

District launching 'culture changing' clean-air campaign

By Stacey Shepard, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, April 3, 2008

Did you calculate tailpipe emissions when you bought your last car? Did you consider the distance from work when you bought that new home?

The Healthy Air Living program will replace Spare the Air days. What's the difference?

Spare the Air days were called when air quality was expected to be unhealthy. Residents were asked to avoid pollution-creating activities on these days.

Healthy Air Living seeks to get people to make air quality a priority in their daily decisions.

San Joaquin Valley air officials will launch a campaign this summer aimed at getting people to make air quality a priority in their long-term and day-to-day decisions.

The Healthy Air Living program will target individuals, businesses and organizations with information and resources on how to cut the amount of air pollution they create.

For example, the district wants people to consider that a hybrid or fuel-efficient vehicle is better for the air than a large SUV when they buy a new car.

"We live in a valley struggling with pollution and individual choices make an impact," said San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District spokeswoman Brenda Turner. "Often when people buy a vehicle, the air pollution aspect is not a concern but we're asking them to make that a priority."

The program replaces the air district's long-running Spare the Air program, which discouraged polluting activities like excessive driving and mowing the lawn on days when air pollution was expected to be bad. There were six Spare the Air days last year.

The district thinks it can get better air quality gains under the new initiative.

"Spare the Air was mostly an education and outreach program," said Seyed Sadredin, air district executive director. "This will ultimately be a year-round, culture changing initiative."

A major focus of the program will be getting people to cut down on driving. During a week-long awareness campaign from July 7 to 13, the district will encourage people to try the bus, a bike or carpool to get to work.

Kern County drivers combined traveled more than 22 million miles daily in 2006, up from 18 million miles a day a decade ago, according to the Kern Council of Governments.

Vehicle exhaust is responsible for about 75 percent of the air pollution in Kern County, according to the air district.

Businesses will also be asked to do their part and encourage carpools and telecommuting, or build showers and lockers for those who bike to work. The district also wants companies, local governments and churches to consider long-term strategies like buying clean vehicles for fleets and hiring 'green' contracting.

Some have already started.

Kern County last year mandated that clean and fuel-efficient vehicles be considered when buying replacements for its 2,700-vehicle fleet.

Chevron and local correctional facilities already operate employee vanpools. Tejon Ranch is working on one to shuttle workers from Bakersfield to its industrial complex near the base of the Grapevine, which employs about 1,000 people.

Project Coordinator Jake Sill said an informal survey of workers there found 70 percent were interested in sharing the commute.

"The question is how many are really going to do it but that's still a high percentage of people that want it," Sill said.

The air district will post tools and resources on how to curb air pollution in the coming months on the Web site www.healthyairliving.com.

Kaweah Delta installing turbine Cogeneration plant will provide 3.5 megawatts of electricity

By Gerald Carroll

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Thursday, April 3, 2008

A new natural gas-powered turbine will save Kaweah Delta Medical Center \$1.5 million a year in power costs when it goes online June 1, CEO Lindsay Mann said Wednesday.

The turbine - built by San Diego-based Solar Turbines Inc. - will generate 3.5 megawatts of electricity, enough to power 350 homes, said site manager Ron Brown. But all that electricity will go to the expanding medical center - translating into lower power costs for decades to come, Mann said.

"That means \$1.5 million per year more available for health care in the Visalia area," Mann said.

The exhaust assembly will be positioned over the newly installed \$2 million turbine today, hospital officials and contractors said.

The process is tricky, said Ron Reitsma, owner of Jameson Hydro Crane Service, which provided the enormous crane being used to lift and lower components.

"We have to be very careful," he said. "Lifting loads as much as 120 tons is very dangerous."

The 2-year-old project hasn't come cheap. Still, the project is expected to come in under the \$23 million budgeted, said Kaweah Delta Operations Director Mike Williams.

The single turbine replaces three older "reciprocating" engines that also ran on natural gas.

That system had many more moving parts and was expensive to maintain, Williams said.

The three older engines also generated only half the power of the new unit, Brown said.

The hospital's "cogenerator" is capable of supplying power on its own, independent of a public utility. But it can be shut down during low-demand periods if public power ends up being cheaper, officials say.

"This investment ensures the independent energy future of the hospital," Williams said.

The turbine - through a boiler system - will generate enough power for the entire hospital, plus the north addition that opens next year, Williams said.

Three diesel generators will remain at the hospital for use in emergency conditions, such as a major earthquake that knocks out power and cuts natural-gas lines, Williams said.

Another plus: Since the single turbine burns much cleaner than the engines it replaces, Kaweah Delta will save on air-pollution credits from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, Williams said.

"This brings us within [district] air-quality compliance and then some," Williams said. "We could sell our credits to someone else, but we won't, because they're very expensive and hard to get."

Home builders, owners put forth extra effort to protect environment

By Hillary S. Meeks

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Thursday, April 3, 2008

"Green" products aren't always showy - think recycled paper or burlap grocery sacks - but a northeast Visalia housing development puts its environment-friendly features front and center.

Sierra Ventana, off Highway 198 near Lovers Lane, boasts solar panels, dual-pane windows and other energy-saving elements. Homeowners also have the option of water-saving "California landscapes" showcasing rocks and hardy desert plants.

But the solar panels have the biggest effect, said Pam Lockhart, real estate broker for the subdivision.

"If you take a whole development and put these panels on every house," she said, "then it's the equivalent of just planting acres and acres of trees."

Sierra Ventana can't claim to be unique, however. "Green" construction is catching on everywhere.

The future of home building

Home builders are under no obligation to create green neighborhoods - yet. Bob Keenan, president of the Kings/Tulare County Home Builder Association, said such requirements aren't far off.

In the meantime, the association has affiliated itself with the California Green Builder program. The organization provides flexible guidelines allowing builders to attain green certification.

The state Legislature is looking at industry regulations that would use the California Green Builder program as a guideline, Keenan said. But smart builders are staying ahead of the curve, he said.

"The consumer is becoming more aware of their environment and they're looking for [green features]," he said.

There's plenty of evidence backing him up.

The Tulare development Claremont Greens, built by certified-green builder Pacific Union Homes, already has sold out, according to the builder's Web site.

A green Fresno neighborhood recently sold its lots before building even began, said Shawn Ogletree, natural resources conservation manager for the city of Visalia.

Visalia is working on a green-building program that would reduce greenhouse-gas emissions, be more energy-efficient and conserve water, Ogletree said.

"I think everybody is kind of starting to realize it's a market," he said.

Visalia's program would not be mandatory. But it would dovetail with green-building efforts by the home-builder association and the United States Green Building Council.

Builders can go to the council with questions on building green, said employee and environmental planner Emily Magill.

"[Making a difference] is really a lot of little things," she said. "It doesn't have to be one thing that's big, because they all add up."

Government goes green

Cities also are going green. The two newest Visalia Police Department precincts used an array of green features, including tightly compressed hay bales as insulation and enhanced natural lighting.

The hay bales serve a dual green purpose, said Visalia's Assistant City Manager Mike Olmos. Not only do they provide extra insulation that cuts down on the use of energy, but hay is an easily renewable resource.

Olmos said he's a big fan of using natural light.

"You almost swear when you walk underneath [a skylight] that there's a bulb in there, but there's not," he said. "Natural lighting just makes people feel good."

The buildings also were oriented with the environment in mind. The urinals are waterless. Bamboo is used for wainscoting.

"Nobody could figure that it was grass and not wood. It looks a lot like oak," said Dennis Lehman, city building official. "And it's a very renewable source. It looks very rich."

A new police headquarters for Visalia also will have green features, Lehman said.

Finding them doesn't have to add a lot to the cost, he said.

"You have to be smart and selective," Lehman said. "It may not be readily apparent, but if you search around, the products are pretty much out there."

U.S. GREEN BUILDING COUNCIL

The United States Green Building Council is introducing itself in Tulare and Kings counties with a free program at 6 p.m. today at the Cellar Door, 101 W. Main St., Visalia.

Mike Crissman, California Secretary of Resources, will be the featured speaker. He'll discuss what he learned at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Bali, Indonesia.

"He'll be talking about some of the new policies coming down the line that they talked about in Bali," said Emily Magill, an environmental planner with the council's Tulare-Kings branch. "He'll address how they're going to apply in the Central Valley."

Information: 636-1166.

- Staff reports

Teenagers build purple 'bat box' at Washington Elementary School

By Dhyana Levey

Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, April 3, 2008

WINTON -- Once upon a time there were a bunch of stinky flying bats, a group of smart kids, millions of mosquitoes, asthma-related guano and a little wooden purple house.

All these moving parts came together just at the right time to help solve an environmental, ecological and health problem at a local school.

Washington Elementary School doesn't necessarily want to get rid of its infestation of about 1,000 bats.

It would just prefer the winged mammals stay away from the kids.

The solution? A violet-colored bat box built by teenagers as part of a Camp Fire Club and Roots & Shoots project.

The youth environmental service group, which includes seven local high school girls, created the bats' new 2-by-2-foot home using plywood and cedar. Inside are nine separate chambers with hand-cut grooves so the creatures can hook their little feet there for a comfortable rest.

About 800 to 1,000 bats can inhabit the space, which was placed on a high pole on the far east side of campus where students don't typically go.

And the bat house is coated in a vivid violet color. "It's painted lightly so the bats won't overheat," explained Elaina Robinson, 16, a Camp Fire Club and Roots & Shoots member and Buhach Colony High School student.

The Mexican free-tailed and little brown bats haven't yet made their big move to new quarters. They still inhabit the half-inch space underneath the multipurpose rooms' gutter and flashing (the metal that hangs over the side of the roof).

Denzel McDowell, the school's maintenance operations director, placed plastic over the flashing so the bats can fly out but will face trouble getting back in. Once they're all out, he'll nail down the flashing completely -- hoping that the creatures will relocate to the bat box.

"We want them away from the building, but don't want to get rid of them altogether," he said.

If the bats were to leave completely, the school would have more problems with mosquitoes, said the school's principal Helio Brasil, superintendent of the Merced River School District.

Bats are the primary predators of night-flying insects and eat enormous quantities of them, according to Bat Conservation International, a nature education resource.

But more than half of the United States' 47 bat species are now endangered or in rapid decline.

Their most formidable threats are humans and loss of habitat. The school doesn't want to lose them or contribute to their endangerment, Brasil said.

Then, of course, there are health concerns for the students. "(Bats) are a filthy mess," he said. "But they are endangered. So how do we keep the campus clean -- and keep them away from the kids?"

No children have come in contact with or had any trouble with the bats, he added. And all those horror stories about bats going on rampages isn't true, said Lisa Kayser-Grant, leader of the Camp Fire Club and Root & Shoots.

"If they are not handled, it's fine," she said. "But children are curious, so we need to have them away from the multipurpose room."

Bat droppings were scattered along the side of the building Tuesday afternoon. A tiny dead bat lay on the ground.

Not only are the creatures messy, but their urine and droppings smell terrible, release ammonia and can even trigger asthma, said Melissa Kelly-Ortega, program associate for the Merced/Mariposa County Asthma Coalition.

The Asthma Coalition encouraged the bat-box program after discovering the school's problem during an "Indoor Air Quality -- Tools for Schools" walk-through. The walk-throughs are done at various local schools to measure carbon dioxide readings, air flow and temperature.

"When we noticed there were bats, I thought of Roots & Shoots," she recalled.

The combined team of youth service organization Camp Fire Club and environmentally focused Roots & Shoots was already looking for a chance to do a bat-box project, Kayser-Grant said. So they were presented with an ideal opportunity.

McDowell said the bats had been a problem for years, and the school had long tried to figure a humane way to deal with them. He had heard about bat boxes, but didn't know how to go about getting them.

Kayser-Grant collected all the information her group needed for the project through Bat Conservation International -- www.batcon.org.

The project took about four months to complete, including about two to three weeks of actually building the boxes, Robinson said. And then they had to find a suitable location, added club member Haley Grant, 16, a home-schooled high school student from Merced.

The box is far from buildings and areas where children play, said Grace Kenny, 15, a club member from Golden Valley High School. And the spot where it sits hosts both shade and sun for the bats while keeping them shielded from shiny reflections, which they hate.

The Merced River School District will be recognized for its conservation and air quality efforts. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will present the district on May 6 -- World Asthma Day -- with a "Great Start Award" for its work with the Indoor Air Quality -- Tools for School Program. These kids clearly were thinking outside the bat box.

EPA Is Sued for Answers on Emissions

By Juliet Eilperin, Washington Post Staff Writer
Washington Post Thursday, April 3, 2008

Officials from 18 states and several environmental groups sued the Environmental Protection Agency yesterday in an effort to force the administration to determine whether greenhouse-gas emissions are endangering public health.

The plaintiffs said the agency is ignoring a year-old Supreme Court ruling that the federal government has legal authority under the Clean Air Act to control carbon dioxide emissions from vehicles. They asked the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia to compel the EPA to act within 60 days.

"What we have is an environmental agency acting completely contrary to its essential mission and duty," said California Attorney General Edmund G. "Jerry" Brown Jr. (D) in a telephone news conference.

The House Oversight and Government Reform Committee recently reported that EPA staff members had determined in December that the emissions endanger public health, but the process stalled after the EPA forwarded the findings to the White House. The House Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming yesterday voted 12 to 0 to subpoena all EPA documents related to the staff action, along with records of the agency's decision to block California from regulating tailpipe greenhouse-gas emissions on its own.

In an e-mail, EPA spokesman Jonathan Shradar said agency officials "will review this new petition" and, in the meantime, will focus on its proposed rule-making as "a reasonable path forward."

State AGs, others try to force EPA action after high court ruling

By Jay Lindsay, Associated Press Writer
In the Contra Costa Times, Thursday, April 3, 2008

BOSTON—A year after a divided Supreme Court ruled carbon dioxide from cars is air pollution that can be regulated, attorneys general from more than a dozen states including Connecticut and several environmental groups planned Wednesday to ask an appeals court to force the EPA to act on the decision.

The plaintiffs said last April's 5-4 ruling required the Environmental Protection Agency to decide whether to regulate greenhouse gas emissions, including carbon dioxide, from motor vehicles. The EPA has instead done nothing, they said.

"The EPA's failure to act in the face of these incontestable dangers is a shameful dereliction of duty," Massachusetts Attorney General Martha Coakley said.

The petition asks the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit to require the EPA to act within 60 days. The petition would be filed later Wednesday.

In last year's decision, the Supreme Court ruled the EPA has the authority to regulate emissions from new cars and trucks under the Clean Air Act, and said the reasons the EPA gave for declining to do so were insufficient.

EPA spokesman Jonathan Shradar said the Supreme Court required the agency to evaluate how it would regulate greenhouse gas emissions from cars and other vehicles, but set no deadline.

The EPA plans to include the evaluation in a broader look at how to best regulate all greenhouse gas emissions, not just those from vehicles, he said. Otherwise, a mash of laws and regulations could emerge rather than the "holistic" approach the administration favors.

"We want to set a good foundation to build a strong climate policy of potential regulation and laws we can work toward and actually see some success," Shradar said.

Shradar did not know when a broader rule-making process could be finished, citing the likely torrent of public comment which would have to be evaluated, though he said the agency had set an "aggressive" internal timetable.

The state of Massachusetts was the lead plaintiff in the original suit against the EPA, filed with 11 other states, three cities and 13 environmental groups.

California, 17 other states sue EPA over greenhouse gases

By Kevin Yamamura

Sacramento Bee and Tri-Valley Herald, Thursday, April 3, 2008

Attorney General Jerry Brown joined officials in 17 other states Wednesday to demand that the federal Environmental Protection Agency release its internal finding that greenhouse gas emissions endanger public health.

The move comes after EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson wrote last week that he plans to open a months-long public comment period on greenhouse gas emissions, a procedure critics say serves to delay action on emissions until after President Bush leaves office.

The states, joined by environmental groups, filed their legal demand Wednesday in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, asking that EPA release the finding within 60 days.

"The president and his assistants have taken control here and have continuously blocked or sabotaged efforts to control greenhouse gases, although on some occasions saying something to the contrary and giving false hopes to the country," Brown said in a conference call. "What we have here is the environmental agency ... acting completely contrary to its essential mission and duty."

EPA last year denied California and other states a waiver to regulate tailpipe emissions for greenhouse gases. Those states have since filed suit against the federal government.

Wednesday's legal action seeks to obtain an internal EPA decision that greenhouse gases from vehicles endanger public health or welfare, a finding that came after the Supreme Court demanded last year that the federal agency make a determination on the risks of such emissions.

Instead of releasing the internal finding, Johnson wrote members of Congress last week that he would pursue an Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on the issue, which involves a public comment period.

EPA press secretary Jonathan Shradar said the agency continues to believe it is pursuing "a reasonable path forward."

"We will review this new petition and respond appropriately," he said.

California in 2006 approved a law requiring the state to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 25 percent by 2020. The state hopes to make use of its 2002 tailpipe law regulating vehicle emissions to achieve that goal. But federal rules stipulate that in order to use the tailpipe law, California must first obtain the waiver that EPA denied last year.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger noted in a statement that it has been a full year since the Supreme Court declared that greenhouse gases are pollutants that should be regulated by the federal government.

"On this issue," he said, "the U.S. EPA has failed to lead, it has failed to follow the states' lead and we are prepared to force it out of the way in order to protect the environment."

States suing EPA over global warming

By Jay Lindsay, Associated Press Writer

In the Modesto Bee, Thursday, April 3, 2008

BOSTON — Officials of 18 states are taking the EPA back to court to try to force it to comply with a Supreme Court ruling that rebuked the Bush administration for inaction on global warming.

In a petition filed Wednesday, the plaintiffs said the 5-4 ruling in April 2007 required the Environmental Protection Agency to decide whether to regulate greenhouse gas emissions, including carbon dioxide, from motor vehicles.

The EPA has instead done nothing, they said.

"The EPA's failure to act in the face of these incontestable dangers is a shameful dereliction of duty," Massachusetts Attorney General Martha Coakley said.

The petition asks the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit to require the EPA to act within 60 days.

In last year's decision, the Supreme Court ruled the EPA has the authority to regulate emissions from new cars and trucks under the Clean Air Act, and said the reasons the EPA gave for declining to do so were insufficient.

EPA spokesman Jonathan Shradar said the Supreme Court required the agency to evaluate how it would regulate greenhouse gas emissions from cars and other vehicles but set no deadline.

The EPA plans to include the evaluation in a broader look at how to best regulate all greenhouse gas emissions, not just those from vehicles, he said. Otherwise, a mash of laws and regulations could emerge rather than the "holistic" approach the administration favors.

"We want to set a good foundation to build a strong climate policy of potential regulation and laws we can work toward and actually see some success," Shradar said.

At a press conference Wednesday, David Brookbinder of the Sierra Club, one of 11 environmental groups involved in the suit, said the EPA has been talking about a "holistic" approach to climate change for years.

"In fact, they have done absolutely nothing except stand in the way of everybody's else's efforts," he said.

Last week's announcement by the EPA of the formal rule-making procedure signaled the agency wanted to put greenhouse gas regulation "on indefinite hold," said Jim Milkey, chief of environmental protection at Coakley's office, who argued the case before the Supreme Court.

"Every day that goes by without a solution, the window of opportunity to fix the problem closes a bit more," he said.

California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger said the EPA "has failed to lead, it has failed to follow the states' lead and we are prepared to force it out of the way in order to protect the environment."

The plaintiffs in the latest court action include Coakley and attorneys general from Arizona, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington and the District of Columbia, plus representatives of the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection and the cities of New York and Baltimore, and several environmental organizations.

The plaintiffs contend the EPA has already completed the work needed to start regulating carbon dioxide.

The Supreme Court ruling requires the agency to regulate carbon dioxide if it determines it's a danger to public health and welfare. Senior EPA employees have told House investigators about a tentative finding from early December that carbon dioxide posed a danger because of its impact on climate.

They also said a draft regulation had been circulated internally, then abandoned. EPA administrator Stephen Johnson has said the issue had to be re-examined because of tougher automobile mileage requirements enacted in December.

The plaintiffs want the finding about the dangers of carbon dioxide released within 60 days so the process for regulating vehicle emissions can begin. They said final rules wouldn't be ready until the next administration takes over.

In Washington, the House Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming voted 12-0 Wednesday to issue a subpoena for all drafts of EPA documents on the issue.

"EPA has made no effort to accommodate the committee's request," said Rep. Edward Markey, D-Mass., the committee's chairman.

Shradar declined to say whether the agency would produce the documents the subpoena will request. "We will review this new petition and respond appropriately," he said.

Obama would find Cabinet post for Gore

By Devlin Barrett, Associated Press Writer
In the Modesto Bee, Thursday, April 3, 2008

WALLINGFORD, Pa. — Sen. Barack Obama said Wednesday he would give Al Gore, a Nobel prize winner, a major role in an Obama administration to address the problem of global warming.

At a town-hall meeting, Obama was asked if he would tap the former vice president for his Cabinet to handle global warming.

"I would," Obama said. "Not only will I, but I will make a commitment that Al Gore will be at the table and play a central part in us figuring out how we solve this problem. He's somebody I talk to on a regular basis. I'm already consulting with him in terms of these issues, but climate change is real. It is something we have to deal with now, not 10 years from now, not 20 years from now."

Since leaving the White House, Gore has gone on to become one of the world's leading voices for combating the greenhouse gases blamed for global warming. His work earned him a share of the Nobel last year.

Popular among Democrats, Gore is perhaps the single most coveted endorsement up for grabs in the long-running competition between Obama and rival Hillary Rodham Clinton.

The relationship between Gore and the Clintons became strained after Gore limited Bill Clinton's campaigning on his behalf in the 2000 presidential race which elected George W. Bush.

Obama said he would use Gore to help forge a cap-and-trade system for carbon emissions designed to lower pollution.

The Illinois senator cautioned that such a system could mean an increase in electricity bills from power companies that rely on coal-burning, and that some of the money generated from a cap-and-trade system may be used in the beginning to help lower income or fixed income customers with those bills.

He also called on individuals to do their part to lower energy consumption.

"All of us are going to have to change our habits. We are a wasteful culture," he said.

Using compact fluorescent light bulbs, energy efficient appliances, and unplugging power chargers when they're not in use are relatively simple solutions, he said.

"Those kinds of simple steps, if everybody takes them, can drastically reduce our energy consumption."

Poll: Make gas guzzlers pay higher fees

Michael Cabanatuan, Chronicle Staff Writer
S.F. Chronicle, Thursday, April 3, 2008

Californians support the idea of charging "green" vehicle fees that would make drivers of gas guzzlers pay higher taxes and offer discounts for those driving less-polluting vehicles, according to a survey by a transportation researcher at San Jose State University.

The state now charges drivers registration and licensing fees and gasoline taxes at rates that do not take into account vehicles' pollution levels. But the survey, conducted by Asha Weinstein Agrawal, a research associate with the university's Mineta Transportation Institute, found that Californians would support a variety of taxes and fees to raise money for transportation improvements as well as combat global warming, including:

- Raising vehicle registration fees, which now average \$31, to an average of \$62 and having higher-polluting vehicles pay higher rates and cleaner cars lower rates.
- Offering rebates of up to \$1,000 for people who buy new cars that emit very little pollution and levying a surcharge of as much as \$2,000 on those purchasing gas hogs.
- Levying a mileage-based tax that would replace the 18-cents-per-gallon gasoline tax. The per-mile amount would vary depending on how much a vehicle polluted the air.

"The public is very supportive of these green taxes and fees," said Agrawal. "This shows that it is realistic to improve the way we collect transportation taxes in this state."

The idea of using incentives to persuade motorists to drive cleaner, greener vehicles is nothing new. People who buy hybrid vehicles get federal tax credits, and drivers of electric, natural gas and some hybrids are allowed access to carpool lanes even if they aren't carrying any passengers. A bill that would have offered rebates to buyers of cleaner, greener vehicles made it to the Assembly floor last fall before failing.

Taxes or fees that penalize drivers of more-polluting vehicles are relatively uncommon, though some have been proposed, including a bill by Assemblyman Jared Huffman, D-San Rafael, that would allow the Metropolitan Transportation Commission to impose a 10-cents-a-gallon gas tax in the nine-county Bay Area, pending voter approval.

Bills in the works

Sen. Tom Torlakson, D-Antioch, has proposed legislation that would allow, with local voter approval, regional transportation agencies to impose a "greenhouse gas mitigation and funding fee" on motor vehicle registrations. And Assemblyman Mike Feuer, D-Los Angeles, has proposed a gas tax increase of up to 9 cents a gallon, or a \$90 registration fee hike, to fund transportation improvements and fight global warming in Los Angeles, also pending voter approval.

According to the San Jose State poll, Californians are warming to the idea of such incentives and taxes.

Sixty-three percent of those surveyed said they would support raising vehicle registration fees to reward drivers of cleaner cars, Agrawal said, compared with 40 percent support for a flat-rate increase. A tax and rebate system for vehicle purchases, depending on their emissions, was backed by 65 percent of those surveyed.

A vehicle mileage fee of 1 cent per mile driven was backed by 28 percent of those surveyed, and support increased to 50 percent when the amount of the per-mile charge was varied to penalize more-polluting vehicles.

Researchers at San Jose State's Survey and Public Research Institute made 1,500 random calls to adults statewide between Jan. 20 and Feb. 1. The poll has a margin of error of plus or minus 2.5 percentage points, Agrawal said.

The researchers will delve into the results more deeply to study how support for the taxes and fees varied by geography, demographics, type of vehicle driven, driving behavior and environmental concerns, she said.

"We might as well design our taxes and fees in a way that encourages people to make more sustainable choices," Agrawal said.

Randy Rentschler, spokesman for the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, said the state already has an effective method for taxing drivers who spew more greenhouse gases into the environment: the gasoline tax.

Gas tax already penalty

The gas tax penalizes those who drive gas guzzlers, and rewards those whose cars consume less fuel, he said. But the tax, last raised in 1984, has failed to keep pace with inflation, the state's growth or its increasing transportation needs. And with the high price of gas, politicians seem disinclined to propose a gas tax increase.

"There is no problem with the gas tax," Rentschler said. "The problem is a political problem - a lack of political will. The gas tax has become a political third rail - no one wants to touch it."

State Sen. Tom McClintock, R-Thousand Oaks (Ventura County), also said green pricing is unnecessary in California.

"We already have variable fees based on gas consumption. It's called price," said McClintock, vice chair of the Senate Transportation Committee. "If you have a gas guzzler, you pay more to run it, which is an incentive to frugality.

"Anything else is just a clever attempt to wheedle more money from motorists," he said.

Survey results

A telephone survey of 1,500 Californians, dialed randomly, found support for green transportation taxes and fees - charges that rise and fall with the amount of pollution a vehicle emits.

-- 63 percent supported doubling the vehicle registration fee, now an average of \$31, and charging higher rates for polluting vehicles and lower rates for clean vehicles.

-- 65 percent supported a tax and rebate system for new vehicle purchases that would give a rebate of up to \$1,000 for clean cars and impose a tax of as much as \$2,000 for higher-polluting cars.

-- 50 percent supported a vehicle mileage fee that charged a higher rate per mile for gas guzzlers.

Source: Mineta Transportation Institute, San Jose State University

Airborne lab leaves SoCal for big atmospheric study over arctic

The Associated Press

In the Contra Costa Times, SF Chronicle and other papers, Thursday, April 3, 2008

PALMDALE, Calif.—A flying laboratory has left Southern California to join an international study of the atmosphere over the arctic, where a recent decline in sea ice is among signs of significant environmental change.

A DC-8 equipped with 22 instruments took off Tuesday from NASA's Dryden Aircraft Operations Facility in Palmdale, bound for Fairbanks, Alaska.

The study will focus on the chemistry of the arctic's lower atmosphere, known as the troposphere.

NASA says scientists want to know how air pollution contributes to climate changes in the arctic, particularly when the return of sunlight during spring powers reactions among pollutants that accumulate during winters.

The DC-8 jet will be joined by other aircraft from NASA's Wallops Flight Facility and Langley Research Center in Virginia.

On the Net:

Arctic study: <http://www.nasa.gov/mission—pages/arctas>

NASA Dryden: <http://www.nasa.gov/centers/dryden>

Americans prefer energy fix to cancer cure: poll

By Rebekah Kebede, Reuters

Washington Post Thursday, April 3, 2008

NEW YORK (Reuters) - A nationwide survey of nearly 700 people suggests that Americans would prefer more money be invested in technology to solve the nation's energy ailments than to cure cancer or other diseases.

Some 37 percent of respondents to the poll, conducted by the Fairfax County Economic Development Authority in Virginia, said they would rank spending to raise energy efficiency and develop alternative fuel technology a top priority for future investment. That compares with 30 percent who ranked more cash for medical breakthroughs as most important.

"I think it's a combination of things like high gas prices and the need for alternative fuels, but also things that are emotional like greenhouse effects, global warming and the need for reducing carbon emissions," said Gerald Gordon, chief executive of the FCEDA.

The survey results come as U.S. gasoline prices continue to rocket to new highs, with average retail prices hitting a record \$3.29 a gallon on Monday, according to the federal Energy Information Administration.

Men were more likely to choose fuel efficiency as their highest priority, with 43 percent placing it on top compared with only 30 percent of women, the FCEDA survey showed. Women were more likely to pick medical technology as a priority, with 33 percent pegging it as a top investment, compared with 26 percent of men.

A next iteration of the survey will break down priorities in fuel and medical breakthroughs, Gordon said.

"When they say alternative fuels and energy, are they talking about energy or things like greenhouse effect -- what's really on people's minds?" he said.

The environment placed third in the survey, with 14 percent of respondents tagging it as the most important area for greater investment, while defense spending took 10 percent of the vote. Britons, however, ranked healthcare breakthroughs as the top priority (38 percent) over fuel efficiency and alternative fuels (33 percent), according to a parallel study by FCEDA in Great Britain.

The U.S. FCEDA study, which had a 4 percent margin of error and 95 percent confidence level, was based on telephone interviews with 692 adults from March 7-9, 2008.

Smoggy Mexico City clears the air indoors with smoking restrictions

By E. Eduardo Castillo, Associated Press

In the San Diego Union-Tribune, Thursday, April 3, 2008

MEXICO CITY – In one of the world's smoggiest cities, the air will soon be clear – at least inside.

A law banning smoking in virtually all public spaces in Mexico City – exceptions include parks, soccer stadiums and outdoor seating areas – goes into effect Thursday.

The owners of restaurant and bars, which can be fined or even closed if they ignore smoking in prohibited areas, are bristling at the regulations.

Daniel Loeza, vice president of the National Chamber of the Restaurant and Food Industry, said business owners do not want to police their clients.

"We should not have to confront our customers," said Loeza, whose group represents 35,000 restaurants. "Our business is to serve customers."

Smokers who refuse to put out their cigarettes face fines ranging from \$50-\$150 and 36 hours in jail.

Living amid heavy air pollution, many Mexico City residents have become inured to second-hand smoke.

But nonsmoker Marisol Estrada, 32, applauded the new measure.

"We all breathe the same air," the bank employee said.

IOC satisfied after final meeting

By Stephen Wade, AP Sports Writer

In the Merced Sun-Star, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Thursday, April 3, 2008

BEIJING—International Olympic Committee inspectors said Thursday that they were satisfied by Chinese organizers' assurances that operations in critical areas will run smoothly in the Summer Olympics.

With the Games just four months away, the inspectors—know as the coordination commission—completed their final official meetings with Beijing organizers. They said they were assured of smooth operations for Internet access, live television broadcasts and contingency plans to deal with the Beijing's air pollution.

"We were satisfied by assurances we received across a number of areas," Hein Verbruggen, chairman of the inspection team, said in a statement. He did not offer details but was scheduled to hold a news conference later Thursday.

Earlier this week, a high-ranking IOC official said Chinese officials had been told that Internet censorship had to be lifted for thousands of journalists covering the games. About 30,000 accredited and non-accredited reporters are expected to report on the games.

Kevan Gosper, vice chairman of the coordinating commission, said restricting access to the Internet during the games "would reflect very poorly" on the host nation.

Beijing routinely blocks Chinese access to some foreign news Web sites and blogs, a practice it has stepped up since rioting broke out in Tibet in mid-march. Laws that lifted many restrictions on foreign media went into effect Jan. 1, 2007. That is due to expire in October.

Broadcasters have been lobbying against plans by Chinese officials that might bar live television broadcasts from Tiananmen Square. Any ban on live broadcasts would disrupt the plans of NBC and other major international networks, who have paid hundreds of millions of dollars for the rights to the games.

China routinely uses 30-second to one-minute delays to control broadcasts seen on state-run TV. The Olympic torch lighting ceremony last month in Greece was disrupted by a protester who ran up behind a top Chinese official giving a speech. The image seen around the world was never shown on state TV in China.

Monday's torch arrival in Tiananmen Square was also broadcast on a delay.

IOC officials have acknowledged that outdoor endurance events of more than an hour could offer a small health risk to athletes. IOC President Jacques Rogge began saying seven months ago that events would be postponed if the air quality were poor.

Last month the IOC's top medical officer said Beijing's air quality was better than expected. A study the IOC approved showed there are risks to athletes in outdoor endurance events and conditions may be less than ideal during the Aug. 8-24 period.

[Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Editorial, Thursday, April 3, 2008:](#)

Supervisors right to postpone Springville hearing

Tulare County Supervisors have postponed a hearing on a 25-lot subdivision in Springville, and rightly so.

The Springville area is already under heavy impact from residential development, and this project would add more pressure to an environmentally sensitive foothills area, at the same time that the county is conducting hearings on the Yokohl Ranch project, also in the foothills.

These discussions ought to be postponed until the county adopts its general plan update, which is long overdue.

The Springville project appears to have enough questions surrounding it to send it back to county staff for review and adjustment, which is what supervisors did.

Among the issues:

- Several state agencies have expressed concern about the project's environmental impact.
- Experts in the environmental impact report disagree over points in the report. One says there are wetlands present. Another says there are not.
- The state Department of Fish & Wildlife has concerns about the project. Those need to be clarified.
- Residents of the area expressed opposition to the project to the Planning Commission, which originally voted it down, then pushed it through with a dissenting vote.

In other words, this project is about as far from a slam dunk as possible.

It does, however, offer the opportunity for a number of things the county ought to be doing anyway, including:

- Revisiting the Foothills Growth Management Plan, which is a part of the county's general plan.

The Foothills Growth Management Plan was adopted in 1981 at the time of the last general plan.

It ought to be thoroughly updated the same way the general plan is.

When the Foothills Growth Management Plan was adopted, there was an entirely different conception about the area and the environment in terms of water, [air quality](#), standards for infrastructure, such as roads, sewer and water systems, rainfall runoff, and drainage and urban development.

Parts of the Foothills Growth Management Plan are being revised along with the general plan update, but large parts of it remain the same as in 1981. Besides, it hasn't been adopted yet. The county is trying to apply a 27-year-old plan to urban development in Springville.

- Assessing the community of Springville itself. This has become a thriving community that is becoming more urbanized all the time. It is also struggling to maintain its natural and historic character while it gets pressure from outside development.
- Springville is not an incorporated area. It does not have the planning or community standards of other cities in the county, yet it is facing many of the same urban pressures in much smaller form.
- Supervisors would be wise to consider how they help the residents of Springville contribute to their own self-determination.
- Adopt the general plan update, thus allowing the Yokohl Ranch discussion to take place in that context.

Yokohl Ranch is the elephant in the middle of the room. It is a huge planned community for the Yokohl Valley, a mostly pristine area of the foothills that now serves as grazing land.

The county risks some major inconsistencies in land-use planning if it engages in decisions about developments in the foothills such as at Springville without adopting the general plan update while at the same time discussing Yokohl Ranch.

- Get complete and consistent information from state and federal agencies regarding any environmental concerns. Inviting conflict from the state Department of Fish & Game and the state's Environmental Quality Agency is asking for further intervention from the federal Environmental Protection Agency. The county would do much better to get its ducks in order, so to speak, on environmental issues.

The supervisors acted prudently this week. The county ought to take the time and opportunity to proceed with caution.

[Modesto Bee, Commentary, Thursday, April 3, 2008](#)

New state mandate for nonpolluting cars a sham

Excerpted from Monday's Santa Rosa Press Democrat:

There are two lessons to take away from California's zero-emission vehicle debacle. The first is that it can be tough for states to push the technological envelope. The second is that mandates shouldn't be the only tool government uses when trying to force the private sector to do something it perceives to be against its interest. In 1990, the California Air Resources Board mandated that by 2003, 10 percent of new cars be nonpolluting. Since then, the rule has been watered down, as manufacturers claimed that zero-emission vehicles are difficult to produce and aren't commercially viable. Thursday, the board again modified the rule, requiring that only 7,500 vehicles be nonpolluting by 2014 -- a drop in the bucket for a state with 26 million registered vehicles. It's an embarrassment. But car makers have legitimate concerns. Electric cars can be expensive and consumers worry about the distance traveled between charges and how to dispose of spent batteries. When it comes to alternative vehicles, relying on mandates might be flawed. In Israel, the government is reducing the cost of purchasing electric cars by providing tax credits. Project Better Place will provide lithium-ion batteries to Renault and its partner, Nissan, which will build the cars. Project Better Place will also build the infrastructure to support electric vehicles, including parking-meter-like plugs. Israel hopes to have 100,000 electric cars on the road by 2010. The CARB should consider similar measures -- or give up the pretense of a zero-emission vehicle policy.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses that EPA follow through with the Superior Courts ruling. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Demandan a la EPA cumplir con la Suprema Corte de Justicia

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Thursday, April 3, 2008

Un total de 19 gobiernos estatales, diversas ciudades del país y grupos ambientalistas demandaron a la Agencia federal de Protección Ambiental, la EPA, por sus siglas en inglés, cumplir una orden de la Suprema Corte de Justicia y autorizar a los estados a activar sus propias leyes contra la contaminación.

Al cumplirse ayer un año de que el tribunal supremo fallara en favor de California, y unos cinco meses después de cumplirse un plazo que la corte impuso a esa agencia federal, la EPA continúa sin dar autorizaciones.

El gobernador de California, Arnold Schwarzenegger declaró que los 19 estados están preparados para forzar legalmente a la administración del presidente, George W. Bush a cumplir con la Suprema Corte de Justicia.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses California to join the lawsuit against EPA.](#)

California se une a demanda contra EPA

Araceli Martínez Ortega

La Opinión, Thursday, April 3, 2008

SACRAMENTO.— El procurador de Justicia de California, Jerry Brown, junto con 17 estados y 11 grupos ambientalistas pidieron a un tribunal de apelaciones que ordene a la Agencia de Protección del Medio Ambiente (EPA) tomar medidas que regulen los gases de los automóviles que provocan el calentamiento global.

El 2 de abril de 2007, la Suprema Corte de Justicia falló en el caso Massachusetts contra la EPA y ordenó que se regulen los gases de efecto invernadero, ya que son contaminantes que amenazan la salud pública.

Sin embargo, a un año de distancia, la EPA no ha hecho nada al respecto, por lo que California apeló para que en un plazo no mayor de 90 días, el Tribunal de Apelaciones del Distrito de Columbia emita un dictamen.

Brown acusó a la EPA de sabotear continuamente las acciones tendientes a regular los gases que provocan el calentamiento y de no actuar de acuerdo con su misión para la que fue creada.

No obstante, advirtió que continuará presionando a la agencia a través de todos los medios.

Brown añadió que razones políticas a causa de las presiones de la industria automotriz han impedido que la EPA desarrolle un plan para frenar los gases invernadero.

Las nuevas regulaciones obligarían a la industria automotriz a diseñar automóviles más eficientes en el uso de la energía y esto implicaría una mayor inversión, explicó Oliver Bernstein, portavoz del Club Sierra, una de las organizaciones involucradas en la demanda.

En términos prácticos, Bernstein indicó que la falta de acción por parte de la EPA se traduce en sequías más frecuentes y prolongadas, inundaciones, incendios más intensos y aumentos en las temperaturas.

James Milkey, jefe de Protección del Medio Ambiente de la Procuraduría de Justicia de Massachusetts, observó que cada día sin solución al calentamiento, los riesgos pueden ser irreversibles.

David Bookbinder, consejero en cambio climático del Club Sierra, declaró que las razones que ha dado la EPA para no cumplir con lo ordenado por la Suprema Corte es que quieren hacer un acercamiento en conjunto contra el cambio climático. Además, portavoces de EPA declararon que requieren un año adicional para consultar al público.

La Opinión contactó a la oficina de prensa de la EPA en Washington vía telefónica y correo electrónico para tener una reacción, pero no obtuvo respuesta.

Los estados que exigen acción legal son Arizona, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, Nueva York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington, el distrito de Columbia, la ciudad de Nueva York y el concilio de Baltimore.

El gobernador Arnold Schwarzenegger dijo tras conocerse de la demanda que "ha pasado un año completo desde que la Suprema Corte declaró que los gases invernadero deben ser regulados por el gobierno federal, pero la EPA ha rechazado garantizarle un permiso para que junto con otros 19 estados mejoremos nuestra calidad del aire, estableciendo regulaciones más estrictas para las emisiones de los automóviles", comentó.

La demanda de ayer no tiene relación con la querrela que presentó California en enero pasado contra la EPA por no darle un permiso para poner en marcha una ley estatal sobre la emisión de gases contaminantes de los autos.

El administrador de la EPA, Stephen Johnson ha dicho en repetidas ocasiones, bajo juramento, que cumpliría con la orden de la Corte y emitiría una resolución para finales de 2007. La semana pasado, Johnson amplió el período por otros 12 meses, coincidiendo con la fecha en que el presidente George W. Bush dejará su cargo.

El procurador Brown dijo que la EPA no puede usar la ley de Seguridad e Independencia Energética aprobada en 2007 que sólo mejora la economía de los combustibles como una excusa para ignorar sus deberes y regular las emisiones del calentamiento global.

La Suprema Corte determinó que la obligación de la EPA es regular tales emisiones independientemente del mandato de 2007.