

Outlook unclear for new year

Kern faces uncertainty with housing, economy, other issues in 2008

BY Vanessa Gregory and James Geluso, Californian staff writers

Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Jan. 1, 2008

As if 2007 wasn't enough of a roller coaster, now we have to face 2008.

What does this year hold in store for Kern County? We asked the experts.

Residential housing market

All eyes will no doubt continue to be on Bakersfield's real estate market, which saw a steady decline in home sales and values in 2007.

"I don't think it's as lousy as everyone puts on," said Ray Karpe, the immediate past president of the Bakersfield Association of Realtors, a local trade group.

Buyers benefit from continuing low interest rates and the variety of houses for sale, he said.

And, he predicted, home prices will reverse direction, and start an incremental climb.

"I think home prices, home values, will creep up," Karpe said.

But the upheaval in the capricious real estate market may continue, with an inventory glut lasting into 2009, local home appraiser Gary Crabtree said.

"Bottom out?" Crabtree said. "I don't know."

Recently, the number of homes sold each month has stopped falling, he said. But a forecasting analysis based on pricing for the last three years predicts a local median home price of \$220,000 by March or April, he said. In December, Bakersfield home prices had already fallen 12 percent to 13 percent, compared with same month in 2006, he said.

Expect more layoffs in the title and mortgage business, small developers losing their land to bank repossessions and huge losses by banks as many homes continue to enter foreclosure, he said.

"I think we still have a ways to go," Crabtree said. "But it's anybody's guess."

Local economy

Talk of a coming recession abounds, but Kern Economic Development Corp. President Richard Chapman thinks Bakersfield will remain somewhat insulated from any economic upheaval in store for California or the nation.

"We're going to have very slow, but moderate (economic) growth," Chapman said.

More jobs will come to the region, and the ever-important agriculture and oil sectors of the local economy are going strong, he said.

Companies continue to express interest in moving to Bakersfield, with its easy access to Los Angeles and its lower costs, Chapman said.

"I think we're going to have some pretty good announcements -- both retail and commercial-industrial," he said. "I'm pretty optimistic."

Gangs and crime

Kern County's top law enforcers are cautiously optimistic they'll be able to tamp down gang violence and other crime in the coming year.

The tools are in place, they said. But they warned that criminals aren't predictable.

"I never expect," said Bakersfield Police Chief Bill Rector. "If there's one thing, you can't predict crime."

"We can't see into the future. We can only see the pieces of the puzzle that we put in place," said Kern County Sheriff Donny Youngblood. "You don't know what's going to happen tomorrow."

Both men pointed to the establishment of a countywide strategic plan as a step they hope will lead to improved ability to fight gangs. The county's gang task force should be at full strength by midyear, when good weather leads to the most crime, Youngblood said.

Rector said there have been recent improvements in how quickly police have been able to solve crimes.

"You do have people standing up, you do have people giving us a call," he said. "If that continues it would be something that has changed in the community."

Efforts to keep kids from joining the gangs in the first place -- "diversion programs" in cop-speak - will also be a factor, Youngblood said.

"We don't know how successful those will be, or how unsuccessful," he said.

But Youngblood said he remains hopeful about 2008.

"We're hoping to see less violent crime, less youth killing youth," he said.

The cops are also fighting other crime, and again, there are steps police can take and steps they can't.

Rector said property crimes, especially theft from stores, are often related to the local economy.

Youngblood said the key is teaching people how to avoid being victimized by crime -- to pay attention to their surroundings and secure their buildings properly.

"But we're under no illusion that crime is going to go away," he said. "Crime prevention is one thing and crime suppression is something else."

Air quality

Like crime, air quality in large part depends on factors beyond the control of the people whose job it is to control it.

The variable that controls air quality more than anything else is the weather, said Rick McVaigh, deputy air director for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Nonetheless, he's optimistic.

"We definitely believe things are going to continue to get better in 2008," he said.

He credited rules and rule amendments created by his agency, and continual improvements as older cars are replaced by newer ones. Even with more people in the valley and more cars and trucks traveling more miles, "we definitely expect to see emissions go down," he said.

"We still face some big challenges, but we have made progress and we expect that to continue."

Government

At the state and federal levels, there's plenty of work to do for elected officials.

But don't necessarily expect it to get done, said Jim Costa, D-Fresno, one of two congressmen who represents Bakersfield.

"Because it's an election year, I am cautioning people not to have high expectation levels," he said.

At the state level, the main issue will be money, said state Sen. Roy Ashburn, R-Bakersfield.

"The Senate is going to be focused mostly on the state budget and dealing with a very significant budget deficit," he said. "The choices to be made are going to be very difficult."

There also is some concern among local officials that the state will raid local tax revenues.

"I think local government officials are right to be concerned," Ashburn said. "The feeling among local officials would be, 'they did it once, why wouldn't they do it again?'"

Ashburn said he has a preference for how to solve the problem.

"Every problem has a solution," he said. "The question is whether our elected officials will show the courage, the political courage and strength to do what's right, and that means cutting spending."

The issue of health care reform also will be important, he said, and it will largely come down to how the plan preferred by the governor is received by the Senate.

There also is the Feb. 5 primary election, he said, which will answer two questions -- whether the state will have any influence in choosing presidential nominees, and whether voters will go for a change to term limits.

Ashburn said he couldn't predict whether voters would make a change.

"I think it's too close to call," he said.

Costa said Congress has a lot on its plate, starting with work on the farm bill and continuing with work on the economy.

"In addition to that I think we're going to see continued discussion on our foreign policy priorities," he said.

And he said he thinks Congress will "set the table" for health care reform, but no real reform will happen until 2009, he said.

The prickly relationship between the Democratic-controlled Congress and Republican President George W. Bush is unlikely to change in the next year, he said.

Costa declined to predict who would get the presidential nomination for his party. And he hasn't endorsed a candidate, either.

"I like the composite candidate," he said.

Assemblywomen Jean Fuller and Nicole Parra, Sen. Dean Florez and Rep. Kevin McCarthy could not be reached.

Looking back at 2007

From water conservation to cleaner energy, the focus on 'going green' reached new high

By Dhyana Levey

Merced Sun-Star, Tuesday, Jan. 01, 2008

Environmental concerns this year reached new heights, not just in Merced County, but across the nation.

"Green" continues to be a buzz word, encouraging interest and participation in a dizzying range of facilities -- from universities to insurance companies.

Popular interest in recycling seemed to reach higher levels, as residents and businesses looked for creative ways to conserve water and energy.

Water conservation especially became an issue as water managers and farmers made clear the burden they shouldered in this critically dry year.

Low rainfall during crucial months combined with higher temperatures in the atmosphere -- creating a smaller Sierra Nevada snowpack -- led to what many farmers and water managers referred to as drought conditions.

The snowpack, measured December 17 at 30 percent of average, is supposed to feed the county's streams and reservoirs. And rain meant to replenish rivers and fields -- home to and a food source for wildlife, fish and livestock -- was in short supply.

Cattle growers had to irrigate their fields earlier and spend more money on feed instead of grazing their cows on natural land. Because of soaring demand and short supply, the prices of feed skyrocketed.

The Westside -- where typically less rain falls -- was hit especially hard.

By the end of March, the county knew cattle growers had lost about \$7.2 million in feed costs. This led the county agricultural commissioner to request and receive a disaster declaration from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The Merced Irrigation District even stopped the irrigation season a month earlier this year in an effort to conserve water. MID and growers were forced to consider what would happen in 2008 if Mother Nature doesn't begin cooperating.

If the pattern of dryness continues, growers served by MID might find their normal water deliveries halved. They had to look at the prospect of groundwater pumping to satisfy demands -- raising concerns in the agriculture and residential communities regarding whether there will be enough water to go around.

However, storms moved in during mid-to-late December, raising hopes of more moisture to come.

Meanwhile, efforts to conserve a number of important resources became a priority for many institutions and businesses.

UC Merced made clear its efforts to save energy, showing off its thermal energy storage tank to tours of important visitors. The tank recirculates its 2 million gallons of water through an underground line extending through college buildings, cooling or heating each room.

County landfills reaped the benefits of county and city recycling programs, according to the manager of public works solid waste division. In October he announced the most recent numbers, which stated the county Solid Waste Regional Agency had diverted 8,169 tons to recycling during the fiscal year.

And the county did meet the state mandate this year -- just barely -- that demanded cities cut in half the amount garbage heading to landfills.

So, was this a good year for the environmental issues here in the county? Not if you throw San Joaquin Valley Air quality into the equation.

County residents and activists complained to the California Air Resources Board and San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District about their health and comfort levels, which fell victim to the Valley's bad air.

After a June air board meeting, the agencies formed a task force, including activists and business people, to examine the situation. At the meeting it had become clear that the goal of cleaning up the Valley's air by 2024 wasn't good enough for many Valley dwellers.

The Merced/Mariposa County Asthma Coalition distributed disturbing information about the number of people who suffer from, or in some cases have died this year, from asthma.

Regulations to cut down on the Valley's pollution need to be more stringent, shouted activists and community members. Their concerns were expressed this year through vigils in Sacramento, Merced and Fresno.

And they can only hope that 2008 will hold more options to clean up the skies.

Biodiesel fuel group eyes city

RICHMOND: If plant is approved, site would be largest producer of energy source in state

By Katherine Tam, Staff Writer

In the Contra Costa Times, Tuesday, Jan. 1, 2008

A team of developers wants to build a biodiesel fuel manufacturing plant in Richmond, pitched as the largest in the state, that would produce up to 40 million gallons a year.

American-West Bio Energy of Larkspur and Greenline Industries of San Rafael have filed an application with the city to build a 28,000-square-foot plant on vacant land on Wright Avenue in

the southern portion of the city. The plant would produce around \$120 million in taxable sales annually and employ 40 people upon completion.

"In the Bay Area, we all talk a lot about the environment and clean air, but unfortunately we are not doing enough about it," said Abe Khamosh of American-West. "It needs somebody to step forward and do it."

Khamosh, who has been negotiating with potential biodiesel buyers, said two companies are ready to purchase the finished product.

Richmond in recent years has begun attracting green manufacturing and distribution companies, in part because the city has land to spare as well as a port, two interstate highways and major rail lines. Officials have rolled out the welcome mat by declaring the city a Green Economic Development Area, reducing solar fees and approving a green building ordinance for major city-funded projects.

Now, the developers behind the proposed biodiesel manufacturing plant want to usher into the city the next generation in fuel.

"The mayor this year declared Richmond being a green city, a city that welcomes businesses that are pro-environment," Khamosh said. "I thought this business would fit in this city."

The \$40 million plant would convert seed oils and animal fats into biodiesel that, depending on the blend, can be used in cars, trucks, ships and heavy equipment such as cranes and tractors, said Ted Lavoie, vice president of strategic development at Greenline Industries.

Greenline began manufacturing the equipment used to produce biodiesel in 2005. Its equipment is in more than 30 plants in the United States and other countries, generating between 5 million and 60 million gallons of biodiesel a year.

Raw materials would reach the plant, and the finished product would head to the market via pipelines, trucks, rail and barges, according to the application. Emissions would fall below standards set by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District.

The city will hire a consultant at the developers' expense to review the application, assess potential impacts and see if it complies with the California Environmental Quality Act, said Joe Light, city planner. The study is expected to take about three months.

"Having the largest biodiesel manufacturing plant in Richmond staring back at Chevron sends a pretty powerful message," said Dave Grenell, outgoing chief of staff to Mayor Gayle McLaughlin, who has reviewed the application. "Richmond can lead the U.S. beyond the oil economy to something cleaner."

The Chevron refinery in Richmond specializes in transforming crude oil into gasoline and other fuels, but the company also has waded into the world of alternative fuels. In October, Chevron partnered with AC Transit to test for six months the use of a biodiesel fuel blend and a gas-to-liquids diesel derived from natural gas in a fleet of buses.

Last year, 11.6 million gallons of biodiesel were produced in California, according to Adam Gottlieb, spokesman for the California Energy Commission. State officials have set a target to increase in-state production of biofuels so at least 20 percent is manufactured in California by 2010, 40 percent by 2020 and 75 percent by 2050.

Trucking firms, Port of Oakland at impasse

Use of independent drivers stymies attempts to cut air pollution

By Francine Brevetti, STAFF WRITER

Tri-Valley Herald Wed., Jan. 2, 2008

Ports along the Western seaboard are studying ways to cut diesel fuel emissions from trucks and ocean-going vessels.

At the Port of Oakland, as well as ports in Los Angeles and Long Beach, a cornerstone of that effort entails persuading trucking companies to hire drivers — rather than continue to use them as independent contractors. Port officials, as well as several community and environmental groups, say this plan will cut pollution because trucking companies can afford to run cleaner trucks than the independent drivers can.

The trucking companies, however, say they cannot shoulder the additional economic burdens of hiring drivers and acquiring trucks.

Nevertheless, trucking companies are being pushed to embrace some measures to improve drivers' conditions and help reduce pollution.

More than 50 percent of the truck drivers who serve California ports earn no more than \$30,000 a year after expenses, according to a report by the East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy and the Coalition for Clean and Safe Ports. On such wages, drivers cannot buy and maintain the most fuel-efficient rigs, the organizations argue.

Port of Oakland officials presented a proposal to its board June 7 that would encourage trucking companies to hire drivers and assume ownership and maintenance of hauling equipment. Such a plan would reduce pollution from poorly maintained old trucks and employers would provide better wages for the drivers, officials said. Edward DeNike, president of Seattle-based SSA Containers, parent of Shipper's Transport Express, which serves the Port of Oakland and others, said trucking companies — which act as brokers between drivers and the retailers or manufacturers that are transporting goods — cannot shoulder the additional expense of employees and their benefits, in addition to costs to procure and maintain equipment.

Jogjait Dulay, owner of Golden Temple Shipping in Fremont, said the change would force him out of business.

"There's no way we could buy one of those trucks," he said.

New trucks can cost upward of \$120,000. Used ones cost what the market will bear, depending, like automobiles, on make, year and condition. Mohammed Asif bought his last truck used in 2006 for \$6,000. But Vereket Woldegorgis, another independent, spent \$20,000 for his second-hand equipment.

Several trucking company owners, such as Jerry Phillips of IMPACT Transload and Rail, based in Richmond, said drivers want to remain independent.

But this belief does not jibe with the petition 1,250 of the port's 1,500 drivers signed, saying they would prefer to be employed by trucking companies. The Teamsters union and community action group Change to Win, which organized the petition drive, presented the document to the port Board of Commissioners in July.

The Port of Oakland has been waiting to implement its clean truck program until officials see how similar plans work at the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles.

On Dec. 20, Los Angeles and Long Beach issued the first element of their Clean Air Action Plan, which levies a \$35 fee on any 20-foot container coming in or out of the ports, or \$70 for a 40-foot box.

Port of Long Beach Executive Director Mario Cardero told the Los Angeles Times the surcharge will generate \$1.6 billion by 2012 to help fund a more environmentally friendly fleet of trucks. The subject of truckers' employment was not broached.

Port of Oakland Executive Director Omar Benjamin said the Port of Oakland's clean air and truck management goals would need the cooperation of the state, as well as continued discussion among three major ports and their trucking and shipper partners.

Meanwhile, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters — which has tried for years to unionize port drivers — awaits the day when independent contractors will become employees.

Chuck Mack, director of ports for the Teamsters union, said, "We're comfortable we're going to change the model in Oakland and Los Angeles-Long Beach."

Spare the Air day set for tonight

S.F. Chronicle, Tuesday, Jan. 1, 2008

Bay Area residents are being asked to celebrate the New Year by ensuring good air quality tonight as part of the first Spare the Air Tonight advisory of 2008, a Bay Area Air Quality Management District spokeswoman said.

Officials ask that during the Spare the Air advisory period, from tonight through Wednesday morning, residents refrain from burning wood in stoves and fireplaces and avoid unnecessary driving, spokeswoman Karen Schkolnick said.

Tonight's Spare the Air advisory is the first of the year and the sixth advisory issued during the 2007-2008 winter season, Schkolnick said.

Spare the Air nights are issued during winter months when officials forecast unhealthy concentrations of particulate matter in the air, Schkolnick said.

During winter months, burning wood contributes to a large portion of concentrated particulate pollution, which can cause serious health problems for the very young, the elderly, and people with respiratory or cardiovascular problems, according to air district officials.

However, compared to the 2006-2007 winter season when particulate pollution exceeded standards 20 times in the Bay Area, this season has been much better, Schkolnick said.

"We're doing better," Schkolnick said. "It is really up to the public to see how we can help to ensure we have good air quality this year."

No free transit is offered during the winter Spare the Air nights, officials said.

More information about Spare the Air Tonight program and air quality forecasts are available online at www.sparetheair.org.

New Year starts off with Bay Area in the smog

By Bay Area News

In the Contra Costa Times, Tuesday, Jan. 1, 2008

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[Fresno Bee editorial, Tuesday, Jan. 1, 2008:](#)

Challenges, opportunities confront Valley in 2008

Issues of jobs, environment, schools require vision and determination.

There are many reasons to face the new year with trepidation. The economy is struggling -- some think it's already in recession. Air quality continues to be a problem. Water issues -- both quality and quantity -- loom overhead. State government is increasingly unmanageable, with consequences for local governments and their citizens.

But such challenges often offer opportunities. It's a time for new visions, new solutions and a renewal of the determined spirit that once animated the Golden State.
Economic development

More and better jobs are always a crucial need in the Valley. Our ag-based economy is rich, but it is also subject to the vagaries of climate, consumer demand and geopolitics. A more diverse economy would be stronger and more predictable.

One place to start is with our problems. We can turn our air quality issues into an opportunity by creating a research and manufacturing sector that addresses air pollution. Where better to seek and build solutions to dirty air than the dirtiest air basin in the nation? Some of this work is already under way. More is needed.

Similarly, there are efforts already in motion to create an industry around the need to better manage and conserve water, a vital but threatened resource.

Schools and the work force

A better labor force is a concomitant of economic development. Too often we hear employers complain that well-paying jobs go unfilled because of a lack of qualified candidates. Businesses seeking to expand or relocate in the Valley find a shortage of people with the skills demanded by 21st-century enterprises.

The solution begins in the schools. We must have an increased emphasis on what we once called vocational education -- training young people for the jobs that exist and the ones we hope to have in the future.

We must also keep a strong focus on the dropout crisis in many Valley schools. Dropouts represent an utter failure on the part of both individuals and society. Without education, young people are usually condemned to poverty, poor health and prison. That ends up costing the rest of us much more than what we might spend to give them a good shot at success in school and afterward.

A better environment

We have made some progress on cleaning up the air, and it's been costly in many ways. But the grim fact is that most of what we've done to this point has been the easy stuff. Now it gets harder.

The hardest part of all will be using our cars less and creating alternative transportation. We say we want cleaner air, but we do little to limit the greatest source of air pollution -- vehicle emissions.

There are many places to start, but one of the best is to support the bond measure on the November ballot that would fund the beginning of a high-speed rail system for California. Not only would this be a boost for clean air efforts -- taking many thousands of cars off the highways -- but it would be an economic bonanza for the Valley.

Budget woes in Sacramento may be used as an excuse to pull the measure from the ballot, as has happened twice before. That can't be allowed to happen. No single step will do more for cleaner air than building high-speed rail.

Better planning

Planning and land use issues will be at the front of many debates in 2008. The way we've grown in the past has led to many of today's problems with air pollution, traffic congestion and decaying older neighborhoods. That has to change. Fortunately, there is already a solid understanding of that among many planning professionals. The problem is getting that message to elected leaders and the larger public.

Voters must support candidates who understand that planning is a regional issue, not a task carried out in a vacuum by cities and counties. Denser urban environments, as contemplated in downtown Fresno, are a must. The Valley's population is growing faster than the rest of the state's, and we can no longer afford to simply build ever outward, swallowing productive farm land and putting even greater strains on water and other resources.

A higher quality of life

We can't ignore the impact of public amenities in building communities that can support economic development and opportunity. Parks, museums, recreation, entertainment, cultural activities -- all play a role in the health of vibrant and vital region. These are not frills bought at great cost of public funds. They are investments that pay huge dividends. Voters and elected officials alike must understand that as they make difficult decisions.

None of this will be easy. California faces huge budget deficits, and that will land squarely on the necks of city and county treasuries. Recent history suggests we can't expect much help from Sacramento, where the entire focus is on pleasing special interests and fundraising for the next election.

That makes the tasks ahead even harder for local officials and residents. But Fresno and Valley voters have shown that they're willing to shoulder a heavier burden -- to pay for schools, roads, a zoo, libraries -- when the case is compelling.

Leaders who appeal to those values will serve us much better than those who would demagogue the issues and divide us. We're likely to be on our own much of the time in 2008. The good news is that we've been in that situation before, and managed to survive. Let our better instincts prevail, and let our hope for a better future guide us.

[Bakersfield Californian opinion Tues., Jan. 1, 2008](#)
Headlines we'd like to see in 2008...

Opinion section crew offers dreamed-up headlines

Voters approve road sales tax

Lennar, McMillin launch 'buy one, get one free' sale

Florez's soapbox collapses Senator opens hearing on alleged conspiracy

McCarthy voted Mr. Congeniality House Democrats amused, not fearful of Thomas' successor

Jagels mandates prosecutor rules No kicking, scratching, biting, public intoxication

Pollution board reverses course; calls for clean air attainment

Health Department funds misspent on B-grade steaks

Bakersfield adds Indian sister city Mayor's job outsourced to Amritsar city officials

Valley fever cured, Kern gets vaccine

KMC CEO: We're in the black!

LA SLUDGE RETURNED TO LA MAYOR

We trust in God, not in KHSD board

Ashburn named honorary citizen of Maui, Hawaii Locals surprised; most assumed he was a fulltime resident

B.A. Jinadu found working for free Nigerian clinic

Termed-out Parra opens capitol cigar bar

Bakersfield's air cleanest in U.S.

Realtor Crisp returns to former fast-food job

Snowpack sets records, water crisis over

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses EPA has been asked by Congress to cooperate in the hearings that will take place to investigate why they denied permission to California to activate one of the most stringent laws against air pollution. For more information, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Pregunta Congreso sobre negativa a permiso de ley ambiental de California

Noticiero Latino, Fresno, CA
2 de enero de 2008

El Congreso pidió a la Agencia federal de Protección Ambiental cooperar en audiencias que llevará a cabo este mes para investigar la negativa de esa institución a un permiso para que California active la ley más estricta hasta hoy contra la contaminación del aire.

La presidenta del Congreso, Nancy Pelosi pidió en una carta al administrador de la Agencia de Protección Ambiental (EPA, por sus siglas en inglés), Stephen Johnson, proporcionar lo antes posible todos los documentos relacionados con esa negativa, incluidas consultas con la Casa Blanca.

Pelosi advirtió al director de la EPA que su negativa tendrá escrutinio legislativo y en cortes de justicia de Estados Unidos.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses various lawsuits that the automotive industry has presented against various states including the state of Rhode Island, that have demanded for more stringent laws requiring new models to contamination less.](#)

Juez de Rhode Island retoma demanda contra ley estatal, como en California

Noticiero Latino, Fresno, California
1 de enero de 2008

Al iniciar este año la industria automotriz ha presentado demandas en varios de los 17 estados que exigen leyes complementarias entre sí, y nuevos modelos de vehículos menos contaminantes y con mayor rendimiento.

El año inicia con dos frentes legales simultáneos. Uno en el Congreso por negativa de la Agencia federal de Protección Ambiental a permitir los 17 planes estatales, y el otro entre cada estado y la industria automotriz en cortes federales.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the new laws against tobacco and drivers licenses for young drivers.](#)

Nuevas prohibiciones contra tabaco y licencias de conducir de adolescentes

La Raza Chicago, Inc, Tuesday, January 1, 2008

Con la llegada del nuevo año, Illinois se convirtió en uno de los estados más exigentes en el control de los fumadores y de las licencias de conducir a adolescentes.

A partir del 2 de enero se comenzará a aplicar la prohibición de fumar en prácticamente todos los espacios públicos, incluyendo bares y restaurantes.

En Chicago se había restringido el espacio de los fumadores en 2005, pero ahora la medida se aplica en todo el estado con la ley Illinois Libre de Humo.

No se podrá fumar en oficinas, fábricas, comercios, clubes privados, dormitorios compartidos como en el caso de universidades, prisiones, estadios, casinos, elevadores o baños.

También está prohibido fumar a una distancia menor de cuatro metros y medio de entradas y salidas de edificios, así como en las ventanas.

Solamente se permite fumar en habitaciones privadas de centros de recuperación médica, en un 25 por ciento de las habitaciones de hoteles y en comercios donde se venden cigarrillos y tabacos, así como en bares que no sirvan alcohol.

Todos los comercios están obligados a instalar carteles de "No Fumar", además de retirar ceniceros y denunciar a la policía a los clientes que no cumplan con la prohibición.

El comisionado de Salud Pública de Chicago, Terry Mason, prometió "hacer cumplir la ley, sin excepciones".

Los fumadores que violen la norma pueden ser multados con hasta 250 dólares, mientras que los comerciantes recibirán una sanción de 250 dólares la primera vez y de por lo menos 2.500 dólares por la tercera violación en un plazo menor a un año.

Illinois es el estado número 23 del país en aplicar una amplia prohibición contra el tabaco en lugares públicos cerrados.

Los defensores de la prohibición sostienen que la ley protegerá a los trabajadores y a los fumadores pasivos (aquellos que inhalan el humo del tabaco sin ser fumadores), con lo que se reducirán los riesgos de problemas cardíacos, circulatorios y respiratorios.

Según cifras del gobierno estatal, un 72 por ciento de adultos consultados en una encuesta en 2005 se pronunció a favor de prohibir fumar en los lugares de trabajo.

Por otra parte, un 73 por ciento dijo que debía prohibirse fumar en los restaurantes.

Sin embargo, la Asociación de Licenciados para la Venta de Bebidas en Illinois opinó que bares, restaurantes y clubes nocturnos perderán clientela que se irá a los estados vecinos que no aplican la medida.

Los casinos, por su parte, pronostican que perderán hasta un 20 por ciento de su clientela, lo que costaría al estado unos 144 millones de dólares en impuestos no cobrados.

El nuevo año también trae la aplicación de severas restricciones en los permisos especiales de conducir a adolescentes de 16 años.

Se triplica el tiempo en que un joven debe conducir bajo la supervisión de un adulto (ahora serán 9 meses).

Además, aquellos que todavía no cumplieron 18 años no podrán conducir después de las 10 de la noche de domingo a jueves, y después de las 11 los viernes y sábados.

La nueva ley también requiere que durante el primer año de la licencia los jóvenes no podrán conducir a otro adolescente como pasajero, a menos que sea un pariente inmediato.

Para obtener una licencia, los adolescentes que conducen con permiso especial deben mantenerse libres de violaciones de tránsito durante 9 meses.

A partir de ahora se aumenta de 18 a 19 años la edad en que un joven puede usar teléfono celular mientras maneja, y se obliga a los padres a asistir a las audiencias en la corte donde se consideren violaciones de tránsito de menores de 16 y 17 años.

"Los jóvenes tal vez no aprecian los cambios, pero el apoyo entre los padres ha sido abrumador", declaró el representante estatal John D'Amico (D-Chicago), uno de los autores de la ley.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the possibility of a green planet and how the world has finally taken into account the dangers of global warming, all due to Al Gore.](#)

La posibilidad de un planeta verde-De la mano de Al Gore, finalmente el mundo toma conciencia de los peligros del calentamiento global

El Tiempo Latino, Friday, December 28, 2007

Redacción

El Panel Intergubernamental de Cambio Climático (IPCC, por sus siglas en inglés) -una red de científicos internacional- comenzó a perfilarse a fines de la década de los 80. Pero fue en 2007 cuando comenzó a marcar un camino claro hacia la prevención del fin de un medio ambiente vivible.

Con el informe anual de este año, se logró un consenso único no sólo sobre la existencia del calentamiento global y sus consecuencias, sino también sobre la principal causa que lo provoca: las acciones de los seres humanos.

En su reporte, el panel detalló claramente las potenciales consecuencias del calentamiento y presentó una hoja de ruta mostrando los cambios que las economías y las industrias debían generar para prevenir cambios climáticos que serían dramáticos para las especies que habitan la tierra.

Esta entidad compartió el Premio Nobel de la Paz con uno de los artífices del movimiento verde que logró poner al tema hasta en la agenda de Hollywood: el ex vicepresidente Al Gore.

Gracias a su laureado documental "Un inconvenient truth" (Una verdad inconveniente) que fue premiado con un Oscar de la Academia, el público masivo comprendió más claramente lo que es el cambio climático.

Como calentamiento global se define al aumento en la temperatura de la atmósfera terrestre y de los océanos en las últimas décadas producto del debilitamiento de la capa de ozono por la emisión excesiva de gases tanto producto de industrias como, por ejemplo, el uso personal de aerosoles.

Calentamiento global y efecto invernadero no son sinónimos. El efecto invernadero acrecentado por la contaminación puede ser, según algunas teorías, la causa del calentamiento global observado.

La temperatura del planeta ha venido elevándose desde mediados del siglo XIX, cuando se puso fin a la etapa conocida como la pequeña edad de hielo.

Según explican los científicos, cualquier tipo de cambio climático implica modificaciones en otras variables. Por ejemplo, que el planeta siga calentándose modificaría la distribución de la fauna y floras del planeta.

Ello supondría la expansión de enfermedades de las que algunos de esos animales son portadores. Tal es el caso de la malaria, el dengue o la fiebre amarilla, cuyos vectores son ciertas especies de mosquitos que habitan principalmente en zonas tropicales.

Además, afectaría los ciclos de cultivos y -lo que ya está ocurriendo de manera tangible- derritiría el hielo de los polos, provocando inundaciones de más de 6 metros que podrían dejar bajo el agua a ciudades como Londres y Nueva York.

Una Corte Federal en Rhode Island retomó una demanda de la industria automotriz contra una ley estatal que busca restringir la contaminación del aire en un caso similar al que las automotrices presentaron en California.