

## **Scientists plan to bury CO2 in Kern County**

**Power plant aims to avoid smokestack, release into air.**

By Mark Grossi / The Fresno Bee

Sunday, May 11, 2008

Scientists plan to pump 1 million tons of greenhouse gas more than a mile beneath a Kern County power plant in one of the nation's largest experiments to slow global warming.

The power plant's exhaust will go directly into a 7,000-foot-deep well. No climate-warming carbon dioxide or anything else will get into the air. There won't be a smokestack.

It's a "double positive" because it will prevent the release of both greenhouse gas and ozone-making pollution, said James Boyd, vice chairman of the California Energy Commission, which is leading the experiment.

"This is extremely relevant in the San Joaquin Valley, where air quality is such a big issue," he said.

The four-year experiment, scheduled to begin in 2011, received a \$65 million Department of Energy grant last week. Federal officials have funded a half-dozen such efforts nationally to capture carbon dioxide and trap it below ground.

The Kern project, 18 miles north of Bakersfield, attracted federal money partly because it involves a power plant that uses aerospace technology to produce electricity and very little air pollution. The power plant is privately owned by Clean Energy Systems Inc. of Rancho Cordova.

But geology is the main reason to pour money into this project. Nature has demonstrated over millions of years that oil and natural gas stay put in the rock formations below the Valley floor.

Scientists say the same would be true for carbon dioxide, or CO2. The experiment is meant to confirm their belief.

No danger is anticipated, scientists say. CO2 does not burn or explode. But a large leak in high concentrations could asphyxiate a human and kill surrounding plants.

There is little chance of that happening in Kern, said earth scientist Larry Myer of Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, technical director of the project.

"We can easily inject the CO2, and it won't go anywhere, even in an earthquake," he said.

"Mother Nature has kept oil and natural gas from leaking out in these kinds of rocks for a long, long time."

Still, why spend \$65 million to entomb carbon dioxide in rock? The gas is necessary for life. People exhale it in every breath. Plants absorb it, make energy from the sun and create oxygen that people breathe.

But scientists say carbon dioxide is building up in the Earth's atmosphere, and it naturally holds heat in the air, raising global temperatures.

The gas comes from many natural sources, such as volcanoes. But human-related sources such as power plants and vehicles also are dumping a lot of CO2 into the atmosphere, accelerating the warm-up, scientists say.

They fear temperatures will rise quickly worldwide over the next century, melting polar ice caps and causing extended droughts, wildfires and other calamities.

As a way to slow warming, carbon dioxide can be injected in vast rock formations below the ocean and the continents.

Norway has been injecting carbon dioxide into formations beneath the Norwegian Sea for many years. The energy corporation BP has been injecting CO2 into the ground in Algeria as crews remove natural gas.

Now, the United States is experimenting with similar projects that are identified through several government-industry coalitions. The West Coast Regional Carbon Sequestration Partnership explores projects in this region.

The partnership identified the Valley as a place where carbon dioxide can be pumped into ancient sandstone. Scientists say plumes of compressed carbon dioxide can spread into the sandstone.

Earth scientist Myer says solid shale formations above the sandstone create an impenetrable cap to keep the carbon dioxide from leaking.

There is a chilling example of carbon dioxide venting at volcanic Mammoth Mountain in the eastern Sierra. The volcano leaked enough carbon dioxide during the 1990s to kill a swath of forest.

An unsuspecting ranger in the area was overcome one day as he entered a remote shack at Mammoth Mountain. He nearly died.

But the active volcanics in the eastern Sierra are different from the deep rock formations that have trapped gases beneath the Valley for many thousands of years, Myer said.

"Once CO<sub>2</sub> is trapped in those rocks, it's trapped," he said.

Drilling a 7,000-foot hole for the project would not be unusual in Kern County. In the 1980s, an oil company drilled a well more than 22,000 feet at Elk Hills.

Injecting steam or gas into oil fields is a well-established process, too.

Oil companies for decades have injected steam to heat up thick oil deposits so they can be more easily pumped out.

The power plant involved in the experiment is uncommon, according to Clean Energy Systems.

"It's the cleanest fossil fuel plant in the world right now," said Keith Pronske, president and chief executive officer.

The company has worked for 15 years to develop power production using engineering from the space shuttle, which combines hydrogen and oxygen for fuel.

Instead of hydrogen, the Kern County plant uses various kinds of natural gas along with pure oxygen, burning it at high temperatures.

The air-quality advantage is that the exhaust is mostly water and carbon dioxide, though there is also carbon monoxide and oxides of nitrogen, or NO<sub>x</sub>, a key gas in ozone. Conventional natural gas power plants can produce 10 times more NO<sub>x</sub> than the technology in the Kern plant.

The aerospace technology would be a significant advance because the Valley's ozone problem is among the worst in the nation. Officials at the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District like the project, even though it puts out more carbon monoxide than other similar-sized power plants.

"Overall, it is a very good project for the Valley's air," said district executive director Seyed Sadredin. "The Valley has more of a tolerance for carbon monoxide. We have been in attainment for that pollutant since the 1990s."

At the moment, the Kern plant produces a modest 5 megawatts that are sold on California's electricity grid. It's enough for about 5,000 homes. For the experiment, the production will increase to 50 megawatts, which still is considered a small amount of electricity.

But it won't contribute to global warming or the Valley's poor air quality, officials said.

"This is a world-class project," Pronske said. "You don't see anyone else putting together this technology with CO<sub>2</sub> sequestration."

## **Cyclist lunging forward with Breathe Easy Ride**

**A 1999 collision with a car almost left him in a wheelchair, almost**

By Emily Hagedorn, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Sunday, May 11 2008

Arin Resnicke lets nothing stand between him and his bike - not asthma, not prior injuries, not pain.

Despite being previously injured in a bike accident while commuting home from work and confined to a wheelchair, Arin Resnicke has been participating in the American Lung Association of California's Breathe Easy Ride for 17 years, this year he will make it 18.

His back feels better when it's arched and ready for racing up hills. His hands are home when gripping handlebars.

Cycling has been a constant in the Bakersfield resident's life since he was 4 years old, when his mother and brother fished out of the dump a candy-apple-red bike.

But his salvation has also been a source of grief. In 1999, a pizza delivery driver hit him in northeast Bakersfield on Resnicke's way home from work, leaving pain he'll endure for the rest of his life.

"There are only two types of cyclists," said the 47-year-old, quoting an old cycling adage, "those who have fallen and those who are about to fall."

The type Resnicke is depends on the day, but one thing is certain: He's always gotten back up.

Now Resnicke, chairman of the American Lung Association of California's Breathe Easy Ride, is looking forward to the ride on the Central Coast this weekend - his 18th.

#### TRAINING WHEELS

Born in Pomona with asthma, Resnicke and his family soon moved to an area promising cleaner air: Bakersfield. And to build lung capacity, his doctor suggested cycling or swimming.

Resnicke's family was "dirt, dirt poor," which meant they didn't have a pool or money to get into one. They opted for cycling, with the bike procured from garbage.

"That was my avenue to freedom," he said.

His cycling resume is a page long and includes such designations as a Union Cycliste Internationale-certified international mountain bike commissair, which means he can officiate international bike races, including the Olympics, and honorary lifetime member of the Southern Sierra Fat Tire Association.

He's kept it up while growing in his day job - an architect. (Resnicke was the architect who oversaw the removal from Union Avenue and redesign of the iconic Bakersfield arch beside the Crystal Palace.)

Resnicke estimates that he has biked 140,000 miles.

He has chosen homes far from work "to make the commute as long as possible."

It was biking to work that brought Resnicke together with Don Snaman, his training partner.

The two bonded - first as neighbors, then as cyclists.

"He was way ahead of the game, in terms of biking," said Snaman, 50, who now lives in the Bay Area. "I set my sights on him, so to speak, as a goal."

Snaman remembers a cycling trip a few years ago in which his *dérailleur*, the mechanism that changes gears, broke.

Content to walk his bike, Snaman was soon goaded into getting on the bike and having Resnicke push him.

"One hand is on his handlebars; one hand on my butt," he says, laughing. "If anybody was behind us watching, they were probably saying, 'What are you doing?'"

#### ROAD RASH

Snaman describes Resnicke as a hard, aggressive cyclist.

"On the downhill, he's fearless," he said.

Resnicke will own up to his penchant for muscle-driven speed.

And while some cuts, contusions and heckling from motorists can be expected, his run-in with the pizza delivery driver almost left him unable to walk, much less ride.

He was at Panorama Drive and Fairfax Road when it happened.

"The last thing I remember is the bumper being right here," he said, pointing to his right thigh.

"The police reported that I flew 26 feet."

After a crash, Resnicke usually goes through a head-to-toe inventory: Can I blink? Can I move?

This time he couldn't.

He was taken to Kern Medical Center, where doctors found he had a continuously dislocating knee cap, among other smaller injuries. Later, he was also diagnosed with broken vertebrae.

"Don't even think about racing again," a doctor told him.

Resnicke deteriorated to the point that he needed a wheelchair, but resolved to get back on the bike.

"Most of it was pure stubbornness," he said.

Resnicke was on top of his bike before he could walk without a cane.

"I would never ask him to do that," to give up cycling, said his wife Gina. "Psychologically, he isn't himself when he's not riding."

#### ANOTHER PURSUIT

Throughout his life, he's dealt with asthma, an inflammatory disorder of the airways that causes wheezing, shortness of breath, chest tightness and coughing.

This, in part, pushed him to become active with the American Lung Association.

His mother also played a role.

"It was watching my mother suffer," he said.

Adelia Resnicke, 72, died roughly five years ago from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, a lung illness that makes it difficult to breathe. Most people with the condition have both emphysema and chronic bronchitis.

"It was seeing her quit smoking and seeing it be too late," he said.

When he sees teens smoking, he wants to show them a photo of his mother.

"She was laying in a hospital bed with eyes that said please let me go," he said. "It was the most horrible death. ... It's suffocating."

For these reasons, and a love of cycling, Resnicke is coming up on almost 20 years with the Breathe Easy Ride, also known as the Lung Ride.

The ride raises money for education, research and advocacy. He has raised \$20,479 through his years with the fundraiser.

"Although cycling accidents happen, it's really important to maintain good will," he said. "Pick yourself up, brush yourself off and continue on in life."

#### THE RIDE

The American Lung Association of California's 19th annual Breathe Easy Ride includes a three-day trek beginning Friday in Paso Robles and ending Sunday in San Luis Obispo, or a shorter, one-day trek in San Luis Obispo on Saturday.

Registration is \$65. Cyclists must raise a minimum donation of \$525 for the three-day ride and \$135 for the one-day ride.

To learn more about the ride and how to donate, call the Kern County office of the American Lung Association at 847-4700.

## **Campaign ad watch: Clearing the air on dairy pollution**

By James Burger, Californian staff writer  
Bakersfield Californian, Sunday, May 11, 2008

The rump of a dairy cow is the first thing that catches your eye on Cliff Thompson's campaign billboards.

If you read fast, or drive slow, you can catch the rhetoric that goes with it.

"1 in 5 children suffer from respiratory illness. Yet, Supervisor (Ray) Watson voted no to ban future dairies - the No. 1 polluter," the sign reads.

Then you see Taft Councilman Thompson's campaign logo for his race against Watson for the 4th District supervisor seat.

The billboard, and three others with different messages that are going up around the district, are the first mass-market salvos in a race that has less than a month to run its course.

The message of the sign is stark - laying childhood breathing problems at Watson's feet.

But as with most campaign claims and slogans, there are facts about dairy bans and pollution that just don't fit on Thompson's signs.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District released a study in 2005 that said a cow produces 19.3 pounds of volatile organic compounds each year - one component of smog. Dairies, the air district reports, are the largest source of volatile organic compounds in the valley.

But dairies aren't the valley's No. 1 polluter, as the billboard claims.

"By far, far, far, motor vehicles are our biggest polluter," said Brenda Turner of the air district's Bakersfield office.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, it is ozone - smog- that aggravates and intensifies asthma and lung disease.

Turner said cars pump out nitrous oxide and VOCs, which, according to the EPA, react with sunlight in the air to produce ozone pollution.

"NOx, in our analysis of our air, has much more of an impact on the creation of smog," Turner said.

Thompson said he culled the dairy pollution information from material supplied to him by staff in the office of state Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter.

Thompson cited an Associated Press story posted on the cbsnews.com Web site Aug. 2, 2005, that stated "dairies are the No. 1 source of smog-producing pollution in the San Joaquin Valley."

The story, as published on the CBS News site, makes mention only of VOCs and ignores the role of NOx in the creation of pollution.

Turner said many media outlets interpreted the 2005 report on VOCs incorrectly and made the same mistake.

Thompson said he stands by the billboard's message because dairies are still a major contributor to air pollution in the San Joaquin Valley.

And then there is the issue of the ban the billboard claims Watson voted for.

It is true that, on Aug. 24, 2004, Watson voted against an urgency ordinance that would have prohibited "approval of future dairies and calf feedlots."

The ban failed on a 3-2 vote of the five-member Board of Supervisors.

Watson said there was no proof the ban was needed.

And just before the vote, Watson made a motion that passed unanimously requiring a full environmental impact report on the impacts of dairies in Kern County to be drafted before any future dairies were blessed by the board.

Four years later, that environmental report is nearing completion.

No dairies have been approved in Kern County since Watson's motion passed.

Thompson said a de facto ban for a few years isn't a full and permanent ban on polluting dairies.

"If they pass an EIR they can build a dairy. That's not what I want," Thompson said.

Thompson stands by the billboards and the message they send about his opponent's decision-making in office.

"I think the ads are effective and they'll open people's eyes," he said.

Two other billboards are located in Wasco and Taft. A fourth one is also located in Bakersfield.

Links:

- [San Joaquin Valley air district Web site](#)

## **Rule to lessen smog would hurt efforts to reduce trash at landfill, officials say**

By Adam Ashton

Modesto Bee, Saturday, May 10, 2008

Modesto's 30-acre compost site is caught between a green rock and an eco-friendly hard place.

It takes 65,000 tons of green waste each year and turns it into organic fertilizer, a key component in helping the city comply with a state mandate to divert half of its garbage out of landfills.

But a proposed rule aimed at reducing ozone pollution could drive up the cost of composting, which could lead to cutbacks at the site and more waste winding up at landfills.

The [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#) wants to rein in volatile organic compounds, a precursor to smog that leaks out of the seemingly endless rows of decomposing material that sit at large compost sites.

Its proposed rule would require companies and cities that compost more than 50,000 tons of waste a year to install equipment that filters smog contributors. The district's board of directors is expected to vote on the rule early next year.

Putting in the filtering equipment would oblige Modesto to more than double what it charges to accept a ton of green waste from \$18.75 to \$40, estimated Jocelyn Reed, city solid waste division manager. Or, she said, the city could scale down its operation to fit in under the 50,000-ton threshold.

Increased composting costs would start to make the landfill attractive, composters say. The county landfill charges \$30 to take a ton of garbage.

"It's going to be twice as expensive to compost material as it is to put it in the landfill because of the demands of what they expect you to do," said Dennis Shuler, environmental affairs director for Modesto's Gilton Solid Waste Management, whose company composts 30,000 to 40,000 tons of green waste a year.

On the finished end, some industry representatives worry that more expensive compost could drive more farmers to buy synthetic fertilizers. The city charges \$15.75 for about 1,200 pounds of compost.

"Rather than beneficially reusing these materials through compost, because of the added regulatory burden and cost, it would go back to landfill or be disposed of in the least environmentally friendly way," said Jan Marie Ennenga, executive director of the Manufacturers Council of the Central Valley.

The air district is taking those criticisms into account while it refines its proposal, said George Heinen, the air district's supervisor for rule development.

Every little bit counts

He said the air district must consider any source to reduce the valley's chronic pollution. Compost sites could contribute as much as 57 tons of volatile organic compounds to the valley's air each year, according to the district's early estimates.

"It all adds up; we need every tenth of a ton," Heinen said.

Those numbers are a source of disagreement between the air district and industry.

The air district based its projection on a Southern California study that showed a ton of compost material yields 3.84 pounds of volatile organic compounds.

A 2007 study at Modesto's site conducted by the state Integrated Waste Management Board came up with much lower numbers -- from 0.8 pounds per ton of pure green waste and as much as 2.6 pounds per ton of composted food waste.

"At this point, we do believe there's quite a bit, but the exact number is still being refined," Heinen said.

Matt Cotton, a composting consultant, said the industry he represents thinks of itself as green because of its work diverting waste from landfills.

"Clearly, the idea of regulating emission from green waste composting is very brand new, and you have the juxtaposition of these competing goals, which are both desirable," he said.

### **Three steps toward smarter growth in the valley**

By Brad Kilger

Modesto Bee, Sunday, May 11, 2008

The California Department of Finance announced recently that the population of California has surpassed 38 million. This should be no surprise to those of us in the San Joaquin Valley, where the most recent growth spurt was felt the strongest. U.S. Census data shows that valley counties grew from 10 to 20 percent from 2000 to 2006.

Much of this growth was fostered by families relocating from the Bay Area in search of more affordable housing. Unfortunately, they didn't bring their jobs with them, and our roads have become increasingly congested.

This growth has raised concerns throughout the valley that significant acreage of prime agricultural land is being lost to urban sprawl. Coupled with a [growing air quality problem](#) and increasingly strict and expensive state water, wastewater and storm drainage standards, valley cities and counties are facing significant challenges in planning for their futures.

Making the task even more difficult are several regional and state issues beyond our control.

The state's population is estimated to continue climbing by 400,000 to 500,000 people annually. And with less land available for development in the coastal and southern regions of the state, we in the valley will continue to serve as an outlet for Californians seeking more reasonably priced places to live.

How can we effectively plan to maintain the quality of life in our valley communities without resorting to the "pull up the drawbridge" approach to planning?

A state law passed in 2006 will significantly change how we plan for the future. Assembly Bill 32, called the Global Warming Solutions Act, will require cities and counties to employ more

sustainable and environmentally friendly development methods to meet the goal of reducing statewide emissions from vehicles, businesses and homes to 1990 levels by the year 2020.

According to the American Planning Association's California Chapter -- which recently published a set of policy principles aimed at guiding local planning decisions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions -- sustainable planning is that which places less reliance on automobiles, promotes public transportation and maximizes open space.

Sustainable communities would encourage walking and biking through an integrated system of parks, greenbelts and hiking trails while conserving energy and water. They would feature "infill" projects that reuse vacant or rundown properties and revitalize historic neighborhoods.

The city of Modesto provides great examples of this approach in action. After years of effort to revitalize its downtown, the city is now bustling with sidewalk cafes, new office space and parks as well as two mixed-use condo/apartment projects that are in initial planning stages.

Such improvements require planning, and implementing will create more efficient land-use patterns throughout Stanislaus County. With more residents living closer to where they work, the number of vehicles clogging our streets will be cut, auto emissions will be reduced, and the rate of agricultural land being lost to housing will be significantly lowered.

But for these smart planning efforts to be truly effective on a larger scale, it's important that we not work in a silo.

That's why Stanislaus County and local cities have started talking about preparing a regional countywide plan. We are working with our counterparts in surrounding counties to develop a comprehensive "San Joaquin Valley Blueprint" intended to guide growth and transportation planning well into the 21st century.

AB 32; smart, sustainable planning; and regional cooperation are all important tools to effectively plan for our future. Considering the temporary lull in the real estate market, the timing is ideal.

Kilger is the Ceres city manager and the former community development director for the city of Modesto. He is a member of the American Planning Association, California chapter.

## **What's New**

By Staff Writer

Valley Voice Newspaper, Monday, May 12, 2008

Residents who took part in the county's Blueprint process to direct future growth strongly supported increasing residential densities by 25 percent over the next 50 years, the Tulare County Association of Governments reported. The Blueprint process is designed to reduce air pollution, curtail urban sprawl, increase public transportation and enhance the quality of life. The vote on densities found 37 percent favor the 25 percent reduction, while 30 percent went for the most extreme reduction of 75 percent. Seventy-eight percent of those who took part in the public forums support an urban separator between Visalia and the cities of Tulare and Farmersville.

## **Lung Association Gives Region F Grade for Air Quality Air Pollution District Moves to Tighten Controls**

By Staff Writer

Valley Voice Newspaper, Monday, May 12, 2008

Tulare County - It seemed appropriate that the same week the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's governing board adopted new rules to limit particulate matter in the air, the American Lung Association listed the Visalia/Porterville and the Corcoran/Hanford areas as two of the worst metropolitan areas in the nation for all forms of pollution.

The two announcements also fell on the same week that the Tulare County Asthma Coalition reported that one in four children in the county has been diagnosed with asthma.

It has long been known that because of the geography, the Valley traps airborne pollutants, putting people with respiratory problems such as asthma at greater risk. Studies show that ozone and particulate matter not only increase symptoms, but can cause asthma.

Of the Lung Association's listed Top Ten Cities Most Polluted by Year-Round Particle Pollution, four are in the Central Valley, with Visalia/Porterville No. 5 and Hanford/Corcoran No. 9. While showing some improvement in air quality, Fresno/Madera was ranked No. 8 and Bakersfield was ranked No. 3.

Among the Top Ten U.S. Cities Most Polluted by Ozone, Visalia/Porterville ranked No. 3, behind Los Angeles/Long Beach/Riverside at No. 1 and Bakersfield No. 2. Fresno/Madera ranked No. 5 and Sacramento No. 6.

The report came at no surprise to Diane Sepeda, acting director of the Tulare County Asthma Coalition.

"Last year, the state held four top positions – Los Angeles, Bakersfield, Fresno/Madera and Visalia/Porterville. This year, out of the top six, we hold five," she said, adding the quality of air is why controlling asthma is such a challenge in the Valley.

"The report magnifies this. We feel we're making some progress, but what magnifies our problem is our geographic location. We are one of the highest regulated (areas) and I know everybody is doing their part," she added.

"The air quality in several cities has improved, but in others, declines in pollution have stalled. The trends tell us loud and clear that we need to do more to protect Americans from breathing air that's simply hazardous to their health," said Bernadette Toomey, president and CEO, American Lung Association, in a prepared American Lung Association State of the Air release.

Overall, the Lung Association gave Tulare County a failing grade for controlling most levels of pollution. Several coastal cities in California were given passing grades, including San Luis Obispo and Santa Cruz counties.

Due to the lead time for the "State of the Air" report, the American Lung Association used the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) 1997 standard for ozone levels rather than the new tighter standard announced on March 12.

"If we were to measure the number of unhealthy days against the new ozone standard, it would show that ozone pollution is worse than the report indicates," said Toomey. "Even with these stricter ozone standards, Americans are being denied the health protection they deserve under the Clean Air Act."

Controlling ozone is the goal of the Valley Air District's PM2.5 plan. The plan will increase the number of days that restrict the burning of fireplaces among other things. In all, the plan contains 13 regulatory control measures, 10 feasibility studies and emission reduction incentive programs with the goal that the San Joaquin Valley reaches PM2.5 attainment by 2014.

PM2.5 is particulate matter that is 2.5 microns or less in diameters. It is so small it can not only enter the lungs, but the blood stream, causing serious health problems. It has been linked to aggravated asthma, irritation of the airways, coughing, difficult breathing and decreased lung function in children. The matter is so small that 24 particulates could fit on a single piece of human hair.

Scott Nester, director of planning with the pollution board, said the new regulations would be phased in over the next three years. The plan will bring the Valley into attainment of the PM2.5 standard. Besides the increased wood burning restrictions, the plan includes more limits on emissions from industrial sources, controlling dust and limitations on prescribed burning and ag burning. The studies will be on pollution caused by cotton gins and even Fourth of July fireworks, along with commercial charbroilers used by restaurants.

Last year, the district issued only four mandatory no burn days in Tulare County, the same for Kings County. While Nester said it is not certain how many more days will be added under the

stricture rule, it could be two or three times as many. The district issued 28 voluntary curtailment days in Tulare County last year, 15 in Kings County.

The rule applies to all types of wood-burning devices, including those that use pellets, unless the fireplace is the only source of heat for a resident or the residence is above 3,000 foot elevation.

The air board uses a combination of weather conditions and pollution levels to determine if wood burning should be prohibited. The wood burning season runs from Nov. 1 to the end of February. The fine for violating the mandatory no burn rule is \$50. Last year, the district issued 87 citations in the eight-county region, but only one in Tulare County and none in Kings County.

The Lung Association's report card ranked cities most affected by three types of pollution: short-term particle pollution, year-round particle pollution and ozone pollution. For the first time since the report has been issued in nine years, a city outside California, Pittsburgh, topped one of the most polluted lists

Other Key Findings of State of the Air 2008:

- One in 10 people in the U.S. live in areas with unhealthful levels of all three types of pollution: ozone, short-term and year-round particle pollution.
- Two of five people in the U.S live in counties that have unhealthful levels of either ozone or particle pollution.
- Nearly one-third of the U.S. population lives in areas with unhealthful levels of ozone.
- Over one quarter of the people in the U.S. live in an area with unhealthful short-term levels of particle pollution.
- One in six people in the U.S. live in an area with unhealthful year-round levels of particle pollution.

## **Extreme commutes: More time on road means less time for family**

By Scott Jason

Merced Sun-Star, Saturday, May 10, 2008

LIVINGSTON -- Zack Guettinger's alarm sounds at 3:45 a.m., bringing with it a cruel reminder that he must drag himself out of bed for another three-hour drive to his job in San Ramon.

Most mornings, he's still half-asleep when he stops at a service station to fill his Toyota Scion with gasoline and his veins with coffee.

The sky's dark, few cars are on Highway 99 and his two sons and wife are still in bed.

On a typical day, he drives 200 miles there and back. It's not a short drive, but as he explained, it's what must be done.

"I struggle through every day with the drive so they can have somewhere nice to live," the 31-year-old Guettinger explained. "I really wanted to get a house down in the Valley for everyone to grow up in."

In one month, he spends nearly 100 hours on the highways that connect the Central Valley to the Bay Area. In a year, to go to work, he'll be behind the wheel for 1,152 hours, or 48 days.

Guettinger, along with other Merced County residents, is willing to trade endless hours on the road for their own corner of the American Dream.

There's a phrase, "Drive until you qualify," meaning that a Bay Area worker can afford a house only if he moves farther from his job.

Guettinger lives on Arena Way in rural Livingston, where he moved a few years ago with his wife and kids because he couldn't bear the thought of his sons growing up in an unsafe Bay Area neighborhood.

U.S. Census data show that he's among about a third of Merced's work force traveling outside the county for a job. More than 8,000 head to Stanislaus County, though others are willing to drive to Alameda, Santa Clara and Santa Cruz counties for skilled jobs that can't be found locally.

Guettinger works for a company that installs Internet-based phone lines for businesses. He simply hasn't been able to find a similar job nearby.

The census estimates that 2 percent of the American work force is made up of extreme commuters, which means they spend more than 90 minutes driving each way to their job.

The extra exhaust fumes pollute air, the tires wear down roads, the vehicles cause traffic jams and, behind the wheel, drivers slowly go mad.

Driving that long changes a commuter's life and inevitably the social fabric of society. It's another way for a community to become fragmented, as residents isolate themselves from friends and neighbors because of their jobs.

In some cases, commuting parents have left their young children in the care of unqualified people, which qualifies as neglect, said Martha MacKenzie, a program manager with Merced County's Human Services Agency.

"It sets them up for an opportunity to be abused," she noted.

The agency doesn't count the number of child welfare cases related to parents being away because of work, though she said there tend to be more reports on the Westside because of Los Banos' commuters.

Meanwhile, Guettinger hopes that his side project, a Web site for aftermarket car parts, will take off and eventually allow him to end his commute once and for all.

"I keep saying, 'Not another year,'" he admits. "But that was a year ago."

From energy drinks to iPods

After graduating from Livingston High School, Guettinger worked at a tire recycling plant near the Merced airport that sliced used tires to use as weights on the tarps covering the mounds of cow feed. The work was terrible.

He later got a job assembling windows.

As he tells it, a friend tricked him into moving to the Bay Area in 1997 by touting the region.

He landed a job in 1999 with a communications company and has spent the past nine years moving up the ranks.

While in San Jose, he watched the dot-com bust firsthand and weathered his employer changing names and owners.

He fled the Bay Area in 2005, feeling tired of a go-go-go lifestyle.

"There's always something to do, but there's never anywhere to step away," the Valley native reflected.

Frustrated by the thought of a long commute, he quit his job, but his bosses talked him into staying because of the training the company had invested in him. They also let him work four 10-hour shifts a week, giving him Fridays free.

There's no way he could stand the drive five days a week. The four days blur together and are tough enough.

The commute has put 186,000 miles on the Toyota Scion he bought in April 2005. He spends about \$500 to \$600 on gasoline each month.

Guettinger loads his iPod with 20 hours of podcasts about finances and business so that he can learn while driving.

He stays awake for the drive home by drinking energy drinks.

At one point, he was downing three a day, though he's cut back to one because he knows they're bad for his health. "It's basically my only addiction," he noted.

Guettinger arrives home about 8 p.m., depending on rain and accidents, which leaves enough time to eat dinner and to tuck his sons, ages 4 and 1½, into bed.

He'll usually spend another couple hours in front of his computer, filling orders for his online business before getting in bed around midnight.

At times, Guettinger's oldest son can be cranky because dad's not there in the morning. The absence also leaves the home a little more chaotic.

"You're not sharing the load as much as you should," he conceded. "It's tough."

Weekends are spent with his wife and kids, though the family rarely leaves the house.

He's looked for jobs locally but has never found anything that would give him a similar lifestyle.

And at this point, the goal is to make enough money through his Web site so he can work from home and quit his Bay Area job.

"You look down that road every day," he said. "I can't make that jump without being assured that it's going to be able to work 100 percent."

Stress and a loss of community

By his own admission, Guettinger said his commute exhausts him to the point that he doesn't involve himself with his community.

He also makes a point to spend as much time as he can with his kids.

Marilyn Scorby, Merced College's Child Development Center's program director, said parents who have long commutes should structure their week to give their kids the most stability and quality time.

"It's not the commuting that's harmful to the children," she observed. "It's the amount of stress it induces on the parent."

Children can grow accustomed to a parent being gone for long periods without any deeply detrimental effects, she said.

The focus shouldn't be on how a job keeps the family from being able to be together.

"They can be successful at it," she said. "It just depends on how the family approaches it."

One issue that arises out of extreme commuting is that the family may not be as engaged with their neighbors or community because of the long absences from home, Scorby noted.

Over a long period, a sense of community, through neighbors, churches and organizations, contributes to a family's happiness.

Sue Chappell, the head of Merced College's child development department, said she spent four years commuting from Modesto to Merced.

She enrolled her daughter at a local elementary school and put her in daycare after class.

"If I wanted to go visit her, I could," she explained. "It made me closer and more accessible."

Chappell believes what matters most is that a child is left at a quality care center that has a low ratio of well-trained employees to children.

She acknowledged that extreme commuting is bound to be hard for families, but the jobs do keep shelves stocked with food and a roof above their heads.

The end of the line

One Stockton commuter will finally end his journey this year by quitting his job at UC Merced and going back to school, which is only minutes from his home.

Bradley Butcher, 30, wakes at 5 a.m. in his Stockton home to exercise and get ready for his job as an academic coordinator at UC Merced.

If it's a Tuesday or Thursday -- the days that he's teaching -- he'll be driving his 2006 Volkswagen Passat down the highway. When he took the job at the university, it had 24,000 miles. The odometer now reads 48,000.

If it's a Monday or Friday, he'll be taking the Amtrak. He works from home Wednesdays.

It's a routine he's maintained since August when he traded a job at a local high school for the chance to train science and math teachers at a university.

In three weeks, he'll raise a white flag, ending his stay at UC Merced.

"It's just a lot of wasted hours," he said, estimating the week's commute totals 12 to 15 hours every week. "It's like a part-time job."

With a lap top and a wireless card, he's able to work on the train, which gives him the ability to catch the 3:45 p.m. train back to Stockton. On a good day, he'll be home by 6 p.m.

With so much time spent on the road, he's no longer able to take a quick trip to the post office after work, mow the lawn or even spend as much quality time with his wife.

The two of them bought a home in Stockton because it's close to family. As a result, moving to Merced never was an option, both because of the housing market and the difference in lifestyles.

He took the job believing that his mixed transportation would work out better. But the train has been late and unreliable.

So he's going back to school at University of the Pacific, about four miles from home.

This time, he'll be able to sleep in, run errands and commute.

On his bicycle.

## **Central Valley residents poorer and sicker than state average, report says Authors hope findings will help residents make healthier choices**

By Ngoc Nguyen, The Sacramento Bee

In the Merced Sun-Star, Friday, May 9, 2008

Central Valley residents lack doctors and other medical specialists, are more likely to die of diabetes and heart attacks, and face diminished well-being because of poverty, according to a sweeping report released Thursday.

Researchers assessed more than two dozen health care indicators, from health insurance coverage and a shortage of physicians to infants' low birth weight and rising childhood asthma rates, and compared the indicators with the state average. The findings were published in "The State of the Great Central Valley: Public Health and Access to Care."

"We're not making a lot of progress to lead healthier lives in the Central Valley, and that's disappointing," said David Hosley, president of the Great Valley Center, which published the report.

He said he hopes the findings will make Valley residents more aware of how their lifestyle choices affect their health.

The findings were based on state and national data and the most recent data from the California Health Interview Survey (CHIS), conducted every two years since 2001.

The report offers a few bright spots in the 18 counties from Shasta to Kern: Smoking rates are down, more children are being immunized and heart disease has declined in some areas.

In the Sacramento region, the picture is better in some respects, but still uneven.

Sacramento County had the lowest rate of uninsured adults in the state, and Sacramento, Placer and Yolo counties boast the highest number of doctors per 1,000 residents in the Central Valley.

Yet despite an abundance of medical facilities and professionals, Sacramento County has the highest number in the region of infants born under 5.5 pounds and has higher heart disease and asthma rates than the state average.

In addition, the six-county region had the lowest immunization rate in the state for children under age 2.

Sacramento County Health Officer Dr. Glennah Trochet cited recent improvement in the birth weight data, but conceded there is more work to be done. "We need to do a better job of protecting the community," she said.

Sacramento was one of 13 counties where the rate of childhood asthma was higher than the state average of 16.1 percent. Other counties with that distinction were El Dorado, Yolo, Sutter and Yuba. In the Sacramento region, only Placer County was below the state average, with 14.1 percent.

Still, asthma rates were far worse in Fresno County, where more than 30 percent of children have been diagnosed with the lung disease.

While state and regional air quality officials try to cut air pollution – and associated asthma rates – in the Valley, Hosley of the Great Valley Center said residents can make their own changes.

"People in the Central Valley are making unhealthy choices," Hosley said. "We're not eating well, we don't get enough exercise, we are choosing to use alcohol or drugs to excess."

Even as the smoking rate has declined, that habit among Central Valley residents is still more prevalent than in the rest of the state. Binge drinking rates also are higher.

Trochet said obesity and smoking rates were "higher than we'd like," noting a link between smoking and the risk of heart attack.

"We can't exclude air pollution as a risk factor for heart attacks and strokes," she said.

Increasingly, health advocates and public health officials see a connection between the environment and health.

They said communities need to be designed to offer people healthier choices: fresh food and produce, access to open space, walkable, safe neighborhoods with jobs and affordable housing.

"A stable place to live improves lives of people who are there," Hosley said. "It affects how well kids do in school, how much they exercise, how well they eat. ... It's all connected."

The health picture is especially dire in the San Joaquin Valley and parts of the rural North Valley, areas with a severe physician shortage.

Maria Pallavicini, professor and dean of the School of Natural Sciences at the University of California, Merced, cited California Department of Finance data from a 2005 report.

In a state with an average of 126 physicians per 100,000 people, the San Joaquin Valley has just 87. By comparison, Southern California enjoys 154 doctors per 100,000 residents and Northern California has 120 per 100,000 residents.

Access to medical specialists in the San Joaquin Valley also lags behind the rest of the state, with 43 specialists per 100,000 people compared with 107 in Northern California and 86 in Southern California.

Kings, Madera and Merced counties are especially hard hit, she said.

At the same time, the Central Valley population is projected to grow 131 percent by 2050, according to the Great Valley Center report.

Pallavicini said UC Merced is hoping to build another medical school in the region, anticipating that physicians trained there would set up their practices locally. She noted that about a third of doctors who completed training at the University of California, San Francisco – Fresno University Medical Center now practice in the Valley.

"The Valley needs and wants its own medical school to meet the needs of the community, which has different needs than those of Sacramento or Davis," she said.

Dr. Richard Pan, an associate professor in the School of Pediatrics at UC Davis, said it will be a challenge to attract physicians to areas with high rates of Medi-Cal and Medicare recipients, because of low reimbursement rates for doctors who provide that care. He said doctors will need a good balance of private and government-insured patients to make it work.

"Without good data, you don't understand what's going on," Pan said. "Data is useful to start a conversation."

## **Big MTBE settlement to benefit California**

By David R. Baker, staff writer

S.F. Chronicle, Friday, May 9, 2008

Chevron Corp. and other big oil companies have agreed to pay \$422 million to settle a major lawsuit over the gasoline additive MTBE, and much of the money will go to plaintiffs in California.

The oil companies will pay roughly \$78 million to a group of California city governments and water companies that claimed that the chemical had contaminated their wells, or could do so in the future. Among those receiving money are a water company based in San Jose, several water districts in the Sacramento area and the city of Riverside.

Formally known as methyl tertiary butyl ether, MTBE was added to gasoline in the 1990s to make the fuel burn more thoroughly and cut air pollution. But it soon started showing up in drinking water - a problem because it gives water a noxious taste and is considered a possible carcinogen. California stopped using it in 2003.

Its use triggered lawsuits nationwide, as local governments tried to recoup the money spent on cleaning up their wells.

The agreement, announced late Wednesday, settles 59 separate cases that had been filed in 17 different states but were ultimately wrapped into one. Most of the nation's largest oil companies agreed to it, including San Ramon's Chevron. Exxon Mobil did not.

The companies have not disclosed how much each of them will pay.

"The settlement was the result of hard-fought litigation and long, tough negotiations between the parties over the course of a year and half," said Chevron spokeswoman Stephanie Price. "We reached the point where we had the opportunity to resolve the litigation, and did."

Under the agreement, the oil companies will pay \$422 million up front. They also agree to cover 70 percent of the cleanup costs for any of the plaintiffs' wells that become contaminated with MTBE within the next 30 years.

"We're pleased because the money recovered will really help them address a problem they've been having, and the 30-year element gives them some peace of mind," said Scott Summy, a partner with the Baron & Budd law firm representing California plaintiffs in the suit.

Within the state, the California Water Service Co. of San Jose will receive the biggest settlement award - \$49.7 million. The company has found MTBE in 27 of its wells and has 786 wells that could be exposed to the chemical.

Several water companies in the Sacramento area received settlement awards of roughly \$264,000 each, even though the chemical hasn't been found in any of their wells.

"They get a little bit up front to monitor the wells, and then they also get that 30-year guarantee in case any of their wells get hit," Summy said. "There's a lot of MTBE contamination in the groundwater nearby."

The chemical has a complicated, contentious history.

Federal clean air laws in the early 1990s mandated that gasoline sold in smoggy areas contain additives that would help cut back on air pollution. Ethanol and MTBE were the additives most widely used. California officials argued they could meet federal air quality standards without either one but were overruled.

Then MTBE seeped into drinking water wells. California and other states stopped using it, and lawsuits were filed against the oil companies.

The companies argued that they shouldn't have to pay cleanup costs because the government had compelled MTBE's use in the first place.

They also argued that the chemical's long-term health effects on humans hadn't been proved, and as a result, MTBE shouldn't be considered a contaminant.

The settlement agreement does not address those arguments, and an attorney representing Chevron in the case said the companies still hold those views.

"There remain differences between the parties in the litigation over whether MTBE poses any real risk and, at what levels MTBE must be treated," said Rick Wallace, with the law firm of Wallace, King, Domike & Reiskin.

### **Schwarzenegger challenges automakers to meet Calif. rules**

By Samantha Young, Associated Press Writer  
Modesto Bee, Thursday, May 8, 2008

SACRAMENTO — Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger on Thursday said pressure from the auto industry will not deter California from attempting to impose strict emission rules for vehicles sold in the state.

The Republican governor met privately with seven auto executives who requested the get-together. In an interview afterward, he said he told them "the train has left the station" and that they should stop challenging California rules that are intended to help slow the rate of global warming.

"I said, 'While you're whining, you should be creating new technologies. That's how you meet the date,'" Schwarzenegger told The Associated Press after meeting with members of the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers.

The trade group, whose members include General Motors Corp., Ford Motor Co., Chrysler LLC, Toyota Motor Corp., BMW AG and Volkswagen Group of America Inc., is pushing back against California rules designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. They are part of the state's wider effort to address global warming.

California wants emissions to be cut by nearly a third for all vehicles sold in the state by 2016. That's four years earlier than similar emission rules proposed by the federal government.

Auto manufacturers say the California benchmark can't be met on time and that they have successfully blocked them from taking effect.

It was the first time Schwarzenegger and auto executives have met after years of being at odds over California's tailpipe rules.

The industry sued California in federal court over a 2002 auto emissions rule, delaying the tougher standards. Although the state successfully defended the legal challenge, the rules have been blocked by the Bush administration, which has denied giving California the waiver from federal law it needs to implement them.

While neither side made any concessions Thursday, they agreed to work together on alternative ways automakers might help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, alliance chief executive officer Dave McCurdy said.

He said automakers are exploring ways to promote driving techniques that save fuel. That might include paying for programs in California to synchronize city stoplights or help relieve traffic congestion.

"We think there are some positive steps we can take," said McCurdy, a former congressman from Oklahoma. "This is a journey. This is not the final outcome. We are committed to reducing CO2."

Schwarzenegger said he urged the automakers to create new technologies that would meet California's emissions rules and lead to cleaner-burning and more fuel-efficient vehicles for the global market. The auto alliance says California accounts for 12 percent of domestic auto sales.

The 2002 law adopted by California requires the auto industry to cut its greenhouse gas emissions 30 percent by 2016, equivalent to an average fuel-economy level of 35.7 mpg.

In addition, California regulators are moving ahead with plans to strengthen the auto rules and require the equivalent of 43 mpg by 2020 as part of a broader global warming law signed by Schwarzenegger in 2006.

If those rules were adopted nationwide, it would be equivalent to taking 14 million cars off the road, according to the California Air Resources Board.

Under federal fuel-efficiency rules proposed in April, new cars and trucks will have to meet a fleet-wide average of 31.6 mpg by 2015. Passenger cars will need to achieve 35.7 mpg, while trucks will need to reach 28.6 percent.

The federal plan is expected to add an average cost of \$650 per passenger car and \$979 per truck by 2015.

Schwarzenegger has argued that California's more aggressive rules would force auto emission reductions sooner.

The Bush administration has blocked California from enforcing its auto standards for years. More than a dozen states have sided with California and are challenging the administration in federal court.

The three remaining major-party presidential candidates have expressed support for California's efforts, something Schwarzenegger said he relayed to the auto executives Thursday.

"The writing is on the wall, so let's work together because that's the direction we're going nationally," Schwarzenegger said in the interview.

## **Public transit adjusts to surge in ridership**

By Erik N. Nelson Oakland Tribune and Denis Cuff Contra Costa Times  
In the Contra Costa Times, Sunday, May 11, 2008

Traffic congestion and air pollution have long spurred transportation officials and environmental advocates to urge, cajole and beg commuters to switch to public transit. Still, the vast majority of Bay Area commuters wouldn't budge from behind the wheel.

As gasoline prices climb past \$4 a gallon, however, commuters are moving to public transportation in huge numbers, breaking records on BART, commuter trains and transbay bus routes.

Whereas public transportation used to be equal to the task of transporting one in 10 of the Bay Area's commuters, evolving into a major rival of solo driving is proving to be as painful for commuters as it is delightful for public transit advocates.

Parking at many BART and train stations is filling up earlier and earlier. Seating is becoming a luxury on more peak-hour trains and buses, and transit officials are wondering how to increase service at a time when state and local budgets are strapped. The economy is on edge and filling buses' diesel tanks has never been more expensive.

"Just getting 15 miles per gallon from here to Santa Clara was getting to be too much," said Brian Heidl, a mechanical engineer, as he waited for the 6:42 a.m. Altamont Commuter Express train in Livermore on Wednesday.

"I was practically paying \$400 a month just in gas," Heidl said, to keep his 1987 Ford Ranger pickup making the 60-mile trip along some of the area's most congested freeway segments, on Interstates 580 and 680.

Now, he pays about \$225 for his monthly ACE ticket "and I get to sleep the whole way and not have to worry about the traffic."

But veteran ACE riders have noticed that it's getting more difficult to find a seat and bicyclists are lamenting overcrowding on the train's onboard bike rack. On the Gilroy-to-San Francisco Caltrain service, "we have to turn bikes away every day," said railroad spokeswoman Christine Dunn.

Across the nation, skyrocketing gas prices have complicated America's love affair with the car. Motorists drove 0.4 percent fewer miles in 2007 than the previous year, the first time without an increase since at least 1982, the first year mileage was tracked in a report by the Federal Highway Administration. "It's simply becoming too expensive for some people to drive a car on a regular basis," said Virginia Miller, a spokeswoman for the American Public Transit Association. "People are voting with their feet for public transit."

But like a newly elected president, transit systems will be hard-pressed to meet all the needs of their new constituents.

New BART riders, for example, are finding rush-hour trains more packed than ever, leading the agency to experiment with removing seats on some cars to make more room near the doors for standing riders.

Public transit ridership has grown rapidly since gas prices regularly exceeded \$3 per gallon in mid-2005, and growth accelerated this year as prices neared or surpassed \$4 a gallon.

The biggest surge in the number of riders is on rail systems such as BART, which carry long-distance commuters who have the option of driving but now feel an especially sharp pinch at the pump.

Across the nation, commuter rail systems such as ACE, which runs from Stockton to San Jose, saw an average ridership gain of 6.1 percent in 2007, according to the transit association's statistics.

In the Bay Area, where gas prices have been among the highest in the nation, the effect has been dramatic. Riders have flocked to ACE and Capitol Corridor trains, which run from the Sacramento area to San Jose via the East Bay. On both services, ridership rose 13.6 percent in the first quarter of 2008 compared with the same quarter last year.

On bus systems, which often carry many people who have no other means of getting around, ridership nationally climbed about 1 percent last year.

AC Transit, which serves large lower-income, non-driving populations in Oakland, Richmond and other areas stretching south to Fremont, is such a system. Its heavily subsidized local ridership has stagnated after service cuts and other constraints. But many of its transbay bus routes, which cater to "choice" riders with private vehicles, have seen ridership increases as high as 20 percent in the past year.

Although most of the drivers making the switch are turning to public transit, other modes also appear to be growing. On the Bay Bridge, for instance, carpool traffic grew 5.2 percent in the nine months ending with March, even as overall traffic declined.

Auto traffic in the Bay Area has declined before, most significantly when the dot-com bubble burst, leaving far fewer jobs to which people would commute. That trend was accompanied by a drop in transit use, too.

The Peninsula's popular Gilroy-to-San Francisco Caltrain service saw its ridership tank after hitting its dot-com peak in 2001.

Seven years later, Caltrain finally surpassed that record, hitting 3,993 average daily riders in February.

"We're already seeing some of our express trains during the peak hours at capacity," Dunn said. "We've added as many trains as we can add. We have scheduled as close as we can schedule," with eight trains passing through Millbrae during rush hour.

The agency is acquiring eight new cars by the end of the year to add to existing trains, Dunn added, but it will be many years off, with the advent of a closely controlled electric-powered system that it will be able to run trains more frequently.

One of the more daunting challenges posed by the surge in riders involves getting riders from often sprawling suburban neighborhoods to use public transportation.

The current trend can be painfully evident to commuters who show up at the Pleasant Hill BART Station after 7:45 a.m.

BART regular Gary Alexander once became so exasperated upon finding no parking there that he returned to his Walnut Creek home and called a taxi to drive him back to the station.

"The parking absolutely is getting worse," Alexander said. "You learn to play the parking game. You get here early, or you have to have another plan."

"Parking is a constraint," said BART General Manager Dorothy Dugger, "but we need to look at parking as one part of the challenge in improving access to our stations." Bus, bike and foot traffic must also factor in, she said.

Dugger said BART's ability to move passengers would be taxed if ridership continues to climb 4 percent or more for a decade, which is twice the rate of BART's historical growth rate.

"We have capacity now," she said. "But we're in the same boat as a lot of the older transit systems. We're talking about the need for adequate levels of federal support to reinvest in these systems, as well as to meet the demand for increased capacity."

BART is taking some measures for short-term relief. Train system managers have started a pilot project to remove as many as six seats near the doors of as many as 80 cars. The experiment seeks to determine whether the extra space will move trains more quickly through stations by speeding up the loading and unloading of passengers.

Although experts predict that high fuel prices will persist as worldwide oil demand grows and supply struggles to keep up, commuting experts such as Alan Pisarski caution that the allure of the personal vehicle is still strong.

"There's an argument to be made that gas prices aren't going back down, but I'm not so sure," said Pisarski, author of the "Commuting in America" report series read by transportation officials across the nation. Pisarski noted that past dire predictions about oil supply, during the oil shortages of the 1970s and early 1980s, proved premature.

"When gas prices recede," he said, "people snap back to their previous behavior."

BART operators painfully recall expecting continued robust growth after the late 1990s, only to watch riders dwindle along with dot-com jobs during 2002, 2003 and 2004.

"People don't change their habits overnight simply because the price of gas this week went over \$4 a gallon," said BART spokesman Linton Johnson. "We could have sky-high gas prices, but if there are no jobs or if the freeways are empty, we won't have as many riders."

Some transit operators say they expect to hold on to many new riders, though.

In the Seattle area, rail ridership stayed 10 percent higher after the completion of a major freeway project last year that impeded traffic for weeks.

"Once they tried public transit, they thought it was worth the cost-saving and convenience," said Linda Robson, a spokeswoman for Sound Transit, which runs trains and buses in the Seattle and Tacoma areas.

Bay Area commuters got a similar push to try public transportation last year when a MacArthur Maze freeway ramp collapsed in a fiery gasoline tanker truck accident and construction closed the Bay Bridge during Labor Day weekend.

Ridership broke records on BART during those periods, and it remained high after the blocked structures reopened.

Paying for transit

Public transportation in California is funded through a complex set of programs and formulas.

In the Bay Area, it costs more than \$2.2 billion a year (2006-07 fiscal year) to operate two dozen rail, bus and ferry services.

Nearly \$604 million of that comes from fares, and the remainder comes from county sales taxes, property taxes, state sales tax on gasoline, federal transit grants and, showing how complicated the system is, the largest category is one the Metropolitan Transportation Commissions calls "other."

Although most of California's transit services get their biggest chunk of funding from local sales taxes, as do SamTrans and Santa Clara County's Valley Transportation Authority, the Bay Area has some big anomalies. San Francisco's Muni System got more than half of last year's \$580 million budget from city general funds, and the East Bay's AC Transit gets a quarter of its \$300 million operating budget from property taxes.

One of the most unpredictable sources is from the state government. It's either feast or famine for two reasons: One, it's from the sales tax on gasoline, which has ballooned in recent years along with gas prices, and two, that big bundle of revenue is a tempting pot of money for the governor and state legislators to raid for other purposes during tough budget years such as this one. Transportation officials estimate the gas sales tax haul to reach \$2.5 billion for the fiscal year starting July 1, but key state officials are already discussing the possibility of diverting those funds to cover the budget shortfall for nontransit programs.

## **Public invited to comment on Staples Ranch proposal**

By Meera Pal, Staff Writer

In the Contra Costa Times, Saturday, May 10, 2008

Developing the 124-acre Staples Ranch property in eastern Pleasanton would create several considerable and inevitable environmental impacts, according to a draft report released a few weeks ago.

The project would irreversibly alter the rural character of the undeveloped property, which sits at the junction of Interstate 580 and El Charro Road, and would also negatively affect air quality, and create greater traffic congestion at surrounding intersections, the report says.

The draft report, which analyzes the proposal's projected effects on the environment, is available for public review. It will be the focus of the discussion at Wednesday's Planning Commission meeting, at which the commission will take public comments and questions on the draft analysis, said Assistant City Manager Steven Bocian.

Public comments on the draft environmental report can be submitted until June 4, officials said.

The city's environmental consultant will review those comments and address them in a final report, which will be submitted to the commission for approval, before being sent to the City Council.

According to the draft report, the proposal's significant and unavoidable effects on the environment require the city to adopt a statement noting it is aware of the consequences but believes the project's benefits would outweigh its ill effects.

Pleasanton signed an agreement with Alameda County in 2006 to consider development applications for the Staples Ranch property in a timely manner, in exchange for annexing the land into Pleasanton.

Previous comments by county Supervisor Scott Haggerty have indicated the county, which currently owns the property bordered by Livermore, is anxious to move forward with the project and annex the parcel into Pleasanton.

The county has already entered sales agreements for the development of Staples Ranch. The 37 acres adjacent to the I-580/El Charro interchange is proposed for the relocation of the Hendrick Automotive Group, which is currently located off Santa Rita Road.

Along the western border, 46 acres has been set aside for development of the 120,000-square-foot Stoneridge Creek Senior Continuing Care Community, which would include 800 residential units, and support health care and skilled nursing facilities and common areas.

South of the auto mall, Fremont Land Development has proposed The Shops at Staples Ranch Retail Center on an 11-acre parcel.

The city is considering a 17-acre community park on another portion of the site.

Access to the senior facility and community parks will be via a new two-lane bridge extending Stoneridge Drive over the Arroyo Mocho. The auto mall and future commercial development will be accessed from a new road off El Charro Road, with no connection to Stoneridge Drive, except for emergency vehicles. The report notes that pedestrian, bicycle and transit access to Staples Ranch is limited.

Bocian said a draft final report could be back before the commission by early August.

"It could be longer depending on the number, degree and type of comments they receive," he said.

If you go

What: Pleasanton Planning Commission meeting

When: 7 p.m. Wednesday

Where: Council chambers, 200 Old Bernal Ave.

Web: Go to [www.staplesranch.org](http://www.staplesranch.org) for more information about the Staples Ranch proposal

## **Cost of transit projects put at \$531 billion**

By Harrison Sheppard and Kerry Cavanaugh, Staff Writers

LA Daily News, Saturday, May 10, 2008

REGION: Fees, tolls, taxes would pay for such things as pothole repair and maglevs.

Maintaining and boosting Southern California's transportation system over the next three decades could cost some \$531 billion and require new taxes, tolls and user fees, a regional planning group said Friday.

In its latest 30-year plan, the Southern California Association of Governments spelled out a range of projects that the region needs to keep people and goods moving - from high-tech maglev rail lines to low-tech pothole repairs.

And the region has to plan for at least another 6 million people in the next 30 years, said Gary Ovitt, immediate past president of SCAG and a San Bernardino County supervisor.

"That means more vehicles and more people traveling," he said. "We really want to get these projects done - and we would love to do even more because we can't afford to take the risk that we don't implement changes to improve the quality of life."

But those projects can't all be done with existing funding from state and federal sources, so local leaders are looking at a variety of new revenue sources.

Those include new fees on containers moving through ports (\$41 billion); new highway toll lanes (\$22 billion); gas tax increases (\$17 billion); and public-private partnerships (\$4.4 billion).

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority is also considering placing a half-cent sales tax on the November ballot in Los Angeles County that would generate up to \$700million a year for transit projects.

Some of the key projects in the SCAG plan include: \$25billion for new toll lanes; \$5 billion for freeway lanes reserved for environmentally friendly trucks; and \$6 billion for 131 highway-rail grade separations east of downtown Los Angeles.

It also would include an \$18 billion high-speed magnetically levitated train system to move goods between ports, airports and distribution centers.

But ultimately, Ovitt said, the top priority might be just preventing what the region has already in place from falling apart further.

Southern California needs at least \$40 billion just to fix potholes, decrepit bridges and other crumbling infrastructure, he said.

To help pay for some of those needs, state and local officials are floating various proposals.

Besides the half-cent sales tax increase, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa has also asked Metro to evaluate possible public-private partnerships to build transit projects, including a Subway to the Sea. That report is expected this summer.

Both funding mechanisms would be considered when Villaraigosa takes over as head of the MTA board, and he's indicated he could support a tax measure.

"Gas prices and traffic congestion have reached a breaking point in this region, which absolutely requires public officials to find new funding for mass transit," said Villaraigosa spokesman Matt Szabo.

"The mayor believes we have a responsibility to look to the private sector, as well as considering an enhanced public investment."

Four Los Angeles City Council members have introduced a motion to support Metro if the agency places the tax on the ballot.

"People are interested in investing in that infrastructure if they know the money is going to be spent on projects that have been outlined and that will be completed on time and on budget," said Councilwoman Wendy Greuel, who heads the council's transportation committee.

"The argument still needs to be made to assure the public that the investment will bring the bang for the buck and that it will impact traffic."

Councilman Greig Smith, who serves on the SCAG board, said there are some promising funding proposals. A private company has offered to build a magnetic levitation train system, or maglev, from the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach to Ontario.

Regional leaders have asked the company to extend the system to Los Angeles International Airport and allow passengers to ride.

Maglev could be profitable because it could cost less to move cargo containers than companies now pay, he said.

But Smith is wary of a half-cent sales tax.

"Any bond or tax on the ballot right now is going to have a hard time getting support because of the economy," he said.

At the state level, Assemblyman Mike Feuer, D-West Hollywood, has proposed three pending bills in the Legislature to increase funding for transportation.

The first would improve the ability of local officials to form special "infrastructure financing districts" under which taxpayers in a certain area would have a portion of their tax payments set aside for specific transportation projects in their area.

The second authorizes Metro to place the sales tax on the ballot. The third would allow Metro to also ask Los Angeles voters to impose a "climate-change mitigation fee" - either up to \$90 per vehicle or a 3 percent tax on gasoline - to help pay for transit projects that improve air quality and traffic flow.

The fee could generate about \$400 million to \$600 million a year, he said.

But critics argue the public is wary of increases in taxes and fees at a time when the economy is teetering on recession and gasoline prices continue to skyrocket.

Robert Poole, director of transportation studies at the Los Angeles-based Reason Foundation, said transit officials will be hard-pressed to make a case that measurable improvements will be made in the quality of life for average Southern Californians.

"I think the public will be skeptical," Poole said. "They might go for it. But they're going to have to be convinced that it's really going to make their lives better. That's not impossible, but it's a tall order."

Jon Coupal, president of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association, said Los Angeles County's history of asking residents for more money for transportation only to see congestion continue to worsen will not sit well with voters.

"The L.A. region's history with transportation projects - being able to deliver projects that are both effective and efficient - is not very good," Coupal said.

"Every time the county has asked for higher taxes, they promise the moon and deliver nothing. I think there will be a lot of skepticism about additional funds."

But supporters of tax increases say Southern Californians understand how badly the region needs to make improvements.

"I am optimistic that one way or the other, the voters of our region will make decisions now to improve our transportation as soon as we possibly can," Feuer said.

"I am absolutely aware of how difficult some of the choices will be. But if we choose the status quo, we confine ourselves to gridlock for the indefinite future. And I don't know anybody who wants that."

#### SOUTH BAY PROJECTS

A sample of the hundreds of projects included on SCAG's 30-year Regional Transportation Plan:

Los Angeles International Airport: Eliminate traffic bottlenecks at LAX, \$5 million

Manhattan Beach: Add one lane to northbound Sepulveda Boulevard from 33rd Street to Rosecrans Avenue, \$13.5million

Manhattan Beach/Hawthorne: Widen Aviation Boulevard to three lanes in each direction at the Rosecrans Avenue and Aviation intersection, widen railroad bridge, \$12.6 million

Terminal Island: Replace Schuyler Heim Bridge, add three lanes from Ocean Boulevard to Alameda Street, construct a two-lane overpass from eastbound Navy Way to northbound Terminal Island (47) Freeway, \$687 million

Torrance: Construct eastbound left-turn lane and westbound right-turn lane, and northbound lane at Torrance Boulevard and Maple Avenue, \$717,000

#### **AC Transit adding fuel cell buses**

By Aaron Crowe, Contra Costa Times

In the Tri-Valley Herald, Sunday, May 11, 2008

AC Transit of Oakland has agreed to purchase at least eight fuel cell systems to power its next-generation hybrid-electric, fuel cell buses, scheduled for delivery in 2009 and 2010.

The new fuel cells come with a warranty period that can be enhanced to up to 10,000 hours of operation based on the fuel cells achieving certain defined performance milestones. AC Transit's first-generation fuel cell buses feature an earlier model UTC Power fuel cell system with a warranty of 4,000 hours, in which fuel economy in diesel gallon equivalency has been between 70 percent and 100 percent better than a control fleet of AC Transit diesel buses.

"Our experience with UTC Power and their fuel cell design has been extraordinarily good," said Rick Fernandez, AC Transit's general manager, in a press release. "Not only have we realized significantly better fuel economy, but their unique design operates at near-ambient pressure resulting in a very quiet vehicle."

In addition to fuel efficiency, the benefits of fuel cell buses include zero harmful tailpipe emissions and smooth, quiet operation, according to UTC Power.

AC Transit is one of the largest transit agencies in California, serving over 67 million passengers a year throughout a 360-square mile region.

### **Air pollution in Wyo. community rivals that of big cities**

By Bob Moen, Associated Press Writer  
Modesto Bee, Thursday, May 8, 2008

BOULDER, Wyo. — There isn't anything metropolitan about this tiny unincorporated town in southwest Wyoming, where a few single-family homes and a volunteer fire station stand against a skyline of snowcapped mountains.

But Boulder, with a population of just 75 people, has one thing in common with major metropolitan areas: air pollution thick enough to pose health risks.

"Used to be you could see horizon to horizon, crystal clear. Now you got this," said Craig Jensen as he gestured to a pale blue sky that he says is not as deeply colored as it used to be. "Makes you wonder what it's going to do to the grass, the trees and the birds."

The pollution, largely from the region's booming natural gas industry, came in the form of ground-level ozone, which has exceeded healthy levels 11 times since January and caused Wyoming to issue its first ozone alerts. Now the ozone threatens to cost the industry and taxpayers millions of dollars to stay within federal clean-air laws.

Sublette County is home to one of the largest natural gas reserves in North America, and it is dotted with hundreds of gas wells to supply the nation's growing demand for cleaner-burning fuel. Thousands more wells are planned for the future.

But pollution from vehicles and equipment in the gas fields - along with dust, weather and geography - have raised ozone to a level that rivals those of big cities in the summertime.

Wyoming's ozone problem comes at a time when the federal government has strengthened its ozone restrictions to better protect public health. In March, the Environmental Protection Agency set a new ozone standard of 75 parts per billion, down from 80 parts per billion.

The peak eight-hour average for ozone near Boulder reached 122 parts per billion on Feb. 21 and 102 parts per billion on March 11. By comparison, the Los Angeles area hit a peak average of 152 parts per billion last summer, and Denver recorded a peak of 98 parts per billion last July.

Failure to meet federal air-quality standards could result in mandatory pollution-cutting measures ranging from restricting wood-burning stoves in homes to placing limits on the booming oil and gas industry.

Jeremy Nichols, director of the Denver-based Rocky Mountain Clean Air Action, said all economic development in the region - not just the energy industry - could be affected.

"If we don't get ahead of the curve, we could be suffering serious consequences in the future," Nichols said.

Conservation groups have seized on the ozone alerts in their efforts to curb drilling for natural gas in the area.

"Obviously, the pace and level of development is just too much," said Linda Baker of the Upper Green River Valley Coalition.

The energy industry says it has been working with regulators to ease the problem and insists drilling should not be curtailed.

Ozone is a component of smog, a yellowish haze of pollutants that lingers near ground level and can raise the risk of asthma and heart attacks, especially among the elderly and children with respiratory illnesses.

Ozone needs sunlight to form, and state environmental officials believe the ozone levels in Wyoming this past winter and spring were exacerbated by heavy snowcover, which intensified the sunlight by reflecting it off the snow. In 2007, when the area had little snowcover, there were no elevated ozone readings.

Also contributing to the situation are rare temperature inversions, when cold air is trapped close to the ground, and the surrounding mountains, which enclose the pollution in the Green River valley.

Gas developers in the area are sharing information on how best to reduce ozone, according to Randy Teeuwan, a spokesman for Encana Corp., one of the largest gas suppliers. Encana already is using natural gas-powered drilling rigs that emit less pollution, and it is consolidating field operations to reduce emissions.

State officials are working with the industry to reduce emissions without waiting for new federal regulations to take effect.

"We understand that the people who are living up there cannot wait two or three years for us to develop regulatory tools," said David Finley with the state Department of Environmental Quality.

For instance, the state is considering a plan that, when conditions appear ripe for ozone formation, would ask companies to curtail truck traffic or use more drilling rigs powered by cleaner-burning natural gas.

Meanwhile, the Bureau of Land Management is reviewing a proposal by several companies to allow nearly 4,400 more wells in the county.

Jim Sewell, environmental project manager with Shell Exploration and Production, said the expansion project would have lower emissions than existing facilities. The companies also are offering \$36 million to pay for environmental monitoring and other measures that lessen the effects of drilling on air quality, wildlife and plants.

Jensen, whose family has lived in this part of Wyoming for four generations, said he has seen both sides of gas development.

On one hand, he has received royalties from wells on his land, enabling him to buy a boat, snowmobiles and other "toys."

But the pollution leaves Jensen longing for the days of clear skies, little traffic and fewer people.

"I'd give it up right now if all them rigs moved," he said.

### **EPA testing air after twister in toxic Okla. town**

By Murray Evans, Associated Press Writer

In the Merced Sun-Star, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Monday, May 12, 2008

PICHER, Okla. The Environmental Protection Agency was preparing to conduct air and soil tests to check for high lead levels Monday after a deadly tornado blew through Picher, a town so polluted with lead-filled mining waste that it's a Superfund site.

Miles Tolbert, the Oklahoma secretary of the environment, said he did not think there was an immediate public health hazard to the town's 800 residents, but said more testing is needed.

Long-term exposure to lead dust poses a health risk, particularly to young children.

On Saturday, a tornado with the second-strongest rating killed six people, destroyed a 20-block area and blew dust off mountains of mining waste, or chat piles.

"You can look at the chat piles and see that a lot of the material has blown off," said John Sparkman, head of the Picher housing authority. "We went up on a chat pile an hour and a half after the tornado hit, and you could see dust blowing fine material all over the place from that vantage point."

In all, 22 people were killed in the tornado outbreak in Oklahoma, Missouri and Georgia.

Meanwhile, law enforcement officers and the Oklahoma National Guard patrolled the Picher overnight into Monday to prevent looting, said Michelann Ooten, spokeswoman for the Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management.

National Weather Service assessment teams determined the twister that hit Picher had an EF-4 rating, the second highest rating, and was 1 mile wide at its widest point, meteorologist Mike Teague said Monday.

The tornado's winds were estimated at 165 to 175 mph, and the damage track stretched 74 miles - 29 in Oklahoma and another 45 in Missouri, where 15 people were killed.

"These storms are fairly rare to be that strong. The devastation was nearly complete in a few areas," Teague said. "Albeit isolated, there were some sections of neighborhoods where houses were just completely taken off the foundation. Gone."

The tornado could be the ultimate incentive for those 800 or so residents who have been reluctant to leave, now that most of their homes have been ruined, Sparkman said.

One of those residents, Sue Sigle, had been hoping the government would offer more money for her home before she moves away from this pollution-scarred town. Then the tornado came.

As she began the task of salvage Sunday, Sigle kept a smile on her face, noting that she was fortunate to be visiting family in Missouri when the massive twister hit.

"I'm OK with everything," Sigle said. "The Lord is going to take care of anything. ... I was going to move anyway. I guess I'll just have to move sooner."

That sense of inevitability appeared to grip residents as they picked through the remnants of their homes. The lead and zinc mines that made Picher a booming town of about 20,000 in the mid-20th century closed decades ago; leftover waste has turned the area into an environmental disaster.

Gov. Brad Henry, who toured the area by air and on foot Sunday, said the buyout program won't stop just because homes were leveled. He went so far as to say he would "guarantee" that those awaiting buyouts who lost their homes would be treated fairly.

"We will make sure the people get the assistance that they need," Henry said.

Because of Picher's Superfund status, the Federal Emergency Management Agency is unlikely to grant assistance to homeowners to rebuild in the town, said Oklahoma Emergency Management Director Albert Ashwood. But he echoed Henry's assurances about the federal buyout program, which is funded by the Environmental Protection Agency.

One of the homes those crews likely will examine will be that of Jeff Reeves, 43, who has followed his grandfather and father as Picher's fire chief. He has lived in Picher all his life and has watched it slowly decline.

"With everything else that's going on here, I'm not sure there is a recovery," he said.

## **McCain urges free-market principles to reduce global warming**

By Glen Johnson, Associated Press Writer

Modesto Bee, Monday, May 12, 2008

PHOENIX — Republican John McCain, reaching out to both independents and green-minded social conservatives, argues that global warming is undeniable and the country must take steps to bring it under control while adhering to free-market principles.

In remarks prepared for delivery Monday at a Portland, Ore., wind turbine manufacturer, the presidential contender says expanded nuclear power must be considered to reduce carbon-fuel emissions. He also sets a goal that by 2050, the country will reduce carbon emissions to a level 60 percent below that emitted in 1990.

"For all of the last century, the profit motive basically led in one direction - toward machines, methods and industries that used oil and gas," said McCain. "Enormous good came from that industrial growth, and we are all the beneficiaries of the national prosperity it built. But there were costs we weren't counting, and often hardly noticed. And these terrible costs have added up now, in the atmosphere, in the oceans and all across the natural world."

The Arizona senator promised to challenge China and India, two economic rivals that are fueling their challenge to U.S. market supremacy with heavily polluting fuels such as coal, gas and oil.

"For all of its historical disregard of environmental standards, it cannot have escaped the attention of the Chinese regime that China's skies are dangerously polluted, its beautiful rivers are dying, its grasslands vanishing, its coastlines receding and its own glaciers melting," said McCain.

He also took a swipe at President Bush, who balked at the beginning of his first term at signing the Kyoto global warming protocols. McCain said he would return to the negotiating table.

"I will not shirk the mantle of leadership that the United States bears. I will not permit eight long years to pass without serious action on serious challenges. I will not accept the same dead-end of failed diplomacy that claimed Kyoto. The United States will lead and will lead with a different approach - an approach that speaks to the interests and obligations of every nation," he said.

The language highlighted the political stakes for McCain, his party's presumed nominee. His visit to Oregon came just days after the two leading Democratic contenders, Sens. Barack Obama of Illinois and Hillary Rodham Clinton of New York, campaigned in the state.

Oregon is among the expected general election battlegrounds, and its Columbia and Hood rivers are playgrounds for many outdoorsmen and environmentalists.

Global warming also stands with abortion rights and an array of social causes as important issues to the evangelicals and Christian conservatives whom McCain hopes will bolster his political base this fall.

Democrats derided McCain's record on the issue, noting contributions to his campaign from energy lobbyists, his recent proposal to temporarily suspend the federal gasoline tax as a means of making driving cheaper and some votes against alternate energy sources.

"Senator McCain's campaign rhetoric on the environment means nothing when he's willing to give his donors sweetheart deals and appoint right wing judges bent on gutting environmental regulations, which is one more reason he is the wrong choice for America's future," said a statement from Democratic National Committee Chairman Howard Dean.

McCain has long expressed a belief in global warming, arguing that even if he is wrong, acting as if the planet's temperature were increasing would only benefit the environment if scientists subsequently proved he was mistaken.

McCain traveled to the Pacific Northwest from Arizona, where he and his family spent Mother's Day.

In his speech, he highlighted his personal experiences viewing evidence of glacial recession. He also cited evidence of a shift in animal migration patterns.

"You would think that if the polar bears, walruses, and sea birds have the good sense to respond to new conditions and new dangers, then humanity can respond as well," he said.

McCain's major solution is to implement a cap-and-trade program on carbon-fuel emissions, like a similar program in the Clean Air Act that was used to reduce sulfur dioxide emissions that triggered acid rain.

Industries would be given emission targets, and those coming in under their limit could sell their surplus polluting capacity to companies unable to meet their target.

McCain wants the country to return to 2005 emission levels by 2012; 1990 levels by 2020; and to a level sixty percent below that by 2050.

"As never before, the market would reward any person or company that seeks to invent, improve, or acquire alternatives to carbon-based energy," he said. "More likely, however, there will be some companies that need extra emissions rights, and they will be able to buy them. The system to meet these targets and timetables will give these companies extra time to adapt - and that is good economic policy."

## **Climate scientist out to change the world**

### **Solar-cooker project could cut air pollution**

By Mike Lee, Union-Tribune Staff Writer

San Diego Union-Tribune, Sunday, May 11, 2008

Veerabhadran Ramanathan tours the globe to conduct experiments and advise world leaders about climate change.

He helped craft the United Nations' landmark report in 2007 on global warming, and his research at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in La Jolla has been featured in major journals such as *Nature*.

Last year, he led a critique of the U.S. climate science program for the National Research Council. This week at Edwards Air Force Base, he'll launch an unmanned aircraft to study how air pollution from Asia, Canada and Mexico affects Southern California.

But at 63, Ramanathan seeks more than scientific accomplishment. He wants to use his knowledge to help poorer nations improve their quality of life and fight global warming at the same time.

His budding vision is Project Surya – Sanskrit for sun. The idea is to give about 3,500 solar and other “clean energy” cooking devices to families in Mukteshwar, a rural area in the Himalayas, and study if the smokeless cookers effectively slash levels of atmospheric soot.

About half of the world's people cook and heat their homes with fires fueled by dung, wood, crop residues and other high-polluting materials.

If Project Surya were expanded to hundreds of millions of people in various countries, Ramanathan expects that it would buy the world an additional decade or two to control emissions of carbon dioxide, which most scientists say is the major human influence on global warming.

Climate change “is going to impact all of us, but developing and poor nations are going to be more vulnerable,” Ramanathan said. “Everybody has to do something about it.”

Some nonprofit groups share Ramanathan's goals. They've launched fledgling projects to provide smokeless cookers and water heaters in nations such as Sudan, Egypt, China and Vietnam. The devices have been shown to work well for households small and large.

Ramanathan's planning for Project Surya includes how the program would be rolled out, ways to measure changes in air quality, and the scientists, nonprofit groups and others likely to help with the program once it's funded.

He now needs money – \$4.5 million – and management experts who can turn his quest into a multinational plan. The money would be used to buy the cookers and scientific tools, gather data and analyze the results.

In recent months, Ramanathan has applied for grants from Qualcomm in San Diego, the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology in Saudi Arabia and the European Commission.

He doesn't have any funds to show for his efforts yet.

"This is my typical experience for all my proposals. They get rejected and then it makes me more determined," Ramanathan said. "There is no giving up."

As a child, he watched his grandmother cook over fires fueled by wood and dung in rural southern India.

"I still think about (my grandmother), and I feel for her," Ramanathan said. "After two hours of cooking, she would be coughing like mad."

#### Groundbreaking studies

When Ramanathan was in his early 20s, after training as an engineer, he worked as a night supervisor in a refrigerator manufacturing plant in southern India. He prevented chemicals known as chlorofluorocarbons, or CFCs, from escaping.

Ramanathan quit to attend graduate school and focused on building an interferometer, which measures minuscule temperature changes. After earning his master's degree, he was accepted into a doctoral program at what is now Stony Brook University in New York.

When his adviser abruptly changed his research emphasis from interferometers to atmospheric issues, Ramanathan switched, too, and it turned out to be a fortuitous move.

Within a few years, Ramanathan's research altered how scientists view a fundamental aspect of climate change. He showed that CFCs were far more powerful greenhouse gases than carbon dioxide.

"It was just an absolutely stunning paper . . . It was really the beginning of our understanding that a whole bunch of other trace gases could affect the climate," said Ralph Cicerone, president of the National Academy of Sciences.

In 1980, Ramanathan co-wrote one of the first peer-reviewed studies that said the effects of global warming would be evident by 2000. A science team convened by the United Nations in 2001 essentially confirmed that hypothesis.

At Scripps, Ramanathan oversees the Center for Clouds, Chemistry and Climate. His associate director, Hung Nguyen, said Ramanathan accomplishes so much because he seeks out all sorts of people to handle different aspects of his projects.

"That is an art – the unselfish part of him," Nguyen said.

This week, Ramanathan will continue his scientific journey with an experiment in the Mojave Desert using an unmanned research aircraft to measure atmospheric conditions such as the type and size of pollution particles and how much sunlight they block.

With the data, scientists will assess how much of Southern California's smog comes from other nations and what effects it has on regional air quality and climate. The research flights are expected to continue every few weeks through January.

#### Experiment inspires

The idea for Project Surya sprouted at the end of Ramanathan's most expensive experiment to date – a \$25 million study of air pollutants over the Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea.

For three months in 1999, Ramanathan and about 200 colleagues collected samples from massive plumes of dust and smoke. From the research plane, Ramanathan was amazed at the size of the brown, contaminant-loaded clouds.

"I said, 'I can't leave over 1.5 billion people to deal with this problem.' . . . I knew neither the government nor the scientists realized the magnitude of the issue," Ramanathan said.

The haze has been linked to glacial retreat in the Himalayas, shrinking of ice in the Arctic Ocean and smaller rice harvests in India because of decreased rainfall and increases in temperature. The clouds also cause acid rain, a major problem in China.

Ramanathan's desire to go beyond publishing studies in journals and make a tangible difference has grown with time, said Jeff Kiehl, a senior scientist at the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colo.

"It's a part of maturing, and it's also a part of realizing that you are entering a stage of life that if you are going to have an impact on other things besides the pure science, now is the time to do it," said Kiehl, who first worked with Ramanathan in the late 1970s.

By early 2007, Ramanathan and a researcher at a medical college in Chennai, India, had drafted plans for Project Surya.

They predict that conversion to clean-energy cookers would lower the amount of pollutants and reduce the size of brown clouds. Soot is washed out of the atmosphere by rain within a few weeks, so Ramanathan expects to see measurable benefits almost immediately.

Ramanathan isn't the first person to suggest mass deployment of clean-burning cookers, but his plan is different because he would scientifically monitor atmospheric changes with satellites and on-the-ground devices.

"This would be a great breakthrough," Dev Sikka, an Indian scientist who has studied brown clouds with Ramanathan, said in an e-mail.

Ramanathan has found it harder than he anticipated to obtain financial backing for Project Surya. He blames himself for not knowing how to tap into funds that are available for public health and social service ventures.

In recent weeks, he has attracted new sources of support. They include a local businessman who offered to introduce Ramanathan to philanthropists and a group of MBA students at the University of California San Diego helping to create a business plan for expanding Project Surya beyond the pilot phase.

"In a school environment, we get a lot of exposure to information about the problem . . . and it's a rare opportunity where you feel like you can do something about it," said Kathy Lin, one of the MBA students.

Ramanathan wants to start sampling air conditions in Mukteshwar by year's end, then distribute the first cookers after he has established a baseline of air pollution there.

He's juggling Project Surya with other commitments. This summer, for instance, he plans to launch unmanned aircraft from an island owned by South Korea to study air quality in Beijing during the Olympics.

"I have started saying that if he wants to work for a long time and keep up with the research then . . . he has to slow down," said his wife, Giri.

Ramanathan doesn't see that as an option.

"I am absolutely discouraged and saddened to say that the climate system is behaving similar to what we have predicted, but because of that, I am more focused on what needs to be done," he said.

[Fresno Bee column, Sunday, May 11, 2008:](#)

### **Driving a little less can go a long way to clean the air**

By Bill McEwen

If everybody emulated Ed King and his wife, Rhonda, we'd all breathe easier, fill up less and save money.

Their "big car" is a Mini Cooper, which gets about 37 miles per gallon on the highway.

It's a maxi compared to their 2008 Smart car, an Ultra-Low Emission Vehicle small enough to park sideways -- bumper to curb -- on crowded streets.

But King, a firefighter, uses something even smaller and more economical for the 18-mile commute to and from a northwest Fresno firehouse -- an electrically assisted bicycle. It takes him about 30 minutes each way.

"Ninety percent of my trips are on a bike," King says. "My car will sit for days at a time. Other than hearing about the rise in the cost of gasoline, I'm not even touched by it."

King, 54, admits that he is extraordinarily committed to the environment: "At some point, if you're going to talk the talk, then you have to ride the bike." And, unlike many folks, he can shower and change into work clothes after riding to work.

The point is, all of us can help clean our dirty and dangerous air. In fact, we have to, or things will get worse as our numbers grow.

Some folks can't be bothered, leaving it to the regulators to place the yoke on the other guys -- manufacturers, refiners, farmers and builders. Others mean well and think about doing something, but actually set the bar too high and give up. It needn't be hard. Count your weekly car trips then decide how many you can realistically cut. Pledge to reduce your trips by that number. You might want to write it down and stick it on the refrigerator.

Fulfilling the pledge -- even if it's one less trip a week -- whittles away at the 1 million miles driven daily in the San Joaquin Valley, an estimate provided by the California Air Resources Board.

Putting 1 million miles a day into perspective: it's the equivalent of two round trips from the earth to the moon.

How can you cut the miles?

Walk to the market and hardware store for small items. Ride or walk with the kids to school instead of driving them. Ride to the gym, thus cutting time on the cardio machines. Car pool to lunch. Take the bus.

Remember: you don't have to give up your car, just meet your goal.

"Using a bike for one trip out of 10 can really make a dent in a lot of problems," King says. "Everything from pollution to the price of gas to congestion on the streets."

You also can help the air without cutting vehicle trips. Replace a leaky water heater with a new efficient one. Use compact fluorescent light bulbs. On hot days, park in the shade when possible, reducing fuel evaporation and ozone-forming emissions.

But driving less will help your wallet, heart and lungs. King, who hadn't been on a bike in 20 years before taking up the cause, dropped 40 pounds, putting him just a few pounds over his old Bullard High School football playing weight.

"When Rhonda rides with me through the neighborhood, she always comments what a different experience it is," King says. "There's no cell phone, radio or air conditioning. You hear the birds singing and see the houses up close. You notice all the little things you miss in a car."

King is so dedicated that he rides to the golf course, carrying his clubs in a trailer attached to the bike.

Now, that's crazy. But you don't have to be. Make it easy on yourself. Promise to drive a little less and stick with it.

[Modesto Bee Commentary, Friday, May 9, 2008](#)

## **Ignoring global warming is gambling with the future**

By Steve Murov

The best models scientists have reveal very close correlations of carbon dioxide with temperature increases over the last several decades. The models project disastrous effects from increasing temperatures if carbon dioxide concentrations continue to increase. The 90 percent probability statements of the 2007 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report are weighty scientific statements that should not be ignored.

The question is whether we can afford to gamble with the future of Earth's life-support systems.

Everything we do to develop alternate energy sources to combat possible global warming, we should be doing anyway because of other very serious negative effects of fossil fuels (oil spills, air pollution, wars, etc.).

Some suggest we should wait to act until we know for sure if global warming caused by humans is occurring. The problem is that actions to level or reverse the effects of fossil fuel use require many decades to implement. In other words, definitive evidence might not be produced until it is too late to avert widespread and serious damage.

We need to learn from the ozone depletion problem that was predicted by scientists in the early 1970s. Fortunately, in that case, the United States and later the world listened to scientists and took action. Today, evidence indicates we have minimized the serious effects that would have resulted had we continued to use Freon.

Global warming models indicate we will have increasingly serious problems if we do not act to decrease our dependence on fossil fuels. Neglect is not an intelligent response to our climate situation.

*Murov is an emeritus professor of chemistry at Modesto Junior College.*

[Hanford Sentinel, Commentary, Saturday, May 10, 2008:](#)

### **Find your way out of the asthma and allergy nightmare**

By Gloria Malarchick, R.N, Kings County Asthma Coalition

I had a pretty good idea of how serious asthma and allergy symptoms were, but when my allergies got complicated this spring, I realized they were close to being fatal.

The inability to breathe through your nose and mouth at times due to congestion leaves you exhausted, the medication leaves you nauseated and dizzy and your head feels as if it is going to explode. It's no fun walking around feeling as if you had drums in your forehead; and on top of that, you're at higher risk for catching an extra virus because of your immune-compromised system, complicating your condition even further.

Two days of fever, chest and back pain, the inability to sleep more than two hours at night and two treatments of antibiotics later, I feel lucky but not happy with myself; I still have not been able to exercise.

How did I get better? I met with my health care provider, who ordered me to stay in bed two days and completely indoors four days, paying closer attention to the air quality and pollen count. As a result, I feel happier. The ability to breathe and function better is priceless.

Through my personal experiences with asthma and allergies and my work as a registered nurse and as a Kings County Asthma Coalition leader, I've found several measures that can help asthma sufferers control the disease and minimize symptoms. With May being Asthma Awareness Month, I hope this information will be helpful to those who suffer from this condition.

- Meet with your health care provider at least once a year to assess the severity of your asthma and allergy symptoms. The ability to follow the provider's treatment regimen and recommendations will be elemental for you to achieve and maintain asthma and allergy control.

- Education and environmental control are as important as the treatment. The ability to recognize indoor and outdoor triggers, learning as much as possible about the condition, will be your gateway to long-term control.
- Good nutrition and control of chronic diseases also will help tremendously in managing your asthma or allergies.
- Don't ignore asthma or allergy symptoms, but consult with your health care provider as soon as they appear.
- Use asthma medications as prescribed to prevent a flare-up that ultimately could land you in the emergency room.
- Check the air quality daily, even if you don't have asthma or allergies. Long periods of exposure outside when the air quality is moderate to unhealthy can be harmful. Air Quality Flags are posted at the Kings County Health Department on Lacey Boulevard in Hanford and at several schools throughout the county.
- Pay attention to the pollen count for the day in the local newspaper, or visit [www.bazallergy.com](http://www.bazallergy.com), especially as soon as the weather changes and the first sign of blooming plants appears.
- Watch for the origin of asthma triggers in your home.
- If you're in school, provide your teacher and school nurse with your provider's signed action plan so that your treatment regimen will be followed there as well.

Be safe. Breathing is a free gift, especially when it is clear.

To learn more about asthma and how to control it, please attend the Kings County Asthma Coalition's third annual Asthma Health Fair from noon to 4 p.m. Sunday, May 18, at the Hanford Mall.

The event, titled "Allies Against Asthma," will include free asthma screenings and information as well as prize drawings, children's activities and music. Kings County Asthma Coalition also offers information on its Web site, [www.kingsasthma.com](http://www.kingsasthma.com).

*Gloria Malarchick, R.N., works at the Kings County Health Department and is a member of the Kings County Asthma Coalition.*

[Bakersfield Californian, Commentary, Sunday, May 11, 2008:](#)

### **Devil is in the details for Tejon's land plan**

By Lois Henry, Californian columnist

I'd love to be happy about the recently announced conservation of 240,000 acres of land on Tejon Ranch. It's described as a jolly win-win by all those involved. Our esteemed governor praised it as an example of the good that can come when groups work together.

I agree it's better to see groups working together than suing each other. And it is a phenomenal amount of wilderness - 90 percent of the ranch.

But I can't help thinking the environmental groups that signed off on this deal may come to regret it.

The Sierra Club, Audobon California, Endangered Habitats League, Natural Resources Defense Council and Planning and Conservation League all agreed to drop their opposition to Tejon's massive 23,000-house Centennial project, its Tejon Mountain Village project set in critical California condor habitat and its I-5 Tejon Industrial Complex expansion projects in exchange for conservation easements on 178,000 acres and the option of buying easements on another 62,000 acres.

Some things about the agreement hit me as cockeyed.

First and foremost, none of the groups has seen the environmental impact reports on these projects. EIRs give exacting details on how projects will be developed, how developers plan to alleviate pollution and habitat destruction, where roads will go and where they're getting their water.

These environmental groups, which all preach reading the fine print, haven't read the EIRs because they aren't done yet. Perhaps by fall, Tejon spokesman Barry Zoeller told me.

Wow. Isn't that like buying the cow before you know if it gives milk?

Bill Corcoran, the Sierra Club's regional director who was key in negotiating the deal, said attorneys on his side of the table worked out issues they had with the developments, and they can go to court to enforce those issues. So they don't expect any nasty surprises.

Local Sierra Club rep Gordon Nipp said negotiations like this have become common locally. There are 29 such agreements in Kern County alone where the club dropped opposition in exchange for better environmental consideration.

"This is a comprehensive agreement that addresses numerous far-ranging issues," Nipp said of the Tejon deal. "This is a great thing for the entire state."

Maybe so. But without the EIRs in hand, that's going a little too much on faith for my comfort.

The other thing that hit me right away was that Tejon had already pledged to preserve 100,000 acres in a widely touted 2003 deal with Trust for Public Land.

That leaves 140,000 acres. And of that, about 78,000 acres wasn't developable. Tejon CEO Bob Stine himself told this paper years ago that more than half of the ranch could never be developed because of the steep canyons and hillsides.

Which brings us down to the 62,000 "optional" acres. This land is broken up into five chunks scattered around the ranch. It is developable.

But the environmental groups have to buy easements on that land. And they have three years to do it.

Much was also made of a 49,000-acre state park. But it would partially be in one of those five chunks of "optional" land. If they can't get the easement, what happens to the park?

Don't know. A summary of the agreement on the Web site [www.tejonpreserve.com](http://www.tejonpreserve.com) just says all parties must "commit to work" toward establishing a park, not that it's a sure thing.

No one knows how much those easements will cost. I'm betting they won't be cheap. I also wonder how the state can create a new park - even years from now - when we're talking about closing parks due to our never-ending budget woes.

So, essentially, it looks to me like these enviro groups gave up their ability to oppose Tejon's developments for the mere chance to buy easements on 62,000 acres.

The money to buy those easements isn't in hand, but several environmental reps said Thursday they wouldn't have made the deal if they weren't confident they could do it.

Hmmm. Getting even further out there on the faith bridge.

When I asked Corcoran where the money would come from, he quickly answered, "state bonds." I have a slight problem with that, but I'll let Corcoran make my point by citing what he told us in 2003 when he criticized the deal between Tejon and Trust for Public Land:

"There are a lot of questions that need to be answered before state bond money should be given to Tejon Ranch or the Trust for Public Land," he said then. "A portion of the ranch is undevelopable because of its topography. It would not be a wise expenditure of scarce bond funds if we're merely setting aside what cannot be developed anyway."

He also bemoaned the idea that Tejon would turn around and use that taxpayer money to fund its development plans and enrich its shareholders.

And that's changed, how?

Here's what hasn't: The Centennial project is still sprawl at its worst.

Tejon touts it as self-sustaining, with a jobs-housing ratio that will keep people from having to commute to Los Angeles. History has shown us these "new town" concepts take decades to actually attract the jobs necessary to keep people out of their cars.

In those decades, our [air pollution](#) will worsen, traffic will be even more of a nightmare and the already crumbling I-5 will further deteriorate.

Even though the Tejon Mountain Village is much smaller (only about 3,000 houses), traffic and [air](#) are still critical issues.

As is habitat for the California condor, which taxpayers have spent tens of millions of dollars to bring back from the brink of extinction, according to Ileen Anderson, a biologist with the Center for Biological Diversity, which was approached by Tejon to be a part of this alliance but declined because its mission is to protect species, and this deal doesn't do that.

Anderson was quick to say the deal was a "large leap forward" from the old 100,000-acre proposal. But "they're still building in a significant amount of critical habitat for these birds," she said.

Air and traffic come up again on the Industrial Complex at the base of the Grapevine, with an eventual buildout of 20 million square feet of warehouse and retail space. Right now it's about 5 million square feet.

Zoeller and others point out this agreement in no way keeps others from opposing the projects, commenting on the EIRs or even suing.

Yes. But not the big hitters with the money, the resources, the experience and the expertise to actually make a difference.

While I hope all the parties are right and their faith hasn't been misplaced, I'm just jaded enough to wonder if, as some in the environmental community have grumbled, this isn't a "deal with the devil."

Meanwhile, as each piece of Tejon's development chess match moves forward, the Sierra Club and others will stay mum and gather another easement on another portion of the ranch. It'll take 30 years to complete. That's a long time to keep quiet.

[S.F. Chronicle commentary, Sat., May 10, 2008:](#)

### **Lean, mean - and green**

By Lynette Evans, Home and Garden editor

The recession is running into the green movement - and that is not a bad thing. Habits we weren't able to break simply on the grounds that our continuous consumption is bad for the planet may now fall victim to the interests of the pocketbook.

As gasoline prices rise, Californians are driving less. Unfortunately, as food prices rise, we may be eating not less food, but less healthy food. And, because we pay for the farm subsidies that make high-fructose corn syrup cheap, those of us without vegetable gardens will find it's cheaper to buy processed foods than fresh foods - as homemaker Donna Dunaway, quoted in an April 27 New York Times story on the "recession diet," said, food costs had forced her to give up making homemade lasagna in favor of serving her husband frozen TV meals she can purchase for 99 cents. What a mess we're in when processed food products are less expensive than meals made from scratch. I would guess the same can be said of clothing and household goods. When you can purchase a skirt or throw pillows made in China or Bangladesh for a few dollars, it's hardly frugal to sew your own.

But I digress. Buying imported products, which I was doing at a Cost Plus sale a couple weekends ago, is hardly green. Oh, sure, I was buying glass wine goblets and spice jars, which are phthalate-free and will last awhile, and holding up the line at the checkout counter while I tried to stuff my purchases into five mesh bags I was carrying. But the greenness of driving to the mall and purchasing goods was surely iffy, at best.

That said, I'm not trying to vilify buying things one needs (and heaven knows, for the next few months at least, a lot of us will be eschewing frills and buying only things we do need), but along with gasoline and food, the price of other goods has been rising with the falling American dollar.

And that might just make us greener. First, when money is tight, we think about our spending. And one of the areas we need to think about is whether buying new green products is greener than sticking with what we have. That includes solar panels, hybrid cars and carpeting. When money is tight, we choose vacations closer to home (jet fuel is a huge part of a traveler's carbon footprint).

As we've noted before, the greenest families are those living in single rooms in Chinatown or South of Market, people without cars or swimming pools or air conditioning or even refrigerators. That's not what most of us think living in America should be. And that sort of green by default is

not what even the most conservation-minded among us has in mind when we tsk-tsk against waste and pollution. Still, there is a lesson in the downturn, even for those of us who didn't spend or borrow above our means, who aren't personally responsible for the mortgage meltdown or the oil price increase.

As Robert Reich notes in "Super Capitalism," we are all responsible for the state of the economy because in our capacities as consumers and investors (yes, you, even if your only investment is in your teacher's retirement account and your shopping is at bargain stores), we are complicit in the economic games. We've done pretty well in the past three decades as consumers and investors, Reich says. As citizens, not so much so. The community good, which accompanied the regulated postwar economy, Reich notes, has languished as we've gained consumer products and bought into the stock market.

Now that we're facing the music as consumers and investors, however, maybe the citizen in us can emerge. After all, when we're broke, we can't pollute. Helluva mess.

[S.F. Chronicle commentary, Monday, May 12, 2008:](#)

### **How to cut your gasoline expenditures by 20 percent**

By Murray Suid

It's time to stop complaining about the price of gasoline. Because the government seems unable or unwilling to take action, let's do it ourselves.

For example, I live in rural West Marin, which is about 30 miles away from many stores and service providers. To cut the cost of everything from dropping off dry cleaning to picking up computer supplies, we've inaugurated an online chore-sharing network. Anyone in the group can post a request that is instantly e-mailed to the other members. A typical connection - say picking up a purchase or delivering a neighbor to the dentist - will save a couple of gallons of fuel - even for hybrid drivers - while also cutting the amount of traffic on our roads, reducing greenhouse gases and saving the most valuable of all resources: time.

The same system can be used in urban areas. But that's just a start. We can save a lot more money by reducing the commute week from five days to four. Because 90 percent of Bay Area workers drive their cars, this plan would save an enormous amount of gasoline.

In some cases, this new work arrangement would take the form of four 10-hour days. But if more hours are required to get the job done, workers could work at home on the fifth day. Having frequently worked out of a home office, I've learned that I'm at least as productive there as when working at an employer's place of business.

Of course, if a job requires specialized machinery, at-home work may not be possible. But this scheme doesn't require that everyone spend a day less at the office or factory. If only 25 percent of workers switch to a four-day commute schedule, the impact on gasoline usage, traffic congestion and air pollution would be significant.

Rearranging workflow is not easy. But when we consider the enormous saving, the challenge is worth it. We can no longer afford to passively watch oil companies siphon off our wealth. If you agree, pass this on to the management of your company. We need action now.

*Murray Suid is a freelance writer of books, articles and screenplays. His latest book is "Words of a Feather," (McGraw-Hill, 2007).*

[S.F. Chronicle editorial, Monday, May 12, 2008:](#)

### **A blight on 'the green city'**

The Mirant power plant near San Francisco's Potrero Hill neighborhood is a disgrace to a city that brands itself as a "green" city for the future. The old turbines that operate at the plant - three run on diesel, one on natural gas - have been spewing an unacceptable amount of filthy pollution for decades. Nearly everyone in the city agrees that the plant has been a major contributor to the

disproportionate health woes of residents in San Francisco's eastern neighborhoods. The sooner it is shut down, the better.

But it makes no sense to shut down the old plants only to replace them with three new ones that will burn fossil fuels that contribute to global warming and create continued health hazards for the same neighborhood's long-suffering residents - for 30 long years. Regrettably, that's the only option before the Board of Supervisors on Tuesday. Supervisors must reject it.

The plan before the board would close the four plants at Mirant and install three smaller "peaker" plants a few blocks away. The plan would cost an estimated \$250 million. According to the plan's supporters, the three new plants would run at least 38 percent cleaner than the current ones and would be ready to go by 2010.

A 38 percent reduction is not acceptable. San Francisco must insist on a cleaner alternative - and pour as much political will and technical guile as needed to make it happen.

And the main benefit to approving this plan? "We know that the energy will be reliable, and we know that the plan is ready to go," Board President Aaron Peskin said.

Well, yes. But if San Francisco expects to live up to its reputation as a green city, it needs to start walking the walk. There's already so much needed work to bring the city up to speed - "In the 10-county Bay Area, San Francisco ranks last in terms of our solar power," said David Hochschild, a San Francisco Public Utilities commissioner. "And we have seriously underinvested in energy efficiency" - that it makes no sense to add to our carbon footprint by adding new plants.

We understand the frustration that has led Supervisor Sophie Maxwell and City Attorney Dennis Herrera, each of whom lives within sight of the plumes, to decide that the trade-off of the peakers' pollution is worth getting rid of the Mirant plant once and for all. "I don't want the perfect to be the enemy of the good," Herrera said.

Still, alternatives to building these new plants do exist, if the supervisors and the mayor are seriously interested in pursuing them. And the final argument that many of the current plan's supporters have presented - that new plants are the only solution acceptable to state regulators - is dubious.

The California Independent System Operator "hasn't been presented with another plan outside of this one," said Supervisor Michela Alioto-Pier. "San Francisco has never said to them, there are new models for grids and peakers, and we have another way to make this work."

Finding another way to make this work, of course, is going to take leadership - and here's where it's time for Mayor Gavin Newsom to start living up to his second-term promise to be "audacious," especially if he wants to earn his claim as a green mayor.

Newsom has been sitting on the fence on this critical issue.

A new transbay cable should help meet the city's energy demands in 2010. What else can be done to bring the city into compliance with regulators without building new, expensive, polluting plants? How much can we improve our energy efficiency? What about new strategies like reconductoring?

With leadership, tenacity and imagination, San Francisco can pursue alternatives that don't involve a \$250 million, 30-year investment in a 20th century technology and the compromised health of a new generation of San Francisco residents. The residents of southeast San Francisco have held their breath long enough.

[Contra Costa Times Editorial, Sunday, May 11, 2008:](#)

### **Stop the secret oil deal**

THE RICHMOND CITY Council decision to enter a secrecy deal with the Chevron refinery should offend anyone in the Bay Area who values open government.

The refinery, which is seeking permission to replace its hydrogen plant, power plant and reformer, says the proposed upgrades would make the facility safer and allow it to produce more California-grade gasoline. Opponents say the changes would lead to processing of heavier crude oil, thereby increasing air pollution and health problems.

The application is pending before the planning commission, which is seeking more technical advice before rendering a decision.

To help the review, the City Council last week agreed to hire an outside expert, Ranajit Sahu, to review the company's application, determine whether approval would lead to processing of heavier crude and determine the health effects.

We're glad to see that the City Council and the planning commission are taking the review of the application seriously. However, we're deeply troubled that the city agreed to allow Sahu to enter into a confidentiality agreement with Chevron to see documents he needs to complete his investigation.

The documents Sahu seeks pertain to the chemical compositions of the materials in the process. They go to the heart of the dispute. If Chevron wants approval of its expansion, it's application should be subjected to full public scrutiny.

Opponents should be allowed to review the technical material and, if necessary, hire their own experts to review it.

They should not have to rely solely on Sahu's evaluation, however good it might be.

There already is great distrust of the refinery in certain parts of the community. Such secrecy will only cast a shadow of doubt over any city decision.

Mayor Gayle McLaughlin and Councilmen Tom Butt and Tony Thurmond are to be commended for opposing the secrecy.

As Butt said, "I don't think it's right for this city to be making decisions based on information that the public doesn't have."

The other six members of the council, who were led by Councilwoman Maria Viramontes, should be ashamed.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Friday, May 9, 2008:](#)

### **Valley, nation must have better energy sources**

Nuclear power generates most of the electricity in Europe. Why? Because it is cheap, doesn't put carbon dioxide into the atmosphere and it is safe. They store the hot stuff in underground salt deposits that have been there, undisturbed, for millions of years. We cannot go on generating more than 50% of our electricity by burning coal. We should not use natural gas either.

California has a law: no nuclear power plants to generate electricity. We need to change that law and lead our nation into the 21st century.

We need a clean, cheap source of energy to make ethanol. We should help Hanford get its ethanol plant. Hanford and the United States should go to Brazil and see how they do it. Maybe we could use sugar beets or sugar cane, as Brazil does. It's about six times more efficient than corn.

*Darrell V. Imperatrice, Fresno*

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the initial meeting between Gov. Schwarzenegger and representatives from automotive industries, and has committed them in helping remove gross polluting vehicles through means of incentives. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

**Discuten California y la industria automotriz métodos contra la contaminación**

Manuel Ocaño, Noticiero Latino  
Radio Bilingüe, Friday, May 9, 2008

El gobernador de California, Arnold Schwarzenegger y representantes de las principales automotrices en el país iniciaron diálogos para encontrar medidas que reduzcan la contaminación del aire y complazcan a ambas partes.

En la primera reunión en Sacramento, ejecutivos empresariales propusieron ayudar a California a retirar de circulación vehículos viejos muy contaminantes, con incentivos a compradores, y usar más modelos de ubicación satelital para que los conductores eviten embotellamientos.

Al encuentro asistieron ejecutivos de General Motors, Toyota, Chrysler, BMW, Ford y Volks Wagen.

Schwarzenegger opinó que los industriales comienzan a tener conciencia sobre la contaminación.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses that a study finds that there are fewer health care services in high polluted areas in Central California.](#)

### **Destaca menos servicios de salud en una de las zonas más contaminadas**

Manuel Ocaño, Noticiero Latino  
Radio Bilingüe, Monday, May 12, 2008

Un informe sobre las condiciones de vida en la región central de California destacó que además de ser una de las zonas con mayor contaminación y efectos en la salud, los residentes cuentan con menos recursos económicos y médicos, comparativamente con el resto del estado.

El "Informe sobre el Valle Central, Salud Pública y Acceso a Servicios", dice que mientras que en California hay en promedio 120 médicos por cada cien mil residentes, en el valle hay sólo 87.

Por un lado la región tiene uno de los índices más altos de asma infantil, causada por la contaminación, pero por otro, menos asistencia para frenar ese y otros males.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the lift of the restriction on vehicles in Mexico City, since pollution levels fell below 160 on the Metropolitan Air Quality Index. The restriction had been placed on Saturday at 4 p.m.](#)

### **Levantán restricción vehicular en la capital**

#### **Repartieron 25 mil volantes con recomendaciones a la población**

Edith Martínez  
El Universal, Monday, May 12, 2008

La Comisión Ambiental Metropolitana (CAM) levantó la precontingencia ambiental que afectó ayer a la ciudad de Mexico, con ello los vehículos con placas extranjeras o de otras entidades podrán circular sin restricciones en el Distrito Federal y la zona metropolitana.

De acuerdo a la CAM, al encontrarse la contaminación por debajo de los 160 puntos del Índice Metropolitano de la Calidad del Aire (Imeca) existen las condiciones para retirar la precontingencia que comenzó desde el sábado a las 16:00 horas.

Así que los únicos automóviles que dejarán de circular son los de engomado amarillo con terminación 5 y 6 que no cuentan con el holograma cero y doble cero. Durante este fin de semana el aire en el Distrito Federal y la zona metropolitana alcanzó altos niveles de contaminación.

Sin embargo, y pese a que las recomendaciones en estas circunstancias son evitar las actividades al aire libre y suspender obras de mantenimiento urbano que entorpezcan la fluidez vehicular, ayer se realizó de forma normal el paseo ciclista en Paseo de la Reforma y se continuaron los trabajos de repavimentación en el Circuito Interior.

Martha Delgado Peralta, secretaria de Medio Ambiente local, reconoció en una entrevista de radio que las condiciones ambientales no eran favorables para las actividades al aire libre, sin

embargo dijo, “es decisión de cada persona atender o no esas recomendaciones y, por lo demás, el gobierno no puede obligar a alguien a actuar de un modo u otro ante ellas”.

Dentro de las atribuciones de esta dependencia no está prohibir sino informar, por lo que luego de varias versiones personal de la SMA aseguró que se repartieron 25 mil volantes en los paseos ciclistas de Reforma y Xochimilco con recomendaciones a la población por la precontingencia.

Mientras que el sábado se alcanzaron niveles de 172 puntos Imeca, ayer la ciudad registró hasta 133 puntos y la calidad del aire fue de mala a regular.

Derivado de la precontingencia ambiental se restringió el acceso a la ciudad de México a vehículos con placas de otros estados y del extranjero, excepto de Hidalgo, Puebla y Querétaro con holograma cero o doble cero.

Caminos y Puentes Federales (Capufe) colocó mantas de aviso en las 7 casetas de entrada al Distrito Federal.

Alberto Contreras, radio operador de Capufe, señaló que a pesar de que no llevan un conteo de los automóviles que no lograron ingresar a la ciudad, dijo que “fueron muchos” los automovilistas afectados.

Esa dependencia, dijo, no tiene comunicación directa con la CAM por lo que deben investigar por su cuenta la situación de la calidad del aire para avisar a los conductores “porque si los dejamos pasar los sancionan”.