

CORRECTION: Fireplace wood-burning permitted today

Staff Reports

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Monday, Dec. 8, 2008

If the winter chill makes you want to use your fireplace today, go right ahead.

A notice provided by AccuWeather and printed in the weather section of today's Times-Delta featured an incorrect status for wood-burning fireplaces in Tulare County. Burning is permitted today.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District determines burn and no-burn days in Tulare County. Its Web site: www.valleyair.org/aqinfo/WoodBurnPage.htm.

Diesel truckers at cancer risk from exhaust

Jane Kay, environment writer

S.F. Chronicle, Tuesday, December 9, 2008

Trucking company workers who have been regularly exposed to diesel exhaust from vehicles on highways, city streets and loading docks have a higher risk of lung cancer than other workers, according to a new national study.

The study, based on 31,135 worker records, found that drivers who do short-haul pickups and deliveries, including loading and unloading containers at ports and working at freight-delivery companies, had the highest rate of deaths and disease.

Dockworkers were also at a higher risk, according to the report by researchers at UC Berkeley and Harvard.

California's Air Resources Board will consider the study's findings when it meets Friday to vote on a landmark regulation to reduce risk to the general public from 1 million diesel trucks in the state.

If the rule is adopted, California would be the first state in the nation to require a retrofit or replacement of every privately owned older, heavy-duty diesel truck on the road - even vehicles registered in other states and nations. The phaseout would begin in 2010.

"This study confirms that truck drivers exposed to diesel have higher lung cancer rates," said Dr. John Balmes, a member of the state air board and a professor at UCSF and UC Berkeley's School of Public Health.

Long-haul drivers were at lower risk. The study's authors believe these drivers are protected because they shut their windows. In contrast, short-haul drivers who often leave their windows open are exposed to the exhaust. The study noted that fresh, newly released particles have a greater potential to cause mutations of DNA.

In the last decade, scientists have linked diesel exhaust to higher rates of lung cancer in workers in construction, trucking and railroads who inhale the toxic stew of about 400 chemicals, including benzene, formaldehyde, arsenic, cyanide and lead.

8 jobs compared

This new study compared eight jobs within the trucking industry, including clerks, and found a higher rate of lung cancer among these certain categories. A 2007 study by the same authors compared all jobs within the trucking industry to the general population, and also found higher lung cancer rates in the industry, Balmes said.

The research from Harvard University Medical School and UC Berkeley School of Public Health was published in the journal Environmental Health Perspectives in October.

The study analyzes workers' exposure histories up to the year 2000 and health outcomes between 1985 and 2000. There were 4,306 deaths and 779 cases of lung cancer, including 734 deaths where lung cancer was the underlying cause.

Workers in the study averaged 22 years on the job and were predominantly Caucasian and lived in the South or Midwest.

Most of them worked at four large companies, which weren't named in the study. They were hired after long-haul trucks changed from gas to diesel during the 1950s and '60s but before or during the transition of pickup and delivery trucks from gasoline to diesel during the 1970s and '80s. Diesel forklifts were also used by dockworkers on some loading docks during the 1980s.

The state, which listed diesel exhaust as a known carcinogen in 1990, considers more than 40 chemicals in the exhaust to be toxic air contaminants, a designation that warrants the toughest regulation.

The fine particles in the exhaust enter lung tissue, where they can accumulate in the lungs and lymph nodes. High concentrations can cause respiratory diseases, and people with asthma, heart disease and emphysema can worsen if exposed to the exhaust. Long-term exposure leads to chronic obstructive lung disease as well as lung cancer.

California gradually has tightened restrictions on fleets of diesel buses, off-road equipment, boats and some trucks. There is no worker standard for diesel exhaust.

"This is the biggest regulation in cleaning up the state's diesel emissions," said air board spokesman Leo Kay.

Deadline for standard

The state is trying to meet a 2006 federal standard for fine particles in metropolitan Los Angeles and San Joaquin Valley. Otherwise, it could lose billions of dollars in highway funding, he said.

In June, the state released a study that found that the fine particles in West Oakland neighborhoods were coming primarily from diesel trucks on nearby freeways.

Diesel engines spew out particles that are 100 times more sooty than gasoline engines for the same load and engine conditions, and about one-quarter of all hazardous particulate air pollution from fuel combustion comes from diesel engines, according to the UCLA Labor Occupational Safety and Health Program.

Bob Ramorino, president of family-owned Roadstar Trucking Inc. in Hayward, said the trucking industry supports the need to clean up emissions in California. But it has asked the air board for exemptions as a way to deal with the cost.

Retrofitting is expensive

Ramorino, who is also president of the California Trucking Association, said he owns 30 large diesel cabs and 60 trailers and employs 60 workers. Retrofitting costs about \$20,000 per truck, and a new vehicle runs about \$100,000.

He also questioned the study, saying it includes exposures from the 1960s through the 1980s. "Trucks manufactured after 1994 are much cleaner than the earlier trucks," Ramorino said.

San Francisco resident Tom Howard, whose family has lived on North Point Street for 100 years, said he hopes the state passes a stricter diesel truck rule.

"We get diesel trucks from Fisherman's Wharf picking up and delivering fish and crab, and truck traffic on Jefferson Street delivering to the In-N-Out Burger, plus diesel trucks going to two Safeway stores," Howard said. "We've got tons of diesel trucks here."

Toxic fumes

To read the study, "Lung Cancer and Vehicle Exhaust in Trucking Industry Workers," go to links.sfgate.com/ZFPU.

Davis fired up over proposed limits on wood-burning in homes

By Hudson Sangree

Modesto Bee, Tuesday, December 9, 2008

As nights turn cold and days stay gray, the city of Davis is weighing a ban on a symbol of domestic warmth: the wood-burning fireplace.

Not just fireplaces, but wood stoves that don't meet strict environmental standards.

Even the cleanest-burning stoves could be used only about half the days of winter, and then for just six hours a day, under the proposed ordinance. If enacted, it would be one of the toughest wood-burning measures in the state.

"It will restrict burning more than any other ordinance that we're aware of," said Alan Pryor, an environmental consultant who has spearheaded the effort.

The proposed fireplace ban has caused a ruckus in Davis, which currently has few restrictions.

City Councilman Stephen Souza said the debate is nearly as heated as the recent fights over the Covell Village subdivision, which failed at the ballot box in 2005, or a Target store, which voters approved and which is now being built.

Residents concerned about environmental health, including folks with asthma and other breathing problems, are firing off letters and phoning city officials.

So are those who burn wood for warmth or pleasure. Some have expressed their love of the "primal" quality of an open fire.

Council members are approaching the issue with caution.

Souza said he wants to increase government rebates to help people replace their open fireplaces or old-style wood stoves with cleaner-burning stoves.

Councilman Don Saylor says he considers the whole issue up for discussion. The council likely won't vote until at least the second week of January, he said.

Pryor said he first proposed a total ban on wood burning after caring for his mother, who died of lung cancer last year.

He said a neighbor in Merced stoked his wood stove night and day, and the smoke seeped into his mother's house, even with the windows and doors sealed.

He realized that wood burning could be a localized health hazard, with smoke drifting to neighbors' houses, even on days when regional air quality allowed it.

"The research we did found very high neighborhood concentrations (of particulate matter) that are relatively independent of regional concentrations," he said.

The current proposal – passed by the city's Natural Resources Commission just before Thanksgiving – is a scaled-back version of the total ban that Pryor sought.

Unlike other rules around the region, it takes wind speed into account, in addition to the amount of particulate matter in the air.

When winds are under 5 mph, Pryor said, smoke settles in a neighborhood.

So burning with clean-burning stoves or pellet stoves would be allowed only on breezy days with low levels of air pollution.

Those conditions exist on about half the days from November through February, Pryor said.

Roger Schiffman, who heats his entire home with a clean-burning wood stove, said he doesn't want to create a health problem but remains unconvinced by proponents' data.

Schiffman, who works for an energy consulting firm, said he spends \$700 to \$800 a year on wood – much less than his prior gas bills.

He also said he gets "a higher quality heat from the wood," and his house stays warmer.

Schiffman is worried about losing the \$10,000 he spent to install the wood stove and the upgrades, including circulating fans and ducts, that allow it to heat the whole house.

"It would cost us more," he said, "and result in a colder house for us than what we currently enjoy."

PROPOSED DAVIS FIREPLACE, STOVE RESTRICTIONS

Davis City Council will vote in January whether to impose restrictions on fireplaces and wood stoves. The Davis proposal would:

Ban: Wood burning in open fireplaces and wood stoves not certified Phase II by the EPA;

Permit: Wood burning in pellet stoves or EPA-certified wood stoves on "allowable burn days" for a maximum of six hours a day. The proposal defines allowable days as those with wind speeds of 5 mph or more and light air pollution, as determined by regional air quality officials.

Exempt: Stoves or fireplaces used as a home's sole heat source, or during power failures.

Burbank airport's solar-powered hangar to be unveiled

Hangar 25 may be the greenest facility in aviation, an industry known for a huge carbon footprint.

By Marla Dickerson

L.A. Times, Tuesday, December 9, 2008

Call it the ultimate plug-in recharger.

A team of Southern California developers today is taking the wraps off what may be the world's greenest aviation facility, one capable of powering a Boeing 757 with solar energy while the aircraft is on the ground for maintenance.

The new 60,000-square-foot structure at Bob Hope Airport in Burbank is believed to be the industry's only solar-powered airport hangar. Its rooftop photovoltaic panels provide enough juice to operate the building's lights and to recharge electric-powered ground equipment such as forklifts and tow vehicles. The array can also keep an airplane's electrical system humming inside the hangar while mechanics perform their chores.

Green construction and solar-powered buildings are nothing new in California. Still, the Burbank facility, known as Hangar 25, appears to be a clean step forward for the aviation industry, which has a massive carbon footprint.

"I haven't heard of anything like it before," said Steve Howards, executive director of the Clean Airport Partnership, a nonprofit based in Lakewood, Colo., that promotes energy efficiency and

sustainability at U.S. airports. "A facility that generates enough renewable power to support [aircraft] maintenance equipment? That's a precedent setter."

The \$17-million hangar is a joint venture involving Shangri-La Construction of Century City, aviation services company Avjet Corp. of Burbank and the Burbank-Glendale-Pasadena Airport Authority, which owns and operates Bob Hope Airport.

The project is the first for Shangri-La Construction, a new player on the green construction scene. But its founder, Steve Bing, is well known in Los Angeles circles as a film producer, philanthropist and heir to a real estate fortune.

Hangar 25 is among only a handful of Southern California buildings to obtain so-called LEED Platinum status. That's the highest environmentally friendly rating given by the U.S. Green Building Council. In addition to solar power, the structure's features include drought-tolerant landscaping, water-stingy plumbing, nontoxic building materials and lots of glass to illuminate rooms with natural sunlight.

Buildings are one of the largest contributors to global warming because of the massive amounts of energy needed to heat, light and cool them. Environmentalists are urging better construction practices to improve efficiency.

Green structures typically cost more to build than conventional ones, but the payback comes through energy savings. That's good for the planet and owners' pocketbooks, said Andy Meyers, president of Shangri-La Construction, who said Hangar 25 didn't cost significantly more than a traditional facility.

"The bottom line of green is black," said Meyers, a former football standout at UCLA. "It's cheaper to operate."

Well-designed buildings tend to be friendly to workers as well as the environment. Bruce Vogt is chief of maintenance for the Boeing business jets that Avjet will service at the new Burbank facility. He said he liked the building's natural lighting and the quiet provided by the electric-powered equipment.

"Hangars are usually dark and dank," he said. "This is a lot better than the old way."

Whether Hangar 25 spawns many imitators remains to be seen. Most of the emissions at U.S. airports come from airplanes and vehicles, not buildings. Making enormous passenger terminals sustainable is a lot tougher than greening a modest-size maintenance hangar.

Still, Howards said, airport authorities nationwide are looking to cut operating costs and reduce their emissions where they can.

"These smaller-scale projects are the springboard for a large-scale evolution," he said.

Industrial safety law celebrates 10 years

By Matthias Gafni

Contra Costa Times, Tuesday, Dec. 9, 2008

Contra Costa Administrator Phil Batchelor's assistant stepped into the closed-session Board of Supervisors meeting, whispered something to his boss and slipped him a note.

Clearing his throat, Batchelor announced: "There's been a very large explosion at Tosco."

"I remember it like it was yesterday," state Sen. Mark DeSaulnier, D-Concord, said. It was Feb. 23, 1999, when an accidental explosion killed four workers and severely burned a fifth at a

troubled Martinez refinery. Many say it was the low point for Contra Costa's refinery belt. The timing could not have been worse.

A month earlier, then-supervisor DeSaulnier helped pass an industrial-safety ordinance that placed stringent controls on a handful of Contra Costa's refineries and chemical plants after a decade of serious industrial accidents.

Despite the inauspicious start, the strict ordinance — celebrating its 10th anniversary in January — became a model for the nation. Contra Costa and Richmond, which adopted the county ordinance in 2002, have yet to record a single refinery or chemical plant accident this year — an unprecedented achievement. Since the county ordinance's inception in 1999, there have been no worst-case incidents at the eight facilities it covers.

Compare that with 1993-99, when those plants had endured eight Level 3 incidents — the worst — killing six workers, injuring almost 50 others and sending more than 23,000 residents to hospitals for treatment.

"There's been a change in how facilities are handling their business," said Randy Sawyer, Contra Costa Hazardous Materials Programs director. "Prevention programs have improved dramatically."

Such a strict ordinance was necessary for a county that hosts more hazardous materials per capita and per geographical size than any other county in the state, he said.

Industry experts from around the country have taken note.

"By reputation, Contra Costa is known to be among the most proactive programs in the country," said Scott Berger, director of Center for Chemical Process Safety, a nonprofit organization that addresses safety needs in the chemical, pharmaceutical and petroleum industries. "Usually, people look to Contra Costa as an indicator of where process safety is heading, in a regulatory sense, in the future."

New Jersey recently enacted its own statewide toxic release program, including safer technology language that mirrors Contra Costa's.

On Tuesday, Sawyer's agency will report the good news to the Board of Supervisors.

"I think the ordinance has been successful," said John Gioia, of Richmond, who was a freshman supervisor when the ordinance was adopted.

"If you want to run a refinery in a heavily populated area, you need to be as safe as possible."

It was not an easy path. Before the Industrial Safety Ordinance, the county had the short-lived Good Neighbor Ordinance, triggered by the 1993 General Chemical release that sent a sulfuric acid cloud through Richmond. More than 22,000 people had to visit the hospital. Approved in 1996, refineries and chemical plants quickly challenged the union-sponsored legislation in court amid concerns that it would force them to build new plants.

As the Good Neighbor Ordinance stalled, Supervisor DeSaulnier, along with then-supervisor Joe Canciamilla, brought together industry executives, union leaders, environmental groups and residents to work on new regulations.

These were not always pleasant meetings.

"You were dealing with very powerful Fortune 500 companies with lots of money, very vocal environmental agencies and labor. "... There were a lot of meetings where it looked like it would die," DeSaulnier said. "It was a long, long process, but it's one of the things I'm proudest of being involved in."

Environmental leader Denny Larson helped organize communities surrounding Contra Costa's refineries and spoke out against the ordinance at the time.

"Residents were scared, concerned and shocked at the lack of responsibility officials from the company and county," said Larson, who now runs the Refinery Reform Campaign. "It was very

important to make sure companies in Contra Costa understood that no matter what happened on site, it was your responsibility that it not cross the fence line."

After months of negotiations, industry and labor both lent support to the ordinance, although environmental groups felt it did not reach far enough. Shortly after a court struck down the Good Neighbor Ordinance, supervisors narrowly passed the Industrial Safety Ordinance and it was adopted Jan. 15, 1999.

A month later, Tosco workers attempted a risky operation to replace piping around a crude-processing unit while it was still operating.

When the workers were ordered to cut out the part, hot petroleum spewed out, ignited and killed four workers. A fifth was severely burned. "Despite serious hazards caused by the inability to drain and isolate the line — known to supervisors and workers during the week before the incident — the low-risk classification was not re-evaluated, nor did management formulate a plan to control the known hazards," a federal agency concluded.

"Those four people wouldn't have died if they followed good work procedure," Sawyer said. In its infancy, most of the ordinance's regulations had not yet been implemented at refineries.

After the accident, the county partially shut down the plant and had consultants review the Tosco's safety culture. Two mergers later, Tesoro now operates the Martinez refinery.

"There is no doubt that in the early '90s and even late '90s the safety culture we had was nothing like how we operate today," said Alan Savage, Tesoro's environment, health and safety manager, who worked under Tosco.

"It wasn't that Tosco managers wanted to be unsafe, but what was first talked about at every daily meeting was "... production," Savage said. "Now, the first thing discussed in every meeting is safety."

The county ordinance kick-started a new era of refinery safety, he said.

"The industry was headed there, but the Industrial Safety Ordinance brought more structure and discipline toward it and therefore accelerated "... it," Savage said.

Although only Tesoro's Martinez facility must heed the ordinance, Savage said the company's six other refineries outside Contra Costa also observe new safety procedures.

"(The Martinez facility) plays very much a leadership role in what is acceptable in safety," he said.

In the past decade, Tesoro has changed procedures for minor routine operations and big ones.

On the routine end, workers must carry a bright orange flag when crossing a refinery street.

A major work project, such as removing large bolts with fist-size nuts, is now done remotely from 1,000 feet away rather than manually in confined spaces with an air wrench.

The industry also recognizes that safety helps the bottom line.

"There's a very real correlation between reliability and profitability and safety. Those three things really go together," Savage said.

Chevron, which has had five major accidents at its Richmond refinery since 1999, is headed for its safest year ever, said spokesman Brent Tippen. The ordinance did not change any refinery operations, he said.

"With the addition of ISO, some of our work processes were adjusted and a couple of new ones were created, so the ISO may have had less impact upon us than some of our competitors," Tippen wrote in an e-mail. The Richmond refinery has used the city's safety ordinance and another guide to develop work processes, he said.

The county's ordinance adds another level of regulations to the California Accidental Release Prevention Program. Contra Costa's program requires firms to have a risk-management plan,

triennial audits, simplification of operating procedures and unannounced inspections. Facilities must respond to safety recommendations.

"You're looking at things differently; instead of putting safeguards in place, they're looking at how to avoid it altogether," Sawyer said.

The ordinance allows the county to levy minor fines. However, Contra Costa can arrest refinery workers on a misdemeanor — up to six months of jail — if evidence determines misconduct led to injuries.

In 2006, the county amended the ordinance to require safety culture and security vulnerability assessments.

Such broad regulations are needed in an industry that has inherent dangers and stiff competition, DeSaulnier said.

The industry pushes "to get as much volume out and you're pushing to do it at the cheapest level possible," DeSaulnier said.

A decade later, the ordinance has won support from some of its most ardent critics, including Larson.

"I think the ordinance has been very successful," Larson said. "Certainly there's a lot more to do in Contra Costa "... like the daily emissions from refineries."

Henry Clark, head of the West County Toxics Coalition, a neighborhood advocacy group, echoed those sentiments.

"They came along kicking and bucking and unwillingly and we need to understand that attitude is still there despite the 10th anniversary and no accidents this year," said Clark, who wants more pollution controls.

The community effort left its own legacy.

Larson created the "Bucket Brigade" in 1995 which armed Contra Costa residents with five-gallon plastic buckets turned into air sampling devices to monitor releases from refineries and chemical companies. That low-tech project has spread to communities neighboring refineries across the globe.

Markey wants waiver for air pollution standards

Associated Press

In the S.F. Chronicle, N.Y. Times and other papers, Tuesday, December 9, 2008

WASHINGTON -- The head of a House global warming panel says Congress should grant a waiver to allow California and other states to impose stricter emission rules than the federal standard.

A provision of a bill being developed by congressional leaders would require carmakers to drop their legal challenges to California's tougher approach to curbing greenhouse gas emissions.

During a hearing Tuesday, Rep. Ed Markey said that "any recovery of these companies will require more than just fresh cash." The Massachusetts Democrat said that it will also require "a change of culture, a culture that answers challenges with innovation rather than lobbying and litigation."

Scorpions Get More Asthma, but Astrology Isn't to Blame

By TARA PARKER-POPE

N.Y. Times, Monday, Dec. 8, 2008

How, when and where a child is born may all play a role in lifetime asthma risk, new studies suggest.

Asthma occurs when airways in the lungs spasm and swell, restricting the supply of oxygen. The incidence of asthma in the United States has risen steadily for more than two decades, and about 6 percent of children now have asthma, up from less than 4 percent in 1980, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The reasons for the increase are not entirely clear. Genetics probably plays a role in the risk for asthma, but an array of environmental factors — pollen, dust, animal dander, mold, cockroach feces, cigarettes, air pollution, viruses and cold air — have all been implicated in its development.

This month, The American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine is reporting that children born in the fall have a 30 percent higher risk for asthma than those born in other seasons. The finding is based on a review of birth and medical records of over 95,000 children in Tennessee.

A possible explanation is that autumn babies tend to be about 4 months old at the peak of cold and flu season. By that age, many babies are in day care and regularly exposed to the outside world.

And while their lungs are still developing, they have yet to develop strong immune systems. As a result, fall babies are at particular risk to contract a severe winter virus, which may in turn increase their risk for asthma.

The lead researcher, Dr. Tina V. Hartert, director of the Center for Asthma Research and Environmental Health at Vanderbilt University, says some parents with a high familial risk for asthma may want to consider timing conception to avoid a fall birth.

But since that is impractical for many people, Dr. Hartert says, all parents should take precautions to reduce a baby's risk of a respiratory infection.

"It's premature to say you should time conception so children aren't born in the fall," she said. "But it's good sense to use typical hygienic measures to try and prevent illness."

As for how a baby is born, Swiss researchers are reporting in the journal *Thorax* this month that a Caesarean delivery is linked to a much higher risk for asthma compared with babies born vaginally.

In a study of nearly 3,000 children, the researchers found that 12 percent had been given a diagnosis of asthma by age 8. In that group, those born by C-section, were nearly 80 percent more likely than the others to develop asthma. The explanation may be that a vaginal birth "primes" a baby's immune system by exposing it to bacteria as it moves through the birth canal.

Finally, researchers at Tufts reported last month in *The Journal of Asthma* that a baby's place of birth also influences asthma risk. In a study of black families in Dorchester, Mass., they found that babies born in the United States were more likely to have asthma than black children born outside the country.

The reason for the disparity is not clear, but the sterile conditions under which American babies are born may be a factor. Babies in developing countries encounter more infections, so they may be better equipped to withstand less serious assaults associated with asthma, like mold and dust mites.

Air tests reveal elevated levels of toxics around schools

By Brad Heath and Blake Morrison,
USA TODAY, Tuesday, Dec. 9, 2008

MIDLAND, Pa. — In this borough of 2,900 in the westernmost part of the state, the steel industry used to be the primary employer. Today, Midland's schools offer the most jobs — and now are beginning to unravel a mystery that could affect the health of their students.

For five days this fall, USA TODAY monitored the air near Midland Elementary-Middle School, a red-brick building blocks from the riverside steel plants that defined the town for generations. It was one of 95 schools in 30 states where the newspaper teamed with scientists at Johns Hopkins University and the University of Maryland to take samples and analyze toxic chemicals in the air.

The highest readings appeared near seven of the schools, including Midland. At those locations, USA TODAY's monitoring showed pollution at levels that could make people sick or significantly increase their risk of cancer if they were exposed to the chemicals for long periods.

Among the chemicals found in the air near the seven schools: the metals manganese and chromium, and the carcinogens benzene and naphthalene, all in concentrations that could be well above U.S. Environmental Protection Agency safety thresholds for long-term exposure.

At 57 more schools, the results showed combinations of chemicals at levels that were lower than at the seven worst locations but still higher than what some states consider acceptable. At about half of these schools — including some along Louisiana's Gulf Coast as well as in affluent suburbs such as McLean, Va., and Lakewood, Colo. — benzene was primarily responsible for the potential health risks. The chemical is often found in refinery emissions and automobile exhaust.

Experts say even small amounts of toxic chemicals can do irreparable harm to children, who breathe more air per pound than adults do, and whose bodies process chemicals differently.

Exposures "may be causing mutations in a child's cells that begin the pathway to cancer," says Philip Landrigan, one of the nation's foremost experts on pediatric medicine and a physician at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York.

"Those mutations, once they take place, they're hard-wired," Landrigan says. "They may go on to cancer. They may go nowhere. But they certainly put the child at greater risk of cancer, and that risk is life-long."

Regulators usually examine cancer risks by asking how many more cases might result from pollution. If the risk, based on a lifetime of exposure, is less than one additional case per 1 million people, the EPA considers the air safe. But if the risk is higher — for instance, if the risk of an additional cancer exceeds one in 100,000, a level USA TODAY found at 64 schools where it monitored — regulators might work with industries to curb emissions.

"These results suggest that we need to be concerned about what the children are breathing while at school," says Patrick Breyse, a scientist with Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health who helped oversee USA TODAY's efforts.

Breyse, director of the Center for Childhood Asthma in the Urban Environment at Hopkins, cautions that the results from USA TODAY's monitoring represent only a "snapshot of pollution." He says parents "shouldn't take these results and abandon their schools. But they certainly need to start asking people in authority to find out more."

He says the findings should prompt the government to act "with some sense of urgency" to investigate pollution outside schools where health risks appear to be the greatest. In some cases, that may mean regulators working with industries near schools to cut their emissions, he says. "In extreme cases," he says, "it may mean shutting down or moving schools."

'Just stunned'

To select where to monitor, USA TODAY used a government computer model that shows how industrial emissions are dispersed throughout the country. About two-thirds of the schools chosen appeared hard-hit by toxic chemicals; the other one-third were in areas where the air seemed relatively clean.

At some schools, USA TODAY's monitoring involved placing charcoal badges near schools to capture toxic chemicals. At other locations, reporters also used pumps and filters that collected samples of metals and other compounds.

In both cases, USA TODAY followed established protocols and used the same equipment employed by many universities and industries to monitor air quality. The monitoring lasted four to seven days, a short amount of time compared with the months-long monitoring that state and federal regulators can do.

Regulators, however, seldom check for toxic chemicals outside schools. "We're trying to show that we can flag some schools based on the limited data collected by USA TODAY," Breyse says. "Now we're calling on the EPA and other health authorities to do it more thoroughly."

That's exactly what is happening in Midland, where USA TODAY's monitoring found high levels of chromium. Airborne chromium can take two forms — one can cause cancer, the other is relatively harmless.

What remains unknown is what type of chromium was in the air. The more dangerous form, known as hexavalent chromium or chromium 6, can be released during a variety of industrial processes, including steelmaking and cement production. It has no odor or taste and is difficult to detect without more sophisticated monitoring.

If the chromium were the more harmful form, the dangers in Midland could rival those found outside Meredith Hitchens Elementary, a Cincinnati-area school where the Ohio EPA concluded the risk of cancer was 50 times higher than what the state considers acceptable. The district closed Hitchens in 2005.

Last year, three companies operating near Midland — a steel mill and a foundry blocks from the school, and a power plant across the Ohio River — filed reports with the EPA that showed combined releases of at least 7,500 pounds of chromium into the air. The EPA doesn't require the companies to say what type of chromium.

Dan Greenfield, a spokesman for Allegheny Ludlum Corp., which runs the steel mill in Midland, says it's "extremely unlikely" that any chromium 6 came from the mill. "We have state-of-the-art environmental controls," he says.

A representative of Whemco, which operates the foundry, declined to comment. Ellen Raines, a spokeswoman for FirstEnergy Corp., which runs the power plant, says its emissions are diluted by high smokestacks, and that scrubbers on those stacks trap most of the chromium before it's released.

Monitoring at Midland also showed manganese, a metal that can damage the nervous system, at a higher level than what the EPA says is safe.

The newspaper's findings prompted the district's superintendent to push for action.

On Nov. 19, the day a reporter told him of the high chromium readings, Superintendent Sean Tanner asked the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection to put an air monitor at the school. The agency installed one on the roof the next morning. "I wanted something done, and I didn't want to wait," says Tanner, who says he was "just stunned" by USA TODAY's findings. "I thought that was necessary to protect our students, our staff and, ultimately, our community."

Since USA TODAY monitored, slumping demand prompted Allegheny Ludlum to mostly idle its Midland steel mill, Greenfield says. It's not clear when production will fully resume.

Pennsylvania authorities said Thursday that initial air tests for chromium and other airborne metals did not indicate reason for concern. Two days of samples — both taken since the Allegheny Ludlum plant reduced production — showed chromium levels 10 times lower than what USA TODAY detected.

An agency guide on air monitoring notes that results of such monitoring often vary based on the weather, or whether a factory is "operating on one sampling day, but not on another." A

spokeswoman for the state's environmental agency, Teresa Candori, says regulators plan to collect samples at Midland for at least six months.

'Lip service' to kids

Page 2 of 2 of USA TODAY's special report on monitoring air quality around schools.

The government routinely monitors for six chemicals, most notably those that cause smog. A report three years ago by the EPA's inspector general highlighted shortcomings in the agency's monitoring for about 180 others, all toxic. It concluded that "many high-risk areas" for chemicals do not have monitors.

In the past decade, for instance, USA TODAY's search of EPA records found only about 3% of the nation's schools were within a mile of a long-term monitor set up to detect hazardous air pollutants. Even fewer — the newspaper identified only 125 of almost 128,000 schools — had monitors within a few blocks.

Although the EPA provides grants for monitoring at locations where pollution models indicate problems, officials say such monitoring is primarily left to each state. The EPA has increased its grants since the inspector general's report, says Robert Meyers, the agency official in charge of air issues. Since 2004 it has spent \$37 million on new monitoring stations.

He concedes that those grants — and subsequent decisions on where to monitor — put no emphasis on schools, even though the agency acknowledges that children are particularly susceptible to toxic chemicals.

Despite strict limits on pollution that causes smog, the EPA has no standards for how much of a toxic chemical can be in the air before the agency takes action. That makes assessing dangers children face inexact at best.

"There may have been some lip service about paying attention to children ... but they're not putting their money where their mouth is," Melanie Marty, a toxicologist with the California EPA, says of the U.S. EPA. "If we don't know anything, we can't say we're protecting the general population out there, let alone kids."

Sources hard to identify

USA TODAY did not place monitors on school grounds. Rather, reporters, editors and others — including local volunteers and journalists from Denver television station KUSA and local newspapers owned by Gannett, USA TODAY's parent company — found locations that generally were within 100 yards of schools.

At those locations, often homes or businesses, the air would be similar to what was outside the school buildings.

Scientists from Hopkins and Maryland analyzed the samples for about 40 chemicals.

The chemicals might have come from a variety of sources: heavy industries such as refineries and steel mills, smaller businesses that aren't required to report their emissions to the government, gas stations and automobiles. The monitoring could not pinpoint sources.

Benzene levels were especially high outside at least three schools: Jotham W. Wakeman School in Jersey City; Wayne School in Erie, Pa.; and H. Byron Masterson Elementary School in Kennett, Mo. There, benzene levels were high enough that they could cause at least one additional cancer for every 10,000 people exposed throughout their lives, Hopkins found.

Studies have linked benzene to leukemia.

"These are still based on limited data," Breyse cautions. "But they should stimulate further investigation."

Monitoring is key

Other locations appeared less troubling. In Ashland City, Tenn., for instance, the EPA computer model indicated the air at Ashland City Elementary School was rife with manganese. The model ranked it among the very worst schools in the nation for industrial pollutants.

USA TODAY monitored the air twice near the school. Although the snapshot samples aren't definitive, both tests found levels of manganese thousands of times lower than what the model estimated would be in the air there.

Why the vast discrepancy? The EPA model relied on reports submitted by A.O. Smith, a water heater manufacturer in Ashland City. The company reported to the EPA that it released 33,788 pounds of manganese into the air in 2005.

A spokesman for the company, Mark Petrarca, says its emissions reports are accurate but that its manganese is trapped in flakes that usually fall to the shop floor and are moved off the site. Only "trace amounts," he says, would be emitted from the plant.

That's consistent with what USA TODAY found and underscores the need to monitor before concluding that the air outside any school is dangerous.

Even with the monitoring by USA TODAY, Hopkins' Breyse sees merit in checking further.

Others echo his assessment. USA TODAY's monitoring "really is a first snapshot, and you need to see the movie to see the whole thing," says Paul Koval, a toxicologist with the Ohio EPA who spearheaded the seven-month monitoring effort that led to the closure of Hitchens.

"Discovering what's happening in your community," he says, "still needs to be done, no matter what."

Contributors: Mark Hannan, Rhyne Piggott

Contributors to air-monitoring project

USA TODAY monitored air quality at 95 schools across the nation, under the supervision of Patrick Breyse of Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and Amir Sapkota of the University of Maryland School of Public Health.

Fieldwork was done by Dan Reed, Kevin McCoy, Rick Jervis, Chris Woodyard, Dennis Cauchon, Judy Keen, Larry Copeland, Rick Hampson, Byron Acohido, Haya El Nasser, Mike Tsukamoto, David Lindsey, Noah Grynberg, Nicholas Persac and Linda Mathews of USA TODAY; Nicole Vap, Anna Hewson and Byron Reed of KUSA-TV in Denver; James Bruggers, Stefanie Frith, Tracy Loew, David Castellon, Brian Passey, Ben Jones, Jennie Coughlin, Kathleen Gray, Tim Evans, Lori Kurtzman, Jeff Martin, Adam Silverman, Greg Latshaw, Grant Schulte, Ron Barnett, Gunnar Olson, Dirk VanderHart, Kevin Paulk, Clay Carey, Maureen Milford and Dan Nakaso of Gannett newspapers; and local volunteers Deborah Corcoran, R.E. Corcoran, Michael Corcoran, James Mathews, Donald DeWees, Maureen Gallagher and Pauline Cross.

Three Berkeley schools in toxic hot spots, report says

By Kristin Bender and Doug Oakley, Oakland Tribune
Merced Sun-Star, Tuesday, Dec. 9, 2008

BERKELEY — Three Berkeley schools are on top of a nationwide list for bad air quality, according to a report on 127,800 schools conducted by a national newspaper using data from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and released Monday.

USA Today spent eight months examining the impact of industrial pollution on the air outside American schools.

What the investigation found was that Black Pine Circle School, a private school for kindergarten to eighth-graders on Seventh Street, Nia House Learning Center, an early childhood learning and day care center on Ninth Street, and Via Center, a school for developmentally disabled students on Sixth Street, all ranked in the first percentile.

That means that the air is only worse at 377 of the 127,800 schools that were studied.

All the schools are south of University Avenue in South Berkeley within a mile of Pacific Steel Casting, a steel foundry that has been sued by three different groups because of odor and reported toxic emissions during the past several years.

The company, which makes steel castings for truck parts, medical equipment and sewer pipes, also has been at the center of complaints from residents about headaches and a tightness in their chests because of foul odors.

The foundry emits manganese and manganese compounds and accounts for 85 percent of the overall toxicity in the air near the schools, according to EPA information in the study.

"When you rank that high in toxic exposure compared to schools in major industrial belts, it's very alarming, because West Berkeley has some industrial base, but it's tiny compared to industrial areas such as places like Cleveland," said Denny Larson, executive director of Global Community Monitor, an El Cerrito nonprofit that empowers industrial communities to re-create a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

But Pacific Steel spokeswoman Elisabeth Jewel said the study means little because California standards are far more rigid than the U.S. EPA standards.

"The California standards are extremely stringent, and PSC has met those standards over and over again," she said.

She said that last year the foundry released a health risk assessment report, which shows the cancer risks and noncancer hazards for those exposed to plant emissions and for those living or attending school or day care near the facility do not pose a "significant risk."

The assessment was mandated by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District under a state air pollution control law. The report was completed by Environ in Emeryville and paid for by Pacific Steel. It recently was certified by the district, Jewel said.

In the study's second percentile were the Berkeley Montessori School on University Avenue and Berkwood Hedge School on Bancroft Way, both in Berkeley.

Administrators at Berkeley Montessori School said they had seen the study but declined to comment. Administrators at other first- and second-percentile schools in Berkeley did not return calls seeking comment.

In addition to Pacific Steel Casting, the study lists Chevron Products Co. in Richmond, ConocoPhillips San Francisco Refinery in Rodeo, Tesoro Refinery in Martinez and Valero Refining Co. in Benicia as "polluters most responsible for toxics outside the schools," the study reports.

Obama gains support to think big, act boldly on clean energy

By Frank Davies, Mercury News Washington Bureau
Contra Costa Times, Tuesday, Dec. 9, 2008

Memo to President-elect Barack Obama on ways to revamp the nation's energy policy and boost the economy: Think big. Act boldly.

That's the emerging consensus of policy experts, Bay Area clean-tech leaders and even hardened pols who know the obstacles. They are urging the Obama to seize a rare opportunity and dramatically accelerate the nation toward a clean energy economy.

"We can't lose this moment — we have to do things in a big way," said Gov. Ed Rendell of Pennsylvania at a forum last week.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid told an energy conference at Google's Washington office to expect a large spending package when Congress convenes in January.

"I'm not concerned about spending money," he said. "It's the only way to get out of the hole that's been dug for us, and that applies to energy."

Obama and congressional leaders are about to make key decisions that will show just how bold they want to be on the energy front:

Obama's energy and environment team could be unveiled as early as this week. Those appointments will give clues on how aggressively Obama wants to move.

With the recession getting worse and unemployment on the rise, pressure is building for a large stimulus plan, costing \$500 billion or more, next month. Reid, Speaker Nancy Pelosi and John Podesta, chief of the transition team, favor a large "green recovery" component of that package, including more spending on alternative fuels.

Citing the threat of climate change, Obama has said he wants to push for strict limits on greenhouse-gas emissions, with utilities and manufacturers buying and trading pollution permits. But is setting up a complex cap-and-trade system achievable in 2009, with fears that it could boost energy prices in the short term?

Obama enters the White House with lots of political capital, an expanded Democratic majority in Congress, and a raft of specific proposals from his own team and allies in the center-left think tanks of Washington. Podesta, former chief of staff in the Clinton White House, heads one of those groups, the Center for American Progress.

He became Obama's transition chief in August, three months before the election, and quietly began planning a fast start for the Obama presidency.

Podesta's center in September issued a \$100 billion "green recovery" plan of tax credits, direct spending and loan guarantees to spur clean technology and energy efficiency and create 2 million jobs — a major Obama goal.

Podesta's group even forecast the impact on each state.

California would receive \$12.7 billion, creating 235,000 jobs, under the plan.

That could include federal funding for high-speed rail, backed by state voters in November.

"The investment described here is doable in the early days of a new administration," Podesta wrote three months ago.

The stimulus package in January will include at least \$15 billion for clean tech and energy efficiency, an Obama adviser has said.

That would include money to weatherize homes and grants for mass transit.

Reid and Obama have used similar language that the economic crisis is "an opportunity" to build a clean-tech infrastructure for the future while boosting jobs and growth in the short term.

Jeff Anderson of San Francisco, who chaired Clean Tech for Obama during the campaign, said the Obama team "wants as many green elements as they can get" in the stimulus bill.

"What's important for a recovery is getting an immediate bang for your buck, and energy efficiency is easier stuff that you can do quickly," said Anderson.

Beyond the stimulus plan, the long-range effort to combat global warming will be a priority, Obama has promised.

But complex cap-and-trade legislation raises big questions about costs, as long as the U.S. economy relies on oil and coal. Depending on how pollution permits are sold, utilities could face higher costs in the short term that they would pass on to consumers.

But environmental groups and many businesses say a cap-and-trade system is the only way to set a price on carbon and shift market forces in favor of renewable fuels.

The overarching question Obama faces is whether he can press for two complicated domestic initiatives — health care reform and tackling climate change — while focusing on the biggest priority, an economic recovery.

Historian Matt Dallek of UC Berkeley said the Obama team "is weighing how far and how fast they can move on all these things."

"It may help them to do health care and energy early, even if you don't get everything you want," Dallek said.

"The election has given Obama a clear mandate and more space to act than presidents usually have, and they want to take advantage of that."

NAME GAME FOR ENERGY, ENVIRONMENT

Barack Obama has moved quickly to name his Cabinet, and speculation is building about who will fill key energy and environment jobs. Several Californians are in the running, according to media reports:

Energy secretary: Dan Reicher, former Energy Department official and Google executive; John Bryson, retired California utility executive. Gov. Kathleen Sebelius, D-Kan.; FedEx chairman Fred Smith; Rep. Jay Inslee, D-Wash.; Ex-Rep. Philip Sharp, D-Ind.

Environmental Protection Agency: Mary Nichols, chief of the California Air Resources Board; Lisa Jackson, New Jersey environmental official; Kathleen McGinty, Pennsylvania environmental chief

Interior secretary: Rep. Mike Thompson, D-Napa; ex-Gov. Tony Knowles of Alaska; Rep. Raul Grijalva, D-Ariz.; ex-Gov. John Kitzhaber, D-Ore.; Richard Moe, president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Investigators: EPA officials did not break lobbying laws Revolves around request to regulate vehicle emissions.

By Michael Doyle, Sun-Star Washington Bureau
Merced Sun-Star, Tuesday, Dec. 9, 2008

WASHINGTON -- Environmental Protection Agency officials did not violate anti-lobbying laws amid a high-stakes campaign over California's request for permission to strictly regulate greenhouse gas emissions in vehicles, federal investigators have concluded.

Rejecting charges by conservatives, the investigators say two top agency officials acted legally when they conveyed information to former EPA administrator William Reilly. A well-connected Republican, Reilly was supporting California's clean-air waiver request.

"EPA staff did not engage in any effort to influence a member of Congress or other covered official," the EPA's Office of Inspector General concluded in a new audit.

The latest investigation may close out the controversy over what happened as the Bush administration considered California's waiver request. The clean-air waiver proposal itself, though, remains alive and kicking.

California lawmakers are now urging President-elect Barack Obama to reconsider the clean-air waiver, which a Bush administration appointee rejected in December.

"I definitely believe that Barack Obama will sign the waiver, because he said he was going to do it, and he's a man of his word," Democratic Sen. Barbara Boxer said Monday.

At least 18 other states likewise seek more power to regulate emissions, Boxer noted. First, though, the states need a waiver from the federal air pollution law that sets a less stringent national standard. California's stricter rules would cut tailpipe greenhouse gas emissions by nearly 30 percent by the year 2016.

Lobbying controversies have pervaded the clean-air waiver fight from the start. Last year, congressional investigators revealed the Transportation Department was actively lobbying Congress to rally opposition to a waiver. Top White House officials also pressured EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson to deny the waiver, Boxer has previously charged.

"Relatively early in the process, I had the impression that (Johnson) was quite interested in and was seriously exploring ... granting the waiver," EPA official Jason Burnett told House investigators in a deposition. "His final decision is well known." Burnett refused, however, to explain further what role the White House might have played in Johnson's apparent change of mind.

Discussions between Capitol Hill and Obama transition officials now focus on how the waiver might happen. A lawsuit filed by California probably will have to be settled, though it's unclear whether a new public comment period will have to be opened.

"Combating global warming is not only good for the environment, it's great for the economy," Boxer said, "and I believe that Barack Obama believes that, too." Boxer chairs the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. The senior Republican on her committee, Sen. James Inhofe of Oklahoma, is an adamant critic of the science surrounding greenhouse gas emissions.

In March, Inhofe requested that investigators look into how EPA information came into Reilly's hands. Inhofe suggested officials might have violated the anti-lobbying act, which prohibits federal employees from using public funds to influence members of Congress or other government officials.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Tuesday, Dec. 9, 2008:](#)

A future for transit

Metropolitan area will need much denser development.

A denser urban environment could be in store for metropolitan Fresno-Clovis, and a meeting tonight might provide a first glimpse of the shape of that future. It's a potentially historic moment in this region, with its long history of sprawling development.

Various pressures combine to make this a crucial time for the metropolitan area. Sprawl takes valuable farm lands out of production, and the long distances many people must commute leave us increasingly dependent on unstable oil supplies, not to mention aggravating our already serious air quality problems.

Mass transit, one answer to our dependence on cars and trucks, doesn't work very well in areas such as this where decades of planning decisions have pushed urban limits farther and farther into the rural countryside.

A new pressure has been added to that mix: Senate Bill 375 was passed by the Legislature and signed by the governor recently. This landmark legislation makes cities change the way they grow if they wish to keep receiving state transportation funds. In short, cities like Fresno and Clovis will have to grow denser instead of sprawling forever toward the horizons.

That could, in turn, create a real opportunity for viable public transit systems, which require certain densities of population to succeed.

To that end, local planners have drawn up some preliminary ideas for how Fresno and Clovis might look in the next few decades. It's called a "activity center and corridor intensification study," and they hope it will provide a blueprint for denser growth at a number of identified activity centers. Those are large job sites, shopping centers and other areas where development would be more intense, spurring demand for public transit.

They'll discuss the ideas at a meeting tonight, at 6:30 p.m. at the new Exhibit Hall at the downtown Convention Center.

This is only the beginning of a long and no doubt contentious process. The shift in conventional thinking that is required will not come easily. People in Fresno have long sought the "American

Dream" of the suburban home, with four or five residences per acre. Getting used to the idea of 20 units per acre or more, as some envision, will be difficult.

But two things must be remembered as we contemplate such a major change: We cannot sustain the old pattern forever, and creating denser neighborhoods doesn't mean everybody will have to live in them. There will always be other choices in this region. We just need to incorporate this new one into the mix.

[Merced Sun-Star Editorial, Tuesday, Dec. 9, 2008:](#)

Our View: Cleaning air worth cost

California air board should adopt new rules governing diesel engines.

The state air board will meet this week to consider tough new rules governing diesel engines and the emissions they cause. We urge the board to adopt the rules for the sake of cleaner skies and a healthier California.

The new rules are on the agenda of the California Air Resources Board for its meetings Thursday and Friday.

They are opposed by the trucking industry, among others, as too burdensome in this time of economic crisis. And we acknowledge that the cost will be high. But the cost of the status quo is even higher.

Diesel emissions are the single-most damaging form of pollution in California's air. Trucks and buses are responsible for 40 percent of the harmful particulate matter and 50 percent of the nitrogen oxides -- the main component of smog -- in the state.

Particulate matter is very pernicious, especially in the Valley, where pollution is exacerbated by the combination of geography and climate. The tiny particles can penetrate deeply into human lungs and other organs. There they can cause or aggravate a whole array of cardiovascular and respiratory ailments, including asthma.

Worse, the children exposed to diesel emissions are at special risk. Particulate exposure can retard lung development in the very young, and has been linked to damage suffered by fetuses and other serious health and reproductive problems.

Those emissions are directly responsible for several thousand deaths each year, and cost billions in added health expenses. A telling figure: Truck drivers themselves are almost twice as likely to develop lung cancer as people not so closely exposed to diesel exhaust.

Schoolchildren are exposed to high levels of diesel pollution on their school buses. And 50 percent of all Californians live within one mile of a freeway. Very few of us escape the damages from diesel pollution.

CARB is considering two rules. One would require more efficient diesel engines, better aerodynamic designs of vehicles and fuel-efficient tires. The second rule would require particulate filters and other emissions controls on trucks and buses.

The cost is steep -- CARB estimates it at \$5.5 billion over the next 15 years; the trucking industry and others set the figure much higher.

And the timetable is tight. Diesel particulate filters would be required by 2014. The new efficiency rules would apply to 2011 models; older trucks and buses would need upgrades by 2012-13.

But we have little choice, and over the same 15 years, the savings in lives, health costs and reduced diesel fuel consumption could amount to nearly \$50 billion, in CARB's estimate.

It won't be easy for truckers to cover the costs of the upgrades, just as it wasn't easy for Valley farmers to comply with new air regulations that began several years ago.

The state is committed to easing the truckers' burden with financial help, just as it did with farmers. In fact, the eminently successful Carl Moyer program is a good model for such aid.

Under the Moyer program, farmers are given help by the state to replace or retrofit older stationary diesel engines used to power irrigation pumps in the fields. The program has helped remove tons of emissions from thousands of older engines.

Such public help is appropriate, because all of us will benefit from cleaner, healthier air. We should all help pay for the cost of those benefits.

None of this will be easy, especially given the fragile condition of both the state budget and the economy. It may take longer than planned to see the benefits of these new rules. But they are badly needed, and we hope CARB will adopt them this week.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Tuesday, Dec. 9, 2008:](#)

'Not going to help'

John Rankin (letter Dec. 5) exhorts readers to wake up to the "liberal socialist policies" that have created the "fallacy of global warming," shut down logging and grazing on public lands, and thereby exacerbated wildfires. He data-mines "solid science and geo-history" to claim that Earth is in fact in a cooling period.

This is true. From about the middle of the Cretaceous, some 100 million years ago, the planet has been in a general cooling trend. But he, like all climate change deniers, ignores the other solid science that shows temperatures increasing, just since the Industrial Revolution, at a rate never seen before.

Since the Cretaceous, continents have moved, dinosaurs have become extinct, multiple ice ages have occurred, and whole new species, including us, have arisen. This global warming thing is just a fiddling up-tick in Earth's long climate history, but it's real, it's our fault, and it's already altering the ranges of crops and diseases. In the near future, it's going to cause massive human misery.

Pretending it isn't so, and blaming the despised other -- liberals will suffice -- for the wages of human carelessness, may salve Mr. Rankin's conscience, but it's not going to help anyone.

Howard Hurtt, Fresno