

[Fresno Bee column, Tuesday, Jan. 15, 2008:](#)

## **Let's clear air on Campus Pointe brawl right now**

By Bill McEwen / The Fresno Bee

Budgets are tight and people are busy over at Fresno State. So, I'd like to save the university some time and money by helping out on the latest Campus Pointe problem.

In case you missed the story, here's a summary: Fresno State hasn't submitted the \$167 million project for review by our regional air-pollution control district, which is threatening big fines.

The key issue is whether Campus Pointe was approved before the district began requiring this review in early 2006. The district contends that while the project was tentatively approved by California State University trustees in 2005, it wasn't officially approved until last year.

With all the heartburn the project has caused the university and developer Ed Kashian, I'd hate to see them suffer more. And they won't -- if they allow me to send this response to the district.

"Dear Mr. Compliance Manager,

"Here at California State University, Fresno, we think of ourselves as standard-bearers for the San Joaquin Valley, the state of California and, indeed, the Western United States.

"We are leaders and innovators and directly connected to the people we serve. In fact, if you'll allow us to brag a little bit -- it's not bragging if you can back it up, you know -- we believe our university is powering the new California.

"As leaders, it is our responsibility to do the right thing. This means fulfilling the spirit and letter of the law. Fresno State would never attempt to skirt its obligations by hiding behind a technicality. Nor will we begin now.

"Air pollution is a serious health and economic challenge to the citizens of our great Valley. It ravages lungs and shortens lives. Asthma rates among young and old are alarming. And a study by researchers at one of our outstanding sister campuses, Cal State Fullerton, indicates that bad air costs our region \$3.3 billion a year in hospital visits, absences from work and school, and a lot of other things.

"If you've been on our campus or visited our Web site, you know of our efforts to be a green university. We are planning our first multistory parking garage. When finished, the structure will free up valuable land for playing fields, green space and new buildings. Last November, we completed a large solar-panel project that supplies about 20% of our base electricity demands -- or enough to power 1,000 homes. We are home to the Claude Laval Water and Energy Technology Incubator, and our professors and students are engaged in work that will spawn cutting-edge environmental advancements.

"Here at Fresno State, we appreciate and applaud the work of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. We cheered when the district board approved the ground-breaking law requiring developers to pay fees on air pollution created by their projects. The law is the kind of bold, innovative, problem-solving we encourage.

"We believe that Campus Pointe will be a valuable addition to the community with its 540 apartments, 200-room hotel, conference center, 14-screen movie theater and 230,000 square feet of retail/office space. We also believe that Mr. Kashian has incorporated features into the project that will make it more environmentally friendly than other new developments. By design, people visiting and living at Campus Pointe will be encouraged to walk or ride bikes.

"It is with confidence and pride that we submit Campus Pointe to your experts for review. As the Valley's No. 1 institution, we accept the responsibilities of leadership and will pay without complaint to offset the project's contribution to the air-pollution 'pie.'

"The last thing we'd want to do is create the possibility of people not complying with no-burn days or other developers trying to get around the law because they think Fresno State is failing to comply.

"Regards,

"Your humble correspondent on behalf of Fresno State President John Welty"

### **Fresno State may be fined**

The Associated Press

In the San Diego Union-Tribune, Madera Tribune and other papers, Tuesday, January 15, 2008

FRESNO - Regulators in the San Joaquin Valley are threatening to fine Fresno State as much as \$75,000 a day, saying the university failed to review the potential impact a new development could have on air pollution.

The \$167 million Campus Pointe project is set to bring apartments, a movie theater and shops to the California State University, Fresno campus.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District says the university could be sanctioned if it doesn't respond to its request to review the project.

The university and the project's developer need to respond by Jan. 31.

### **Three green groups sue EPA**

#### **Failure to rule on a 2004 air pollution cleanup plan at the heart of matter**

By Stacey Shepard, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Jan. 15, 2008

Three environmental groups filed a lawsuit Monday against the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for its failure to rule on a 2004 air pollution cleanup plan for the smog-laden San Joaquin Valley.

Without EPA's approval, the cleanup plan lacks teeth and the regional air district "can let things slide a bit because nobody can enforce the law against them," said Tom Frantz, head of the Shafter-based Association of Irrigated Residents, one of the parties filing suit.

The plan in question contains air regulations to bring the valley into compliance with the smog standard in place in 2004. The standard was strengthened in recent years and a new cleanup plan was submitted last year. But the groups suing say the old plan must still be enforced to control smog.

San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District officials said the district has implemented all the air regulations in the plan.

"We didn't wait for EPA," said Seyed Sadredin, the air district's executive director. "We've met all our obligations under the plan, so for us, it really doesn't matter."

EPA generally approves or rejects a plan within a year. Once approved, citizens can sue the air district if they suspect the rules aren't being applied.

Frantz said he doesn't know if the district has violated the plan. But if it has, "we can't take them to court right now because nothing's enforceable in this plan."

EPA's regional air director Kerry Drake wouldn't say why the agency declined to rule on the plan.

Sadredin, of the valley air district, suspects EPA felt it wasn't necessary since new smog standards have taken effect.

Sadredin admits the situation is frustrating.

"All the deadlines are enforced on the local government but when it comes to the federal government, the same standards don't apply," he said.

Frantz likened EPA's refusal to rule on the plan to a teacher who gives students a math problem to solve, then never provides the answer.

"No one knows if it's right or wrong," he said.

## **Activists want to force action on air cleanup**

Merced Sun-Star, Tuesday, Jan. 15, 2008

Activists on Monday asked a judge to force federal officials to either approve or disapprove a San Joaquin Valley cleanup plan that was submitted almost four years ago.

The plan was approved by local and state air authorities, meaning the rules and pollution reductions are being enforced. But without a federal decision, no one can challenge the rules and hold air officials to their promises, said a lawyer for the activists.

The Association of Irrigated Residents and the Natural Resources Defense Council filed the action against the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The case is in U.S. District Court in San Francisco.

The activists want a decision concerning a Valley plan for the one-hour ozone standard, which was revoked in 2005. They also say the government has not acted on two other air plans -- one in the South Coast Air Basin and one state-level plan dating back to 2003.

A regional EPA official said he had not seen the complaint and could not comment.

## **Valley groups sue EPA over air**

The Associated Press

In the Madera Tribune, Modesto Bee and other papers, Tuesday, January 15, 2008

FRESNO - Two environmental groups filed suit Monday against the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, claiming the federal government did not do enough to ensure that all Californians enjoy clean air.

The Natural Resources Defense Council and the Association of Irrigated Residents, a grassroots group of residents from the San Joaquin Valley, allege the government never made sure that people living in the smoggiest air basins were protected under the state's pollution reduction plans.

The suit filed in federal court in San Francisco says the EPA failed to implement the Clean Air Act by neglecting to rule on important pieces of the state's clean air plan.

The agency hasn't taken action on the California Air Resources Board's 2003 statewide strategy, the groups said.

"Until the agency makes a decision on those plans, legally, the state doesn't have to fix air quality," said San Francisco attorney Brent Newell, who is representing the residents' group.

Kerry Drake, an associate director in the air division in EPA's Region 9, said he couldn't comment on the suit, but said the EPA continues to work closely with local air quality managers.

## **Environmental groups sue EPA over air quality deadlines**

By Bob Egelko, Staff Writer

S.F. Chronicle, Tuesday, January 15, 2008

The Environmental Protection Agency has ignored long-expired deadlines to act on the state's plans to clean up its most polluted air, in the San Joaquin Valley and Los Angeles Basin, conservation groups charged in a lawsuit Monday.

The suit accuses the EPA of violating federal laws that required action by February 2005 on a state-approved plan for the South Coast Air Quality Management District and by May 2006 for the San Joaquin Valley. Those plans cover pollution from factories, other industries and farms.

The EPA also missed a July 2005 deadline for acting on a statewide plan that includes new limits on emissions from diesel trucks, the suit says.

The suit was filed in federal court in San Francisco, where the EPA's regional office is located.

State and regional agencies have started to implement the plans, which contain commitments to meet federal standards for ozone and other pollutants. But without EPA approval, the plans can't be enforced in court by either the federal agency or private citizens, the conservation groups said.

"EPA should have acted two years ago to ensure our health is protected," said Tom Frantz, president of a valley group called the Association of Irrigated Residents, which is a plaintiff in the suit. The other plaintiff is the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Kerry Drake, associate director of the EPA's Clean Air Division for the region, declined to discuss the agency's compliance with legal deadlines. But he said the EPA is working closely with the San Joaquin and South Coast agencies and the state Air Resources Board on plans to meet federal standards.

"Progress is being made," he said.

Drake said the regional agencies submitted updated plans to the EPA in November.

But Brent Newell, a lawyer for the conservation groups, said the local and state plans will have little effect until the EPA either approves them or orders changes. For now, he said, the San Joaquin Valley is operating under a federally approved plan that dates from 1994, and the South Coast under a 1999 plan.

## **Report shows SoCal trash could be lucrative for county Supervisors to hear report on numbers today**

By James Burger, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Jan. 15, 2008

Dumping Southern California trash in Kern County might prove lucrative for refuse entrepreneurs, according to a report the Board of Supervisors will hear this afternoon.

The report from Daphne Harley, director of the Kern County Waste Management Department, doesn't advocate for immediate action and she doesn't know of any active plans to site private landfills here.

But that doesn't mean those proposals won't come, she said.

Southern California is paying high prices to bury its trash, Harley said, and an investigation shows it could dump cheaper in Kern County.

"We need to pay more attention to what's going on in Southern California," she said.

Supervisor Michael Rubio said the report and the county's response to it will be critical. He said the report "scratches the surface of a much larger issue -- our policies for dealing with importation of waste."

The trash and [pollution from diesel trucks](#) that haul it here clearly endanger the county's quality of life and ability to operate a waste management system, Rubio said.

The investigation that produced the report was prompted, Harley said, when the High Desert Green Energy Park was proposed near California City nearly two years ago. The project included a landfill that would have taken up to 1 billion cubic yards of waste from Southern California.

Local opposition to the proposal was forceful and the idea was scrapped. But the county and Harley didn't let the issue drop.

They commissioned a study designed to find out if it was financially beneficial for Los Angeles trash to be hauled into Kern County and dumped in privately owned landfills.

The answer was, "Yes."

Today's report is a wake up call for Kern County leaders -- pointing out the need for an economic plan to protect the county's publicly owned waste management system from private competition, Harley said.

## **Fee on cargo containers at L.A.-area ports to raise \$1.4 billion**

By Alex Veiga, AP Business Writer

In the Merced Sun-Star, Tuesday, Jan. 15, 2008

LOS ANGELES-Harbor commissioners for the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach voted Monday to charge a fee on loaded cargo containers aimed at raising more than \$1.4 billion to help pay for bridge, rail and highway construction.

The \$15 per container fee goes into effect Jan. 1, 2009, jumps to \$18 in 2010, then decreases to an unspecified amount two years later. It will remain in effect until the projects are fully funded, which officials expect will be seven years, but could be longer.

Funds raised by the fees are expected to cover about half the cost of building the slate of infrastructure projects, with the remaining money coming from federal and state sources.

Among the projects to be funded: construction of a six-lane bridge, a four-lane elevated expressway and several major railway track improvements.

The Los Angeles City Council must sign off on the proposed Infrastructure Cargo Fee before it goes into effect.

The fee is the latest charge tied to cargo containers moving through the neighboring ports as part of a sweeping effort to reduce air pollution in and around the harbors.

Last month, the ports approved a \$35 fee on loaded containers beginning June 1. That measure is expected to raise around \$1.6 billion to help pay to replace thousands of older diesel trucks with cleaner-burning models.

The two ports combined represent the nation's largest port complex and account for more than 40 percent of all containerized cargo entering the U.S. annually.

Exploding economic growth in Asia is expected to triple the cargo container volume at the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach over the next two decades.

That has raised concerns over the impact pollution from trucks, ships and other vehicles at the ports is having on surrounding communities.

The ports' clean air initiative forecasts an 80 percent reduction in air pollution from port trucks in the next five years.

## **Officials taking steps to clean up the air at Bay Area ports**

Information from the Contra Costa Times

In the Modesto Bee, Tuesday, January 15, 2008

SAN FRANCISCO - Air pollution officials are taking some of the first steps to clean up the air at Bay Area ports.

Officials with the Bay Area Air Quality Management District Board have released for public comment draft rules intended to reduce air pollution at the ports of Oakland, San Francisco, Richmond, Benicia and Redwood City.

The district is seeking to require an inventory to estimate the tons of fine particles, sulfur dioxide and smog-forming gases from each of the five ports.

The district would then establish a series of measures to reduce the amount of pollution coming from ships, trucks and trains operating in the ports.

Air quality officials say the ports - especially Oakland - are a major source of toxic diesel soot that can aggravate the risk of asthma attacks and heart and lung problems.

## **Lawmaker to question EPA about waiver denial**

By Erica Werner, Associated Press

In the Contra Costa Times, Modesto Bee and other papers, Tuesday, Jan. 15, 2008

WASHINGTON -- Rep. Henry Waxman said Monday that he plans to depose key EPA officials about why the agency denied California a federal waiver needed to implement first-in-the-nation reductions on greenhouse gas emissions from cars and trucks.

At least 16 other states were prepared to implement the same limits if California received the waiver, which the Environmental Protection Agency denied last month.

Waxman, D-Los Angeles, chairman of the House Committee on Government and Oversight Reform, sent a letter to EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson naming seven high-level managers he wants to interview, including the heads of the air quality and atmospheric program offices.

He wants the EPA to agree to a schedule for transcribed interviews or depositions by Wednesday. EPA spokesman Jonathan Shradar said the agency would work with Waxman's committee to schedule the meetings.

Waxman's move comes as the EPA has missed deadlines to turn over to Waxman and Sen. Barbara Boxer documents they've requested to back up the waiver denial. The EPA says it is still working to collect the documents. Waxman asked the EPA to establish by Wednesday mutually agreeable deadlines to produce the records

Boxer, chairwoman of the Senate's environment committee, has threatened to try to subpoena the records, but she can't do so without the consent of at least two Republicans on her committee. Waxman, however, has unilateral authority to conduct depositions by invitation or subpoena after consulting with the top Republican on his committee.

Waxman said that because Johnson's conduct is being examined by his committee, EPA lawyers can be present for the transcribed interviews only if they certify they are acting specifically as counsel for the witnesses being interviewed rather than for the agency as a whole.

When the EPA denied California's waiver request, it said that Congress' new fuel efficiency law was a better way to go. California contends that its law, which would have forced automakers to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 30 percent in new cars and light trucks by 2016, is stronger and takes effect more quickly than the new federal law.

The federal law would raise fuel economy standards nationwide to an average of 35 miles per gallon by 2020. California says its law would result in standards of 36.8 miles per gallon four years earlier -- an analysis the EPA disputes.

California has sued the federal government over the issue. Government officials familiar with the decision have said Johnson overruled a consensus among the EPA's legal and technical staff that denying the waiver was unlikely to stand up in court.

Twelve other states -- Connecticut, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington -- have adopted California's automobile emissions laws. The governors of Arizona, Colorado, Florida and Utah have said they plan to adopt them, and the rules were under consideration elsewhere.

The EPA officials Waxman wants to depose include Margo Oge, director of the office of transportation and air quality, and Brian McLean, director of the office of atmospheric programs.

## **House Dem leader to put EPA in hot seat**

### **Waxman to ask why it didn't let state set own vehicle emissions rules**

Associated Press

In the S.F. Chronicle, Tuesday, January 15, 2008

Washington -- A key House Democrat said Monday he plans to question EPA officials about why the agency refused to allow California to require reductions in greenhouse gas emissions from cars and trucks.

At least 16 other states were prepared to implement the same limits had the government issued the waiver California needed to set the standards, which would have been the first in the nation.

Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Los Angeles, chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, sent a letter to Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Stephen Johnson naming seven high-level managers he wants to interview.

Waxman wants the EPA to agree to a schedule for transcribed interviews or depositions by Wednesday. EPA spokesman Jonathan Shradar said the agency would work with Waxman's committee to schedule the meetings.

The EPA already has missed deadlines set by Waxman and Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., to turn over documents supporting the waiver denial. EPA says it is still working to collect the documents.

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Twelve other states - Connecticut, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington - have adopted California's tailpipe emissions laws. The governors of Arizona, Colorado, Florida and Utah have said they also plan to adopt them, and the rules were also under consideration elsewhere.

## **High Court Declines Air Safeguards Case**

In the S.F. Chronicle, N.Y Times and other papers  
Monday, January 14, 2008

WASHINGTON (AP) -- The Supreme Court declined Monday to hear industry complaints that the Environmental Protection Agency should have dropped some old clean air safeguards when it imposed a more stringent air quality standard for ozone.

EPA concluded that its existing standard for ozone exposure was inadequate to protect public health and the agency has estimated it will cost \$9.6 billion a year in increased costs for polluters to comply with the new one.

When regulators relax a standard as opposed to imposing a tougher one, the Clean Air Act contains a section designed to ensure that air quality won't deteriorate in an area.

Safeguards, which regulators refer to as "anti-backsliding" requirements, call for control measures on polluters.

Industry objected in the case of the revised ozone standard when EPA concluded it could use the "anti-backsliding" requirements, even though the agency was imposing a tougher standard rather than easing one.

In raising the ozone standard, regulators had dropped a few of the requirements, but they were reimposed by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, which ruled against industry.

The EPA is imposing requirements, regardless of whether they are needed to attain the new, more stringent ozone standard, industry lawyers wrote in asking the Supreme Court to take the case.

Petitioning the court were the National Petrochemical & Refiners Association, the American Chemistry Council, the American Petroleum Institute and the Utility Air Regulatory Group.

Separately, businesses in Baton Rouge, La., also asked the Supreme Court to hear their objection to EPA's position on the new ozone standard.

Lawyers for the businesses said that if Louisiana is forced to revise its pollution control plan, over 150 Baton Rouge businesses will be forced to pay \$65 million to \$100 million a year, threatening thousands of jobs in an economy still overwhelmed by the impact of hurricanes Katrina and Rita, local business groups told the court.

The cases are National Petrochemical v. South Coast Air Quality Management District, 07-311, and South Coast v. EPA, 07-333.

## **Transit panel urges gas tax increase**

By Hope Yen, Associated Press Writer

In the Modesto Bee, Tuesday, January 15, 2008

WASHINGTON - Federal gasoline taxes should be raised up to 40 cents per gallon over five years, a special commission urged Tuesday in calling for drastic changes to fix aging bridges and roads and reduce traffic deaths.

The two-year study by the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission is the first to recommend broad changes after the devastating bridge collapse in Minneapolis last August. It warns that urgent action is needed to avoid future disasters.

Among the other recommendations by the 12-member commission:

- Work to cut traffic fatalities in half over the next 17 years by urging states to embrace new strategies to improve safety.
- Ease traffic congestion by expanding state and local public transit systems and highway capacity.
- Protect the environment by smoothing traffic flow, encouraging alternative commute options such as carpooling and public transit and promoting energy-efficient construction and lighting in transit systems to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.
- Seek to develop new energy sources with new research programs costing \$200 million annually over the next decade.

Under the proposal to raise gas taxes, the current tax of 18.4 cents per gallon would be increased by 5 cents to 8 cents annually for five years and then indexed to inflation afterward to help fix the infrastructure, expand public transit and highways as well as broaden railway and rural access.

Other sources of revenue could come from tolls, peak-hour "congestion pricing" on highways, freight fees and ticket taxes for passenger rail improvements, according to the report.

But the proposals for improving the nation's transportation system, which are expected to cost \$225 billion each year for the next 50 years, is at risk of stalling because of internal division. The commission's chairwoman, Transportation Secretary Mary Peters, and two other members oppose gas tax increases and were issuing a dissenting opinion to the report that said private-sector investment and tolls would be sufficient.

The gas tax has not been increased since 1993, and recent efforts by Congress to raise it have faltered over the objections of the Bush administration. The tax increase is designed to take effect in 2009, after President Bush leaves office.

It is time for a "new beginning," the report said, calling the current strategy of patchwork repair "no longer acceptable."

The report also calls for the country to rebuild and expand its rail network to meet a growing demand for alternatives to congested highways and to promote partnerships between the public and private sectors at U.S. ports.



The commission was formed by Congress in 2005 to study the future needs of the nation's surface transportation system, which includes roads, mass-transit systems, ports and rail lines - as well as to recommend funding options.

The report comes as state governments and several business groups, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers, are calling on the federal government to raise gas taxes to pay for substantial transportation improvements. The Minneapolis bridge collapse, which killed 13 people and injured about 100, also shone a national spotlight on the unsteady condition of the nation's roads and bridges and drew new calls for additional spending.

The Bush administration has said that raising taxes won't cut congestion and creates additional risks for congressional pork, such as Alaska's infamous multimillion dollar "Bridge to Nowhere," which has been scuttled.

In its report, the commission unanimously agreed that measures of accountability were needed to keep watch over state and federal spending.

Besides Peters, the two commissioners opposing a tax increase are Maria Cino, Peters' former deputy who is organizing the 2008 Republican National Convention, and Rick Geddes, a Cornell University professor who has served as a senior staff economist in the Bush administration on the President's Council of Economic Advisers.

## **Automakers roll out plug-in concepts**

By Jeff Karoub, AP Business Writer

In the Modesto Bee, Monday, January 14, 2008

DETROIT - Chrysler LLC on Monday rolled out three plug-in concept cars at the North American International Auto Show, the venue where rival General Motors Corp. made a splash one year ago with its Chevrolet Volt electric concept.

Not to be outdone, GM announced production may begin as soon as 2010 on a plug-in hybrid electric version of the Saturn Vue Green Line, which it expects to be the first regular production plug-in hybrid electric vehicle.

And Toyota said it plans to test hundreds of plug-ins with fleet and commercial customers worldwide by the same year.

It's an electrifying race with many entrants, but one analyst says it's more of a public relations scramble right now for an industry that's lagged on drivers' demand and desires for alternative power.

"The automotive industry is trying to have this green image, but I don't see a true commitment ... where a company is taking a leadership role," said Thilo Koslowski, an automotive analyst for Gartner Inc.

"The concepts trickling down are primarily based on consumers demanding them. ... From the initial perspective, we see a lot of talk about concepts. It doesn't mean you can actually realize those ... for the mass market."

Chrysler's entries in the concept race are Chrysler ecoVoyager, Dodge Zeo and Jeep Renegade. Officials say consumer demand isn't generated solely by technology. It also needs to come with distinctive designs - in other words, no one-size-fits all approach.

Frank Klegon, Chrysler's product development chief, said the Zeo concept, which is completely electric, is designed to maintain Dodge's tradition of performance. The ecoVoyager, coupled with a fuel cell, is meant to convey Chrysler's reputation as an "iconic American brand." And the Renegade, combined with a low-emission diesel engine, is envisioned as a vehicle that could "go anywhere" and "go green."

Still, he said, they are purely concepts with no production guarantees.

"With emerging technologies, you don't really know which one is going to be the right solution, or something else that leapfrogs in the meantime," he said. "That's one challenge for us as an industry and a company."

GM hopes to have the Volt on the market by 2010 but is setting no firm date. This year, it's showing a similar plug-in hybrid concept that's a collaboration between Saturn and Opel.

GM also will extend its hybrid lineup, releasing a new Saturn Vue two-mode hybrid, which is expected to boost fuel economy by about 50 percent when it hits showrooms later this year. And it predicts the Vue plug-in hybrid will be the first regular production vehicle of its kind.

Ford Motor Co. has a partnership with Southern California Edison to develop a small fleet of plug-in hybrids. The automaker delivered its first plug-in to the utility late last year.

"The intention there is for us to learn with them what are the opportunities for a workable business model for batteries of plug-in hybrids because there is still a significant cost associated with batteries," said Derrick Kuzak, Ford's head of global product development.

The auto show also features Toyota's plug-in hybrid prototype, which, like the current Prius, switches from pure electric to gas engine to a blended gas electric mode. But the plug-in has a second battery pack that allows it to store greater levels of electricity and is capable of operating in pure electric mode for longer periods of time and at much higher speeds.

Company officials said that when the plug-ins make it to showrooms depends a lot on their ability to mass produce the batteries and the usage by fleet and commercial customers.

Even upstarts are getting in on the act. California-based Fisker Automotive announced Monday it will begin producing a plug-in sports car in late 2009. The Fisker Karma will cost around \$80,000, with projected sales of 15,000 per year.

Chinese automaker BYD, which is also one of the world's top battery suppliers, said it will begin selling a plug-in hybrid sedan in China by the end of this year and wants to bring the vehicle to North America in three to five years.

Many automakers say this time, the market is ready for electrics. The 1990s and early 2000s saw the rise and fall of GM's EV1 and offerings from Toyota and Audi.

Koslowski, who worked for Audi, said it's true that there wasn't as strong demand then. But he also blames the automakers for not promoting the technology or accepting lower profit margins in the short term as they boosted investment in batteries and other technology necessary to make it happen.

"Why didn't we do this before? The simple answer is nobody really forced the automakers to make these changes," he said. "The fact that we haven't had changes over the past couple of decades is shameful."

Troy Clarke, GM's North American president, said that GM fully understands the technological pitfalls of electric vehicles, such as the limited range of the batteries.

He said the technological timing is right, and comes at the convergence of three trends: concern over climate change, the need for U.S. energy independence and the high costs of oil.

"You don't really need anybody to convince you that this is the right time to start doubling down on your bets with this type of technology," he said.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Tuesday, Jan. 15, 2008:](#)

### **'Enjoy the warm glow'**

The letter from Shirley Studt [Jan. 8] really stoked my fire, as did a recent letter that labeled those who enjoy a fire as Neanderthals.

My family and I enjoy the occasional fire in our fireplace. In fact, it draws my family together in the same room to watch TV or just talk. Some bring pillows to sit on the hearth to enjoy the warm glow. We are sure to check the burning restrictions for the day and follow the regulations.

Yes, the fire does warm the house and provide some light so we use fewer natural resources and pay less to Pacific Gas & Electric. What's wrong with that?

It amazes me how people like Ms. Studt demand we conform to their desires. If, on occasion, the smoke bothers you -- close your window! Frankly, I think she's exaggerating the problem. Could it be she's just blowing smoke?

*Chris Patin, Clovis*

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the lawsuit filed against EPA by Natural Resources Defense Council and Association of Irrigated Residents of the San Joaquin Valley. For more information, contact Claudia at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

### **Ambientalistas de California presentan otra demanda federal contra la EPA**

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Tuesday, January 15, 2008

Dos organizaciones ambientalistas presentaron ayer en California una nueva demanda contra el gobierno federal para exigir reglamentos más estrictos contra la contaminación del aire, especialmente la vehicular.

El Concilio de Defensa de los Recursos Naturales y la Asociación de Residentes Irritados del Valle de San Joaquín, en la región media norte del estado, acusaron a la Agencia Federal de Protección Ambiental (EPA-por sus siglas en inglés) de fallar en garantizar la mejor calidad de aire para los californianos.

Ambos grupos expusieron en sus demandas proyectos regionales con mejores alcances que el del gobierno federal, pero que están inactivos porque la administración del presidente George Bush los ha rechazado.

##

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