and yet it could once again distract from fair treatment of more-realistic electric cars. Examples:

- On Thursday, the air board adopted a state alternative fuels plan that suggests using plug-in hybrids and biofuels would be cleaner than scenarios that rely on hydrogen fuel cell cars. But the plan largely ignores battery electric vehicles. That's foolish, especially in light of a study done for the state Energy Commission that found that electric cars -- which use the existing power grid -- reduce overall greenhouse gas emissions by 68% compared with conventional cars. Hydrogen fuel cell cars -- for which there is no infrastructure -- would achieve only a 54% reduction.
- State-funded studies starting soon at UC Berkeley and UC Irvine will compare plug-in hybrids with conventional hybrids and with hydrogen fuel cell cars -- but not with battery electric cars. That makes no sense, especially because right now several major automakers are expressing interest in resuming production of electric cars. The air board should provide state-owned electric cars for the studies, if necessary, for complete comparisons.
- The board's current zero-emission-vehicle regulations favor hydrogen by granting one fuel cell vehicle the same amount of credits as 10 electric vehicles in meeting state goals; the proposed regulations for 2008 give three fuel cell cars the same credits as four electric vehicles. Narrowing that credit gap isn't enough. The board should insist on one-to-one technological neutrality and not push back the deadlines just because hydrogen cars aren't ready. Treat hydrogen and electric vehicles equally, and let the market decide.
- There's no time to waste. Only California can pass clean-air laws that are stricter than federal standards. But many other states adopt California's requirements, so what the board does has national implications for our health, for the environment and for national security. A slower drive away from gasoline is a ride we don't want to take.

Sherry Boschert is the author of "Plug-in Hybrids: The Cars That Will Recharge America."

[Contra Costa Times Commentary, Sunday, Nov. 18, 2007:](#)

Solar power ready to shine

It is amazing that our enormous power plant in the sky, the sun, has remained mostly untapped despite severe concerns about energy shortages, energy security, the threat of climate change and [air pollution](#) with enormous effects on our health and economy.

Today, only a fraction of a percent of the world's electricity generation comes from solar energy.

The sun is back in favor again as a source of electricity generation. Several factors are in play, and they include oil prices in the \$90- to \$100-a-barrel range, heightened concerns about greenhouse gas

emissions, a requirement in a large number of states (25), including California, that utilities buy power from renewable sources and development of new solar technologies.

The solar energy market today is dominated by photovoltaic, or PV, solar power that directly converts the sun's rays into electricity via silicon panels. The PV solar power business is booming. One recent indicator of its popularity is that major American corporations such as Wal-Mart, Microsoft, Google, Este Lauder and Tiffany's are planning to install solar panels on their rooftops to supply electricity to their businesses.

An alternative form of solar power, solar thermal, has enormous potential. It has been around for a long time, just as solar PV has. The promise of solar thermal is that it can be used to generate electricity in large quantities. Hence, it can be used to run electric utility power plants.

A solar thermal system consists of a large array of mirrors, which focus the sun's rays to heat water or another fluid. This generates steam, which drives turbines, similar to a conventional power plant, to generate electricity. As a source of large-scale power generation, thermal solar is less expensive and more practical than PV solar. It is important to remember that although both types of solar power systems produce electricity, solar PV produces electricity directly; the thermal solar first produces heat and then electricity.

The question frequently asked is what happens to power generation from a solar thermal system when the sun no longer shines. The answer is fairly simple. As the thermal solar plant first generates heat, that heat can be stored before it is used for electricity generation. When the sun goes down, the stored heat can be used to turn the turbines that generate electricity.

When a thermal solar plant is located at a place with an abundance of sunshine, the plant becomes very reliable. Much of the American West is an ideal location for thermal solar power plants.

A very large thermal solar plant was built in the 1980s in Mojave Desert. The solar farm covers four square miles, has 400,000 mirrors and produces 354 megawatts of electricity, sufficient to serve tens of thousands of homes. Not much has happened in the two decades since that plant was built until recently, when natural gas prices escalated rapidly.

In June in Boulder City, Nev., 35 miles southwest of Las Vegas, a new solar thermal power plant, called Solar One, went online at a 280-acre desert site with 220,000 giant glass mirrors faithfully tracking the sun's progress across the sky. It is a sight to behold in the bleak Nevada desert.

The large Spanish conglomerate Acciona built the plant, and it produces 64 megawatts of electricity.

In July, PG&E entered into a major renewable energy agreement with Solel Solar Systems of Israel to purchase energy from the Mojave Solar Park, to be constructed in the Mojave Desert. The Solel Solar plant will be one of the largest in the world. PG&E has contracted to obtain 553 megawatts of solar power, sufficient to serve 400,000 homes.

Solel Solar Systems is the prime thermal solar company in the world. In the past two decades Solel has powered nine solar power plants in the Mojave Desert. At present, it is producing 354 megawatts of electricity annually. When fully operational in 2011, the plant will cover 6,000 acres (nine square miles) in the Mojave Desert.

In October, PG&E signed a contract with Ausra Inc. of Palo Alto to build a 177-megawatt solar thermal plant in San Luis Obispo County. The plant is expected to go online by 2010. One of the important features of the plant is that it is built on 640 acres of land -- less than what comparable fossil fuel power plants use.

Ausra Inc. recently moved out to Silicon Valley and has been well financed by venture capital money. Kleiner, Perkins, Caulfield and Byers and Khosla Ventures, two of the major VC players in the valley, have invested \$40 million in Ausra Inc.

The prime locations for solar thermal power generation in the world are Australia, Spain, Portugal, Saudi Arabia and the U.S. Southwest. The desert gold rush is on. This time not for oil, but to capture the sun's heat. We are going to see a very large number of solar thermal projects in these vast regions endowed with an abundance of solar heat.

The good news is that nonpolluting solar thermal power is back, and utilities can build power plants with it instead of coal or natural gas.

The enormous potential for solar thermal in the United States will be fully realized when it can generate electricity at 10 cents a kilowatt-hour or less, the current average price of electricity in the United States. That day may not be too far off, based on what I hear from some energy experts.

Tapan Munroe, an economist and longtime resident of Contra Costa County, is a director of LECG LLC, a worldwide financial and economic consulting firm with headquarters in Emeryville.

[Contra Costa Times Guest Commentary, Saturday, Nov. 17, 2007:](#)

There is no need to ban fireplaces

By Brooke King

I applaud your opposition to banning burning in fireplaces during Spare the Air periods as an intrusive solution to a lesser component of pollution.

I am perplexed how you can support banning new fireplaces in the same editorial. Which is more intrusive, disallowing burning in fireplaces a few times a year or disallowing all new fireplaces? I say the latter is far more intrusive.

I have lived in homes with fireplaces most of my life. I've intentionally lived only in homes with fireplaces since 1989. If you've ever been without power during a cold wave, you understand why I made this choice. Even a gas furnace has an electric blower. I have only used my fireplaces a few times in the past 18 years, sometimes for the pleasure of a fire and sometimes for the necessity of heat. But I like the option.

I would not like to think that such a useful home component would be denied to all people who dwell in new homes in the Bay Area, including my family should I move us to a newly constructed home.

There are alternatives. People with fireplaces could be asked to voluntarily refrain from burning during Spare the Air periods. New fireplaces could be permitted to burn only during non-Spare the Air periods or during power failures. The Albuquerque, N.M. model of banning all but essential fireplace burning on its analog to Spare the Air (No Burn Nights) is basically what your editorial opposed, but it's less drastic than a ban of new fireplaces.

In Albuquerque, your worry of nosy neighbors has not come to pass. It enforces the law, but typically not with neighborhood snoops or overtaxing the police. Compliance and public support are widespread. When I lived there, compliance seemed to be at similar levels to compliance with driving cars on the right-hand side of the road.

Making No Burn Nights the law might have been unnecessary to achieve the ends. Publicizing the problem and the answer seem to have been the keys.

I suspect that the Bay Area Air Quality Management District would gain a lot of voluntary support simply by asking people not to burn during the Spare the Air periods just as more people avoid using single-occupant vehicles during Spare the Air periods.

There is no need to ban new fireplaces and perhaps no need for a ban on burning during Spare the Air periods. Try publicity first.

King is a resident of the East Bay.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Sat., Nov. 17, 2007:](#)

Buying local produce will reduce air pollution

Imagine my surprise, while getting supper, to discover that two lemons had traveled all the way to my kitchen from Chile! Later, when a minneola from Australia turned up, I asked myself, "What's happening here? I'm eating fruit that is more traveled than I am!"

This must be globalization, bringing foreign citrus into a citrus-growing region.

This is sort of like the United States dumping genetically engineered corn on Mexico. It not only destroys their indigenous varieties of corn, but sends the price of corn so low that Mexican farmers can't earn a living. (Maybe slipping across the border to find work can keep their families alive.)

After this, I'm going to look for local varieties of produce. It may not make much difference, but I won't feel guilty contributing to the pollution that the ship, truck and train emissions put into the world's air, bringing lemons that already are here.

Marion Young, Auberry

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses how California states they are at the forefront in taking protective air quality measures. For more information, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

California dice ser vanguardista en medidas protectoras del aire

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Thursday, Nov. 19, 2007

Autoridades ambientales de California en alianza con grupos ambientalistas auto reconocieron al estado este fin de semana como vanguardia en iniciativas de ley para proteger la calidad del aire, e incluso pidieron que el Congreso secunde sus intenciones.

La directora de la Oficina estatal de Recursos del Aire, Mary Nichols, y el comisionado de Energía de California, James Boyd presentaron conjuntamente con el grupo América Ambiental un reporte que identifica a California como líder en la elaboración de nuevas leyes que protegen el aire.

Nichols dijo que el siguiente paso es que el gobierno federal coincida en proyectos que los estados ya hacen por cuenta propia