

Valley air district upset by state offer

Recommendation gives more than half of \$1b for exhaust cleanup to SoCal.

By Mark Grossi / The Fresno Bee

Friday, Jan. 18, 2008

Diesel truckers drive more miles in the San Joaquin Valley than any other corridor in the state, yet this region might get far less money than Southern California to clean up the dangerous exhaust.

So say officials at the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. On Thursday, they announced a broad lobbying campaign for a bigger cut of a \$1 billion bond allotment aimed at fighting diesel pollution.

The cleanup funding would target a key polluter as Valley authorities struggle against some of the nation's worst air pollution and a childhood asthma rate among the highest in California.

The state's recommendation would give more than half the money to Southern California.

For the recommendations, the state analysis included three factors: population size, pollution coming from freight transportation and pollution reduction needed to meet an impending cleanup deadline.

Some Valley air officials said the proposal shows that the more populated and politically powerful places get more attention.

"There's a perception that urban sites take advantage of rural sites," said Valley air board member Steve Worthley, a Tulare County supervisor.

State officials recommend \$250 million for the Central Valley, earmarking most of it for the San Joaquin Valley and a smaller fraction for the Sacramento Valley.

The South Coast Air Basin -- with an air problem on a par with the San Joaquin Valley -- is supposed to get \$550 million.

San Joaquin air officials dispute the state's analysis and, with their own study, assert that the Valley should get at least \$370 million.

"We are extremely disappointed with the recommendation," district executive director Seyed Sadredin said Thursday at the Valley air board meeting. "This is a total abandonment of the commitment the state has made to the Valley's needs."

The money comes from a 2006 transportation bond measure, Proposition 1B.

Three quarters of the \$1 billion is aimed at replacing dirty diesel trucks and installing soot-reduction devices on engines. The rest of the money will be used to battle pollution at the state's ports.

Diesel exhaust has been linked with cancer. It also contains gases that create corrosive ozone, which triggers lung problems, such as asthma.

The Valley has led the nation in ozone violations several times in the last eight years. Heavy-duty diesel trucks are the region's single biggest ozone problem.

Governing members of the state Air Resources Board were scheduled next week to consider approving the proposal for divvying the money. That discussion has been delayed until Feb. 28 and 29 to finish work on guidelines for the proposal.

State board spokesman Leo Kay said the staff struck a fair balance, based on the population, freight pollution and the need to meet a cleanup deadline.

"We used the latest figures available," Kay said. "We stand by our analysis."

But Valley officials said the state underestimated the amount of diesel pollution in their region by pegging the average truck age at 7 years old. The Valley fleet is much older, they said, and older rigs pollute far more than newer trucks.

Valley officials also said it was unfair to emphasize population size -- South Coast has 16 million residents; the Valley has about 3.8 million. It would be more equitable to study pollution exposure to residents, officials said.

Residents here suffer as much exposure as Southern Californians, according to the Valley district's analysis.

Cleaner recognized for environmental efforts

BY MARK RIVERA, Staff Reporter
Turlock Journal Sat., Jan. 19, 2008

Cleaning clothes with something other than water takes chemicals, some of them harmful to the environment.

Local dry cleaner Carr's Cleaners is looking to change that. Carr's has switched from the toxic dry cleaning solvent perchloroethylene to environmentally friendly wet cleaning.

The business has received a grant from the California Air Resources Board for switching to this non-toxic and non-smog forming cleaning method. Carr's is the only dry cleaner in the Central Valley utilizing this method, and one of only 80 in the nation.

"You could never clean a wool suit in water at home, yet we safely do it all day long because of the advanced garment care technology we use," said Chad Boucher, president of Carr's Cleaners.

Carr's adopted the new technology in August and has since cleaned over 60,000 garments. Carr's uses computer controlled wash machines and moisture-sensing dryers.

They also use biodegradable soaps, softeners and conditioners and specialized pressing equipment - all of which makes professional wet cleaning far different from washing clothes at home.

"We are excited to switch to an alternative cleaning method that is not only safe for the environment, our employees and our customers, but also does a better job of cleaning the garments," Boucher said. "It is exciting to be the only cleaners for at least 60 miles to offer a truly green alternative.

"The whites stay whiter, there is absolutely no solvent odor left in the garments and overall it does a better job of cleaning and stain removal than traditional dry cleaning."

Carr's Cleaners started in 1945. Boucher's parents, Harry and Sandy, bought the business in 1979. Carr's has two locations in Turlock and a location in Atwater. They also run a pickup and delivery service and a carpet and upholstery cleaning division.

County, developer submit bond application

Written by Jonathan Partridge

Patterson Irrigator, Saturday, Jan. 19, 2008

Following months of discussion, a development team and county officials sent off an application Thursday for \$26 million in state money to set up short-haul rail service from the Port of Oakland to Crows Landing.

The proposed 4,800-acre PCCP West Park industrial park, which would stand on and around Crows Landing's former naval airfield, would use the short-haul rail service, shipping containers to and from the port.

"We're very proud of our application," West Park consultant D.J. Smith said Friday. "We're in the running now."

Stanislaus County and the Stanislaus County Council of Governments, a regional planning agency, submitted the application in conjunction with the project developer.

West Park developer Gerry Kamilos is in the midst of a yearlong negotiating period with Stanislaus County as the potential developer of the 1,527-acre Crows Landing Air Facility.

The Crows Landing application was one of 84 the California Transportation Commission received Thursday.

The commission will award as much as \$3 billion for trade corridor projects in April. Close to \$2 billion of that will come from a \$3.1 billion trade corridor bond approved by voters in 2006, while another \$1 billion could come from a state highway account, federal money and other fees.

The transportation commission will host a hearing on the bond applications next month, and commission staff will make project recommendations March 13.

Stanislaus County CEO Rick Robinson signed a letter at the beginning of the bond application that trumpets potential benefits of the project.

"We truly believe this project begins a critically important change in the transportation paradigm for Northern California," he wrote.

At full build-out in 2039, the business park would employ 37,650 people and generate as many as 14,827 trips per day, the bond application said. The application also states the project would reduce regional pollution, eliminating 34.5 tons of nitrous oxide and 3,820 tons of carbon dioxide in 2021 by using trains instead of trucks to move containers of goods.

It predicted that as many as 210 one-way truck trips would be eliminated in 2011, and as many as 2,400 in 2030.

The application also said the project would create 37,000 "family-wage jobs" for Stanislaus County and the surrounding area, potentially reducing the number of commuters going to the Bay Area.

"These aren't minimum-wage jobs," Smith said. "They are high-quality skilled and semi-skilled jobs."

The application said some details, including the availability of water and sewer facilities, a financing plan for infrastructure, mitigation of trains and traffic and the types of available jobs, would be available in later environmental and planning documents.

West Park officials have been criticized by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission - the Bay Area's transportation planning agency - for having vague information on such features.

However, Smith said some of those details could not be known at this time, while the application should answer many questions the MTC has had in the past.

Stanislaus County Supervisor Jim DeMartini, a critic of the project, was out of town this week and had not had time to read through the application. However, he expressed doubts about applying for the bond money in the first place.

"There are a lot of needs ... for projects in the state, and I just don't see how this is a priority, particularly when the Port of Oakland has said they're not interested in it," DeMartini said.

He referred to past statements from port officials, who said that they supported short-haul rail but that it was not a priority.

More money needed

In addition to the \$26 million that West Park advocates hope to receive in state transportation corridor funding, \$18.98 million would come from project investors. Another \$12.5 million would come from the county's donation of a 170-acre former runway at the air facility for the inland port. That \$12.5 million figure was half the amount of an assessment an independent appraiser gave the county, according to the bond application.

DeMartini said he could not believe the initial \$25 million appraisal for the inland port property, and that even cutting that figure in half was a rip-off for taxpayers.

"My feeling was the match should have been a cash match," he said.

West Park officials also hope to get support from a \$1 billion pool of environmental bond money available through the \$3.1 billion trade corridor bond package. California Air Resources Board officials will decide the guidelines for qualifying projects next week.

Other projects could benefit

The Crows Landing short-haul project was one of about 15 projects recommended by Northern California regional planning agencies for trade-corridor funding as part of a "Northern California Trade Strategy." Another short-haul rail project, linking the Port of Oakland to a proposed inland port in the city of Shafter near Bakersfield, also made the list.

Other proposed projects include improvements to the Port of Oakland, capacity expansion on rail lines through Donner Summit and the Tehachapi Pass, and work on a Sacramento rail depot and the Port of Sacramento.

Closer to home, agencies called for \$75 million in matching funds to help the San Joaquin Regional Rail Service buy a Union Pacific rail corridor from Stockton to the Bay Area across the Altamont Pass. The rail service runs the Altamont Commuter Express commuter train, and its tracks would be part of the proposed short-haul rail line to Crows Landing.

Other recommendations proposed channel dredging between the Port of Stockton and the San Francisco Bay, a new climbing lane for trucks over the Altamont Pass, improvements to Interstate 880 near the Port of Oakland, and an extension of Highway 4 to the Port of Stockton.

Smith, West Park's consultant, said not all the top projects recommended by regional agencies will likely receive full funding, but he thought the Crows Landing project had a good chance. Stanislaus County's \$26 million request was much less than amounts requested for other projects, and California Transportation Commissioner Kirk Lindsey is a Modesto resident, he said.

"We're pretty optimistic at this point," Smith said.

Smallest Air Pollution Particles Hurt Heart Most

Washington Post, Saturday, January 19, 2008

SATURDAY, Jan. 19 (HealthDay News) -- The tiniest bits of air pollution from your vehicle's exhaust may be the most dangerous to your heart's health, suggests a new U.S. study.

Particles that are about one-thousandth the size of a human hair, cause plaque build-up in the arteries, according to a University of California, Los Angeles-led study. This condition, called atherosclerosis, can lead to heart attack and stroke.

These particles also contribute to hardening of the arteries by shutting down the protective qualities of so-called "good" high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol, according to the study, which appears in the Jan. 17 online edition of *Circulation Research*.

Over five weeks, researchers exposed mice with high cholesterol to larger fine pollution particles (2.5 micrometers in size) or ultrafine particles (less than 0.18 micrometers), then compared them to mice exposed to filtered air. The mice exposed to ultrafine particles had 25 percent more arterial plaque development than the mice exposed to fine particles and 55 percent more than mice that breathed filtered air.

"This suggests that ultrafine particles are the most toxic air pollutants in promoting events leading to cardiovascular disease," study author Dr. Jesus Araujo, an assistant professor of medicine and director of environmental cardiology at UCLA's David Geffen School of Medicine, said in a prepared statement.

While the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency regulates fine pollution particles, it doesn't monitor ultrafine -- or nano-sized -- particles, according to background information in a news release about the study.

"We hope our findings offer insight into the impact of nano-sized air pollutant particles and help explore ways for stricter air quality regulatory guidelines," principal investigator Dr. Andre Nel, UCLA's chief of nanomedicine, said in a prepared statement.

More information

The American Academy of Family Physicians has more about the possible health effects of air pollution.
SOURCE: University of California, Los Angeles news release, Jan. 17, 2008

Proposed wood burning ban draws fire

Jane Kay, Chronicle Environment Writer
S.F. Chronicle, Sunday, January 20, 2008

A proposed ban on burning wood in the Bay Area's 1 million fireplaces and stoves on bad-air days has drawn praise - and heat - from hundreds of residents as regulators consider how to balance the health risks of inhaling smoke against the need to stay warm.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District's plan to restrict wood burning comes after federal officials imposed tighter limits on emissions of fine particles, a move that regional officials say could lead them to declare 20 Spare the Air days during the winter season. There have been six such days in the region since November.

After sifting through more than 400 comments, Bay Area air-quality officials plan to refine their proposal by spring, intending to put new rules in place by next winter. Presto logs and logs made of coffee grounds and nutshells would be regulated like wood.

"We know there are very toxic components in wood smoke," said Dr. Janice Kim, public health medical officer with the air toxicology and epidemiology branch of the state's Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment.

People who burn wood "are exposing themselves, their neighbors and their families to harmful compounds, including carcinogens," Kim said.

Influenced by a rash of studies showing that wood smoke poses severe health hazards, two-thirds of the residents who commented on the air district's plan said they favor mandatory controls on haze, smoke and airborne dust to control pockets of plumes in their neighborhoods.

Paul Spiegel of Walnut Creek said, "There is no escape from inhaling these emissions, even inside your own home with an air-cleaner going." He complained that people use green wood and construction waste that burn dirty.

Spiegel said he'd accept more government controls "to allow these chronic and abusive wood-burners to needlessly pump our lungs full of their irritating, penetrating and persistent fumes and particulates which bring great risks to our immediate and long term health."

But James Sayre of Oakland wrote: "Sometimes it seems as if our government is trying to squeeze out every last bit of fun and joy in life (unless it is sold to us at a profit by major corporations). This proposed regulation of private fireplaces seems quite heavy-handed and probably impractical to enforce, to boot."

Sayre said environmental regulators should instead crack down on diesel truck and bus emissions.

For more than a decade, the Bay Area's air quality district has considered controlling wood smoke from about 1,400 cords of wood - enough to fill the beds of 2,800 pickup trucks - that are burned daily in cold weather.

Air regulators in the San Joaquin Valley and Sacramento have put in place "Check Before You Burn" restrictions, which prohibit wood fires during periods of poor air quality.

"For the most part, once folks understood how the rule works, that there are not burning restrictions every day, they weren't against it," said Aleta Kennard, program supervisor for technical services at the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District.

As early as 1990, scientists attributed 40 percent of the airborne particulates in San Jose in the wintertime to wood smoke, and the researchers found an increase in deaths related to an increase in particulates. In 1997, state researchers conducted a study in Santa Clara County that linked particulate levels and increased emergency room visits for asthma.

Since 1998, about 40 cities and counties in the Bay Area have adopted regulations, mainly prohibiting the construction of fireplaces in new homes - and the cities of Fremont, Gilroy, Los Altos Hills, Los Gatos, Martinez, Mill Valley, Oakland, Rohnert Park, San Pablo and Union City banned burning on bad-air days.

Studies have found that the microscopic mix of solids and liquid droplets in wood smoke are composed of acids, organic chemicals, metals, dust particles and allergens - quite different from the emissions from burning fossil fuels. Scientists are examining the toxicity of the entire mixture - not just separate components - just as they do for tobacco smoke.

UCSF associate clinical professor Dr. Michael Lipsett, who also serves as chief of the exposure assessment section in the California Department of Public Health, was among several authors of a review published last year concluding that wood-burning stoves and fireplaces "emit significant quantities of known health-damaging pollutants, including several cancer-causing compounds."

Among them are polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, benzene, aldehydes, respirable particulate matter, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides and other free radicals.

"In the wintertime, residential wood combustion is a significant contributor to fine particles in the air," said Lipsett.

The problem with wood smoke is that it hangs close to the ground, particularly on windless, foggy nights. Complaints come from all over the Bay Area - from Cow Hollow in San Francisco to Menlo Park, Novato and Castro Valley - where neighbors' wood smoke has invaded streets, yards and houses.

Walnut Creek resident Spiegel said the smoke is noticeable as soon as he emerges from the eastern end of the Caldecott Tunnel in Contra Costa County.

"It can come as a big surprise if you're not used to it," he said in an interview.

But rural resident Vernon Huffman, who heats his house with wood on a ranch outside of San Anselmo, said the proposal "will turn this neighborhood into a tattletale state. One smell of smoke will have the cops at each other's doors, which ultimately is a violation of our civil and human rights."

His natural gas heating system is inefficient and costs too much to run, he said, and a ban on burning during periods of poor air would "force me to install a heating and air system and be reliant on PG&E."

Huffman's problem is a problem for the Bay Area air district, too.

Eric Pop, an air-quality specialist for the agency, said his staff is wrestling with how to best define "sole source of heat," one of the few exemptions that the district has offered in the proposed rule. Regulators realize that people without connections to utilities or who can't afford other means of heat need to stay warm, but they don't want people to lower air quality for others by burning wood.

The air district is considering an option that would allow cleaner-burning devices, such as EPA-certified stoves and fireplace inserts, to operate during restricted periods. Officials are also setting up a program to offer retailer discounts to residents who want to upgrade devices.

In west Marin County, where air pollution from wood stoves hovers on still, cold nights, Susan Goldsborough is searching for an amicable solution. Her neighbors can use electricity or propane, but many choose wood for warmth.

"Many residents who would consider themselves to be environmentally aware and live a green life burn wood," she said. "It seems to be a blind spot."

Goldsborough won't let her grandchildren sleep over on smoky nights from November to February, and she suggests that sensors be put in place in problem valleys so neighbors are not policing neighbors.

"We have the right to clean air," she said.

Air quality rated unhealthy

By staff reports

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Saturday, Jan. 19, 2008

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issued a forecast for air quality in Tulare County of 118 on its Air Quality Index, meaning air quality is unhealthy for sensitive groups.

The index forecast was the result of an increase in particulate matter in the atmosphere.

The air district recommends those with respiratory conditions, the very young and elderly avoid prolonged exposure to outside air.

The forecast for Sunday is for moderate conditions with an air quality index of 97.

The air district recommends restrictions on fireplace/wood stove burning status.

WinCo Foods may open in southwest

City planners to consider report for proposed center

BY JENNY SHEARER, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Jan. 22, 2008

Farmland in southwest Bakersfield may one day house a WinCo Foods and other retailers.

The proposed shopping center, dubbed Silver Creek Plaza, would be on the southwest corner of Ashe Road and Panama Lane.

But first, lengthy environmental documents have to be reviewed. The project's draft environmental impact report is now online.

Potentially significant impacts include traffic, [air quality](#), biological resources and hydrology and water quality.

The report's adequacy will be considered at the Feb. 7 Bakersfield Planning Commission meeting.

If commissioners agree the report is adequate, the shopping center would be considered for a general plan amendment and zone change -- from low-density residential to commercial -- in March, said Maurice Etchechury, project engineer. Ultimately, the City Council would review the project.

But if the report is deemed inadequate, the massive report would return to consultants for revisions.

The vice chairman of the Kern-Kaweah Chapter of the Sierra Club hadn't read the full report but said Monday he had concerns about air pollution and greenhouses gases from the project. Gordon Nipp would like to see the center feature solar energy technology and be designed to encourage walking.

"We support having commercial mixed in with housing so people don't have to drive so far to do shopping," Nipp said.

The proposed center would have approximately 137,600 square feet of retail in a "soft, Mediterranean style, which will blend in with neighboring tracts," according to the report.

WinCo would be the largest tenant. Others would include a drug store with a drive-through pharmacy, fast-food restaurants and service-oriented businesses, such as a sandwich shop, salon or dry cleaners, according to the report.

Calls to an Orange County-based project representative weren't returned Monday.

The February hearing will be the project's second appearance before the commission.

Opposition surfaced at a 2007 hearing when it was suggested the project needed more environmental study than was proposed. City planning staff and the developer pulled back and decided to do an environmental impact report, said Marc Gauthier, one of the city's principal planners.

BART directors OK paying more for green power

Rachel Gordon, Chronicle Staff Writer <<mailto:rgordon@sfchronicle.com>>
S.F. Chronicle, Saturday, January 19, 2008

BART now has the green light to go green, but the initiative could add an estimated \$1.8 million to the rail system's annual power bill.

That's enough money to pay the salary and benefits of an additional 22 workers to clean the trains.

The BART Board of Directors, eager to reduce the agency's carbon footprint, voted unanimously last week to lift the agency's price cap on the purchase of alternative energy. Without that action, BART couldn't afford to buy the more-costly sources of renewable power.

At an average cost of \$100 per megawatt hour, alternative energy exceeded the \$70-per-megawatt hour price-limit for green power BART had in place, which meant that no wind, wave, thermal or other alternative sources of power were being purchased. A megawatt hour is enough to power about 750 homes for one hour.

"We as a good public agency are committed to the idea of sustainability," said Gail Murray, president of the BART board. "People need to know that there's a cost."

That said, she added, "We do have to be careful with the public's money."

Currently, more than half of BART's power supply comes from hydroelectric power, said agency spokesman Linton Johnson. And while that is considered a renewable source, it falls into a different category from wind, wave, thermal and solar. The price fluctuates, but BART pays an average of \$70 per megawatt hour for hydroelectric power and other conventional energy sources.

BART director Tom Radulovich said the green power initiative has several benefits, including allowing BART to diversify its energy portfolio to protect the agency in case there's a big price increase in a particular market, such as fossil-fuel-generated electricity. He said BART's investment also can be used as a catalyst to expand the alternative-energy supply, which eventually may help bring down the price.

And finally, Radulovich said, "We can put our money where our mouth is. The BART board is saying yes to spending a little more money to be green."

The district's power budget for the fiscal year that ends July 1 is \$34.7 million - without the new environmental initiative that could cost an additional \$1.8 million. BART's total operating budget for the year is \$627 million.

BART, which uses 400,000 megawatt hours of electricity a year, is in the top 10 of electricity consumers in Northern California. Powering the trains accounts for about three-quarters of BART's energy usage.

BART has set a goal of deriving at least 20 percent of its energy from alternative renewable sources, such as wind energy and the methane gas belched from landfills, by 2010.

The Northern California Power Agency, which purchases and generates electricity for BART and more than a dozen other public entities, has agreed to supply BART with seven megawatts of renewable energy.

The transit district has the right to reject any individual renewable-energy project offered by the Northern California Power Agency if the cost is too steep. BART officials hope that by getting rid of the price cap, they finally will be able to purchase green energy.

Before adopting the plan, directors discussed whether the additional money needed to buy alternative energy could be put to better use funding projects that would do more to protect the environment. Would the installation of more secure bike parking at the stations lure commuters out of their cars and reduce air pollution? In the end, no definitive answers were offered.

Murray, who recently took over the board presidency, plans to create a sustainability committee to delve deeper into the potential advantages and shortcomings of green policy initiatives at BART.

During the debate on the green power contract, directors shied away from a broader discussion on what BART could do with the money systemwide. One of the biggest gripes of riders is dirty trains and stations. BART officials already added more money to its budget to address the problem, adding 24 cleaning positions to bring the total number to 115.

The money earmarked for purchase of green power would be enough to beef up the cleaning force by another 19 percent.

BART General Manager Dorothy Dugger said the use of funds shouldn't be looked at as an either-or proposition - being good environmental stewards or improving the customers' experience.

"I think we need to make progress on both fronts," she said. "There are multiple ways that we as a public transportation provider can have positive benefits."

Valley issues get parties' attention

GOP candidates clash more on immigration, emissions, genocide.

By Michael Doyle / Bee Washington Bureau

Fresno Bee, Sat., Jan. 19, 2008

WASHINGTON -- The surviving presidential contenders from both parties are competing more furiously than ever, but beneath their surface discord they often find common ground on issues important to the San Joaquin Valley.

Even as their competition escalates, Democratic Sens. Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama and former Sen. John Edwards agree the United States should formally recognize the Armenian genocide.

The Democrats also uniformly back California's bid to impose stiffer greenhouse gas regulations. And they each support an agricultural guest-worker proposal called AgJOBS that could offer legal status to 1.5 million illegal immigrant farmworkers.

Republican candidates clash more on those issues, mirroring in some ways their sharp policy divisions at the national level.

On issues such as immigration, for example, the law-and-order advocates who emphasize stricter border controls can clash loudly with the self-styled compassionate conservatives who stress a blend of security and social integration.

For candidates from both parties, the Valley can offer a treasure trove of primary voters on Feb. 5.

The candidates are enticing those votes through a combination of policy positions and personal appeals. Six of the major candidates have visited Fresno and the southern San Joaquin Valley since last year, and Ohio Rep. Dennis Kucinich is expected to visit Fresno on Sunday.

"We'll be seeing more of them," predicted Mike Lynch, a Modesto-based Democratic political consultant. "They've got to come through here."

The Democrats favor the same phrases on some Valley issues, with Edwards and Clinton both saying an agricultural guest-worker program will let farmworkers "come out of the shadows."

While legislatively dormant at present, the agricultural guest-worker proposal remains politically volatile. It's an issue that can tip voters one way or another in regions like the San Joaquin Valley, home to many illegal immigrants and the farmers who employ them.

Arizona Sen. John McCain, who visited the Valley early last year, is the only Republican candidate to formally endorse the agricultural guest-worker program, although former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani sounds sympathetic. McCain's position draws fire from his fellow conservatives, who denounce it as amnesty.

"McCain championed a bill to let every illegal immigrant stay in America permanently," former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney charged in a recently aired TV commercial in New Hampshire.

Former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee piled on, declaring that he "opposed the amnesty President Bush and Sen. McCain tried to ram through Congress" last year.

The word "amnesty" is politically toxic, and supporters of the comprehensive immigration and agricultural guest-worker proposals speak of "earned legalization," whereby illegal immigrants must pay fines and meet strict criteria.

Words likewise anchor the debate over an Armenian genocide resolution, which revolves around how to characterize the deaths of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire between 1915 and 1923. Armenian-Americans and many historians consider the widespread slaughter a genocide.

The issue is dear to the hearts of many Armenian-Americans, more than 50,000 of whom are estimated to live in the San Joaquin Valley.

California's bid to regulate greenhouse gas emissions from automobiles draws support from Democrats. While some Republicans, including Romney, argue that a consistent national emission standard is best, Democrats are united behind California's efforts, which are now the subject of a federal lawsuit.

Burning agreement coalescing Framework on field burning goes to Idaho Legislature

By Scott A. Yates

Capital Press, Friday, January 18, 2008

Agricultural field burning should return to Idaho next summer, but with strict oversight and a health-first orientation.

The agreement is in response to a January 2007 decision by the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals that overturned the state's rules regulating field burning. Although burning continued on reservations, which operate under a separate set of federal rules, growers in the rest of the state were out of luck.

Many have been treating the announcement of the settlement as a fait accompli that burning will be back in August. Patti Gora, executive director of Safe Air For Everyone, said recent headlines have been misleading.

"There is a whole lot of work that needs to be done. What came out is a framework around which we agree these very important issues need to be hammered out," she said. "I don't know it is a slam dunk."

Mike McGown, smoke management coordinator in Idaho, agreed. "There is no guarantee it will be up and running by the end of the summer, but if everything goes smoothly, it is possible," he said.

The first hurdle is getting the Idaho Legislature to agree to move authority for the agricultural burning program from the Idaho State Department of Agriculture to the Department of Environmental Quality. The release announcing the settlement said DEQ's oversight ensures "public health impacts of exposure to smoke are a priority in managing the program."

Although the framework of the Idaho agreement is similar to the program now administered in Washington state by its Department of Ecology, it is not an exact fit. One of the most obvious differences is that bluegrass growers in Idaho retain the right to burn. In Washington, the practice of burning grass seed fields to stimulate production was prohibited in 1998. The rule came with Ecology's certification that an economic alternative to burning grass fields existed.

Keeping fire as a tool for both wheat stubble burners and bluegrass growers was a key demand

of Idaho agriculture. Gora acknowledged it was a major concession, and she said she still has concerns over how bluegrass burning will be managed and where it will occur.

"We didn't get everything we wanted, but that is the nature of negotiations. There is some give and take," she said.

The give on the growers' side is operating under a statewide program that prohibits burning if air quality levels exceed or are expected to exceed 75 percent of any national ambient air quality standard or 26 micrograms per cubic meter. Washington's Ecology aims to maintain a level at or below 20 micrograms.

The burning program will also be subject to more openness in terms of where any particular day's burns are occurring. Specifically, the agreement calls for "an enhanced information dissemination system" to ensure that the public has ready access to information on burn locations, size and type of field.

McGown said he expects burning in the northern portion of the state will stay constant. Exactly how growers in Southern Idaho will respond as part of a statewide program is hard to gauge. McGown said some growers may decide not to go through the process, which includes an as-yet-undetermined per-acre fee.

Dar Olberding, a legislative aide with the Idaho Grain Producers Association, said growers in the south are now part of a bigger picture.

"Guys will have to get used to paying a permit fee. It's problematic, but nothing that can't be overcome," he said.

Olberding, who served as agriculture's spokesman on the negotiations, said it was a fascinating experience. He praised the mediator, Duke University law school professor Francis McGovern.

"He must be one of the best. There were times he had a sixth sense about the next move before either side had," he said.

Although it's been nine months for growers in Idaho, the grain producer lobbyist is optimistic farmers will have fire back in their production toolbox by next August. First, they need to get the Legislature to sign off on the changes, and then the Environmental Protection Agency must be on board. Olberding expressed confidence the federal agency will fast-track the settlement.

"If they do that, we'll get burning back by August," he said.

EPA won't give details on denying emissions waiver

Associated Press

In the S.F. Chronicle, Saturday, January 19, 2008

Sacramento -- Invoking executive privilege, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency refused to provide lawmakers Friday with a full explanation of why it rejected California's greenhouse gas regulations.

The EPA informed Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., that many of the documents she had requested contained internal deliberations or attorney-client communications that would not be shared with Congress.

"EPA is concerned about the chilling effect that would occur if agency employees believed their frank and honest opinions and analysis expressed as part of assessing California's waiver request were to be disclosed in a broad setting," EPA Associate Administrator Christopher Bliley wrote.

More than a week after a deadline set by Boxer, the agency gave the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, which she chairs, a box of papers with large portions of the relevant documents deleted, Boxer said. The documents omitted key details, including a presentation that, according to Senate aides, predicted EPA would lose a lawsuit if it was taken to court for denying California's waiver.

The refusal to provide a full explanation is the latest twist in a congressional investigation into why the EPA denied California permission to impose what would have been the country's toughest greenhouse gas standards on cars, trucks and sport utility vehicles.

In denying the waiver last month, EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson told Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger that the federal government is implementing a national fuel efficiency standard.

Johnson's decision spurred congressional investigations and a legal challenge this month by California and 15 other states.

Boxer and Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Los Angeles, have asked the EPA for weeks for more information about why it denied California's plan. Boxer called the agency's failure to comply with the request "an insult to the American people and a dereliction of duty."

EPA spokesman Jonathan Shradar said Boxer and her aides were welcome to view and take notes on the entire documents.

Coal is no longer on front burner

The rush to build power plants slows as worries grow over global warming, building costs and transportation.

By Judy Pasternak, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer
L.A. Times, Friday, January 18, 2008

WASHINGTON -- America's headlong rush to tap its enormous coal reserves for electricity has slowed abruptly, with more than 50 proposed coal-fired power plants in 20 states canceled or delayed in 2007 because of concerns about climate change, construction costs and transportation problems.

Coal, touted as cheap and plentiful, has been a cornerstone of President Bush's plans to meet America's energy needs with dozens of new power plants. Burned in about 600 facilities, coal produces more than half of the nation's electricity.

But urgent questions are emerging about a fuel once thought to be the most reliable of all. Utilities are confronting rising costs and a lack of transportation routes from coal fields to generators, opposition from state regulators and environmental groups, and uncertainty over climate-change policies in Washington.

"Coal projects need more regulatory certainty before any new ones are going to get built in the near future," said David Eskelsen, a spokesman for PacifiCorp, which serves more than 1.6 million customers in six Western states. "The current situation does make utility planning very challenging."

Just a few weeks ago, PacifiCorp dropped plans for two coal-fired power plants in Utah, citing the many unknowns in assessing the costs and objections on global warming grounds from a major customer: the city of Los Angeles. PacifiCorp said in filings with the state of Utah that it hadn't found a substitute for production that it will need to bring online in 2012 and 2014.

Shortages are feared

The setbacks have energy regulators jittery about the prospects for meeting America's ever-increasing hunger for electricity. They say that any delays in building new capacity -- coal-fired or otherwise -- add pressure to an already strained electricity infrastructure, raising the prospect of shortages or sharply higher prices.

Energy planners say coal needs to be in the mix because the other mainstay fuels for generating electricity also have serious drawbacks. Natural gas has proved volatile in both price and supply. Nuclear power plants are costly and take much longer to build -- and the problem of radioactive-waste disposal remains unsolved.

"We're very close to the edge," said Rick Sergel, who keeps a close eye on the grid as chief executive of the quasi-governmental North American Electric Reliability Corp. "We operate under tight conditions more often than ever. We need action in the next year or two to start on the path to having enough electricity 10 years from now."

This fall, regulators in Kansas and Washington state denied applications for coal plant permits because of concerns about carbon dioxide emissions.

After Republican Florida Gov. Charlie Crist said in October that he wasn't a "fan" of coal, utilities postponed plans to build coal plants in Tampa and Orlando.

Xcel Energy has told Colorado officials that it plans to close two coal plants and add 1,000 megawatts of wind and solar power, in addition to a new natural-gas plant. The company wants to cut its carbon dioxide emissions 10% by 2015.

In Nevada, Sierra Pacific Resources delayed construction of a coal plant and moved up the schedule for a natural-gas-powered plant instead.

The Tennessee Valley Authority decided in August to add a \$2.5-billion unit to a nuclear power plant rather than construct a new coal facility -- the other main option -- because of the uncertain economics.

Altogether, 53 coal-fired plants were canceled or delayed in 2007, according to Global Energy Decisions, a private consulting firm that tracks power plants for the Department of Energy.

In the near term, coal clearly will remain a part of the American energy picture. Even as the postponements and terminations pile up, plans for new coal-fired power plants continue to advance in New Mexico, Mississippi and Indiana.

Although TXU Energy canceled eight coal-fired power plants it had proposed in Texas, the utility is going ahead with three others.

Last month, an energy industry consortium announced plans to build a government-subsidized power plant in southern Illinois to demonstrate low-emissions coal technology. But the ballooning cost of the FutureGen plant -- now projected to be about \$1.8 billion, nearly double its original estimated price tag -- has drawn criticism from the Department of Energy, which could delay or kill the project by withholding funds.

The growing push in Washington to do something about global warming is a major factor that affects the cost of burning chunks of solid carbon, by far the dirtiest way to manufacture power.

A recent study by the industry-funded Electric Power Research Institute projects that coal power will cost more than nuclear power or natural gas by 2030 if coal's carbon dioxide problem is solved the way most experts envision. Still unproven, that method involves separating carbon dioxide from the gas stream before it heads out of the stacks, collecting the vapors and then storing them underground. That would also require a new network of pipelines to move carbon dioxide from the power plant to a geologically sound site.

Another industry analysis predicts that wholesale electricity prices will rise 35% to 65% by 2015 if the Warner-Lieberman climate change bill -- one of the more conservative plans put forward in the Senate -- is enacted.

A more immediate challenge is transportation, from missing links in the rail routes to silted-up Great Lakes shipping channels, which raise concerns that coal may not be so simple to get at after all.

"Can coal deliver?" asked Gary Hunt, president of Global Energy Advisors, a Sacramento-based unit of Global Energy Decisions. "The answer is no," he said -- not without "billions and billions" spent on improvements for mining capacity, railroads and shipping.

Powder River Basin

About 40% of the coal that America burns comes from the Powder River Basin in Wyoming and Montana. Sought after for its low sulfur content, the product is sent all over the country on trains more than 100 cars long. But only two rail companies serve the basin, and for 100 miles they share one set of tracks.

That caused trouble in spring 2005, when coal dust built up between the ties, snow and rain fell on the tracks, and the resulting slush caused two derailments. The ensuing bottleneck delayed coal deliveries for months. Utilities started hoarding the coal they had on hand, and ran their more expensive natural-gas plants more often. They filed for rate hikes, and at least two sued their rail carriers.

Railroads are investing about \$200 million to improve and expand the tracks leading out of the Powder River Basin, and they point to record cargoes this year. But the National Mining Assn. still has concerns about the future, spokesman Luke Popovich said. "Capacity is adequate now, but it's close to being inadequate," he said.

In the coal fields of southern Illinois and Indiana, a mining renaissance is hoped for -- but no north-south rail line connects them with Chicago and the Great Lakes.

Purdue University recommends building a 300-mile "Indiana coal corridor" -- at a cost of about \$1 million a mile.

Overall, the Assn. of American Railroads estimates that \$148 billion needs to be invested in freight infrastructure over the next 28 years. The industry says it needs federal assistance to help it cover about \$39 billion of that cost.

We Energies, which provides electricity in Wisconsin and Michigan, said it had faced at least \$45 million in higher fuel costs as a result of rail disruptions. Like other producers in the Upper Midwest, the company tried to find relief by shipping coal across the Great Lakes. But lake channels have silted up, creating a "dredging crisis," in the words of James H.I. Weakley, president of the Lake Carriers' Assn.

The Lake Erie port of Dunkirk, N.Y. -- site of a coal-fired power plant -- closed to shipping in 2005. A freighter ran aground at the Lake Huron port of Saginaw, Mich., last year. With ships loading 6,000 to 9,000 pounds less than their capacity in order to stay afloat in the shallower channels, coal-cargo totals on the lakes this year are down 8% from a year ago, the carriers' group said.

The domestic transport problem has led some coal customers to look overseas for supplies. Despite the promotion of coal as crucial to energy independence, imports have been rising since 2003. For example, Southern Co., the largest power supplier in the Southeast, brings in nearly 19% of its supply through East Coast ports from Colombia, Venezuela and Russia, said W. Paul Bowers, president of generation and energy marketing.

Coal's advocates say they are still optimistic about the future, because America has 200 years' worth of reserves -- and growing electricity needs. "If you don't want to use coal," asks Janet Gellici, executive director of the American Coal Council, "which 12 hours of the day don't you want electricity?"

Decisions up in the air

In any case, coal producers say, surging worldwide demand, especially from China and India, indicates there will be a healthy global market for their product. Indeed, that demand has helped drive up the cost of coal, which has been at record levels for much of 2007, which in turn drives up the potential cost of coal-fired energy.

The changing coal picture is making it hard for America's energy planners. Decisions about where power plants are located and when they are built can also determine where -- and whether -- new transmission corridors are built. And that could create spillover effects that hurt the availability of cleaner sources, like wind, that would use the same lines.

With power plant decisions up in the air, there's been a lag in seeking new transmission lines, said Suedeen Kelly, who sits on the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. And because the transmission lines -- like power plants -- take years to move from the proposal stage to operations, "ideally, you should be starting to build these transmissions lines today," Kelly said.

It's tough for those who would build power plants to make billion-dollar commitments that will last for the next 50 years while trying to guess what's going to happen in Washington. The White House, the Senate and the House of Representatives are sharply divided over versions of global warming legislation that could provide answers.

The president's threat to veto the energy bill forced congressional Democrats to drop a requirement for utilities to meet targets for use of renewable energy, such as solar and wind power.

Bush has also signaled that he'll reject any global warming legislation that includes mandatory carbon limits. The proposals are controversial in Congress as well.

This could mean at least another year of jousting -- and another year of indecision.

For environmentalists, a pause in the rush to coal is a good thing.

"It's the silver lining" in an otherwise clouded energy picture, said Bruce Nilles, who heads the Sierra Club's National Coal Campaign.

More important is which energy sources utilities turn to in its place, he said.

"That's what this is all about: whether they stick with the old way or we transition to a new, clean way of making energy."

Safeway's trucking fleet shifts to biodiesel

David R. Baker, staff writer

S.F. Chronicle, Saturday, January 19, 2008

Safeway grocery trucks no longer just deliver vegetables. In a sense, they now run on vegetables, too.

Safeway, the nation's third-largest grocery chain, said Friday that its entire nationwide trucking fleet now uses biodiesel, a renewable fuel that can be made from plant oils, used cooking grease or animal fat.

In Safeway's case, the biodiesel comes from soy oil or canola oil. It is blended with regular petroleum diesel before being pumped into the company's more than 1,000 trucks.

The move is part of Safeway's broader effort to green its operations. The Pleasanton company buys much of its electricity from wind farms, has switched to energy-efficient refrigeration and lighting, and is installing solar panels on 24 of its California stores.

"This investment in utilizing cleaner-burning technologies to operate our trucking fleet reflects our strong commitment to protecting the environment," said Joe Pettus, Safeway's senior vice president of energy operations.

Biodiesel generally produces less air pollution than diesel made from petroleum. And it helps rein in greenhouse gas emissions because the plants used to make it absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

It also works. Safeway has been slowly expanding its use of biodiesel since July and has yet to run into any problems with the fuel, which it buys from suppliers across the country.

"So far, so good," said George Waidelich, vice president of energy operations. "At this point, there's nothing negative."

Safeway's trucks fill up at the company's distribution centers, such as the one in Tracy.

Safeway won't reveal how much fuel it's buying or the price it's paying. Biodiesel typically costs more than regular diesel. The price increased last year as some farmers switched from growing soybeans to growing corn, hoping to tap into the growing market for another alternative fuel - corn-based ethanol.

"Whether you're looking at biodiesel, solar or wind energy, going green does cost a premium," Waidelich said, adding that the difference is less than 10 cents per gallon. "We thought it was manageable."

The switch drew praise from California officials who have set ambitious goals for fighting greenhouse gases and global warming. Safeway estimates that using the biodiesel blend will cut the company's carbon dioxide emissions by 75 million pounds each year, the equivalent of taking 7,500 cars off the road.

"Here we have a major California corporation, a major American corporation, leading the way," said Lt. Gov. John Garamendi. He said the state government should consider adopting biodiesel in its own vehicles.

San Francisco made the change last year, using a biodiesel blend in fire engines, buses, street sweepers and other city vehicles.

"There hasn't been an overall policy, and it's important that we do it," Garamendi said. "There's an enormous opportunity at the state level."

Biodiesel use has grown rapidly in the past four years, driven by soaring petroleum prices. The National Biodiesel Board, an industry trade group, estimates that the United States produced 450 million gallons in 2007, up from 250 million gallons the year before.

But that still pales in comparison with America's use of other fuels. The country produced 4.9 billion gallons of ethanol in 2006, the last year for which complete data are available from the Renewable Fuels Association, an ethanol industry trade group. In the same year, American drivers consumed 141.8 billion gallons of gasoline.

Few Americans own diesel cars, a fact that has hampered biodiesel's growth. But companies and government agencies have been trying it in fleets of trucks or other diesel vehicles. Often they try the same blend that Safeway now uses: 20 percent biodiesel, 80 percent petroleum diesel. Switching to that blend requires no major surgery for a diesel engine. Safeway simply cleaned its trucks' fuel tanks and changed the fuel filters, as biodiesel tends to loosen fuel deposits stuck to an engine's insides.

"Biodiesel is such a simple way for large companies to meet their sustainability goals," said Jenna Higgins, communications director for the National Biodiesel Board. "They don't have to buy new vehicles. It works with what they have."

She said Safeway is one of the largest retailers to use biodiesel so far, if not the largest.

"To have a company with the prestige of Safeway commit to biodiesel nationwide we think will give biodiesel a boost," Higgins said. "And we hope other companies will take note."

Biodiesel basics

What is it? A renewable fuel for trucks and cars that have diesel engines, not for cars that burn gasoline. It can be used on its own or blended with regular diesel.

What is it made from? Vegetable oils, animal fats or used cooking grease. Soybeans are the most common source of biodiesel in the United States.

What are the advantages? Biodiesel comes from renewable sources produced in the United States. In general, it creates less **pollution** than regular diesel and releases fewer greenhouse gases.

What are the disadvantages? It costs more than regular diesel, and prices can vary significantly from place to place. Biofuel Oasis in Berkeley, for example, sells it for \$3.99 per gallon, while Pacific Biofuels in Santa Cruz County sells it for \$3.69. It is not widely available for retail sales. It tends to congeal in cold temperatures.

Filling Up With Biofuel

Safeway's New Truck Policy Adds to a Retail Trend

By Ylan Q. Mui

Washington Post, Friday, January 18, 2008

Safeway's fleet of more than 1,000 trucks nationwide will run on cleaner-burning biodiesel fuel, the grocery chain said yesterday, the latest step in an initiative to reduce its carbon footprint.

The trucks will operate using a blend of traditional diesel and biodiesel fuel, derived from vegetable oils or animal fat instead of petroleum. Safeway estimated that the switch will help reduce its annual carbon dioxide emissions by 75 million pounds, the equivalent of taking nearly 7,500 cars off the road each year.

"Our customers care about these types of sustainability issues, and we are proud to be a leader in environmental best practices," said Joe Pettus, senior vice president for energy operations.

Sustainability has become a retailing buzzword recently as companies scramble to curtail their environmental impact and introduce organic and other earth-friendly products. For example, Wal-Mart has vowed to sell 100 million compact fluorescent light bulbs, and trendy home-furnishings store West Elm has introduced organic cotton sheets.

Safeway announced the move to biodiesel during a news conference at a store on Capitol Hill with several members of Congress and an administrator from the Environmental Protection Agency. The Pleasanton, Calif., grocer estimated its Washington-area trucks consume about 975,000 gallons of fuel each year. It expects to spend one to two cents more per gallon on biodiesel.

Safeway said the trucks are part of its larger Greenhouse Gas Reduction Initiative, which is designed to manage the chain's carbon footprint, address climate change and reduce air pollution.

Over the past few years, it has purchased 87,000 megawatts of wind energy annually, enough to power its 300 fuel stations and more than 50 stores. It converted about two dozen stores in California to solar power and recycled about 500,000 tons of materials annually at stores across the country.

Boxer ready to fight for climate

By DIANA MARRERO, Gannett News Service

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Tuesday, Jan. 22, 2008

WASHINGTON - Barely 5 feet tall, Barbara Boxer used a wooden box to reach the microphone at a global warming rally outside the Capitol.

But her voice was big.

"We are putting global warming on the map," she told faithful supporters last winter. "We are saying to our friends in the world, we understand America has to step up to the plate."

Boxer, a California Democrat who had just taken control of the Senate's environment committee, spoke to a crowd that didn't need convincing.

She now faces a tougher audience inside the Capitol.

The three-term senator is shepherding legislation through the Senate that would cut carbon dioxide emissions by two-thirds nationwide by 2050.

Scientists say the United States, the world's largest emitter of carbon dioxide, must significantly reduce its carbon footprint soon or face the planetary consequences of a warmer climate.

California could see dramatic changes under the most dire predictions. Farmers in the San Joaquin Valley and across the state could see their water supplies dwindle. The state's climate could become hotter and drier, increasing the frequency of wildfires. And cities along the state's 1,340 miles of coastline could be swamped by rising sea levels.

A fierce environmentalist, Boxer has the passion to push a global warming bill into law. But it takes more than one person's passion and hard work to make laws in Washington.

The bill faces long odds after the Senate returns from its holiday recess today - election year politics that tend to stall major bills, opposition from powerful industry groups and Republicans in the Senate who say the bill would hurt the U.S. economy.

At the winter rally, however, Boxer was optimistic. It was March and Boxer had reached the peak of her power. The Democrats controlled the Senate, albeit by a slim margin. And, after a quarter of a century on Capitol Hill, Boxer could set the agenda as chairwoman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee.

Her goal: to pass global warming legislation that would set up a cap-and-trade system requiring U.S. companies to trade credits in order to release carbon into the atmosphere.

When the legislative session ended last month, Boxer had fallen short of that goal. The bill passed her committee, but it was less stringent than she wanted. And the Senate leadership showed no sign they would bring her bill to the floor for a full Senate vote.

The world's leading scientists agree that greenhouse gases, the bulk of which is carbon dioxide, are largely responsible for global warming. Its effects, they say, are already being felt, as snowcaps melt and parts of the world become drier.

The United States signed the Kyoto climate accord to reduce greenhouse gases a decade ago but, unlike 177 other countries, the U.S. never ratified the treaty.

Points of contention

President Bush argues such limits could harm the U.S. economy and that the treaty does not impose similar constraints on China, India and other developing nations. China could soon surpass the United States in emissions.

Environmentalists say developed nations have the responsibility to show leadership on the issue and that other countries eventually will follow.

Some say Boxer's bluntness - she once questioned Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's truthfulness - makes it tough for her to work with Republicans. With a 51-49 majority, Democrats must often work with the GOP to get to the 60-vote threshold needed to pass controversial legislation.

"It makes it difficult to move her agenda forward," said Jennifer Duffy, a Senate analyst for the Cook Political Report.

By the end of the year, Boxer's committee had held nearly two-dozen global warming hearings but had not approved a bill.

With a new round of climate talks scheduled for December in Bali, Indonesia, Boxer set aside her own bill to gather support for a more viable cap-and-trade bill by Sens. Joe Lieberman, I-Conn., and John Warner, R-Va.

Environmental and scientific groups agree the bill doesn't do enough to reduce the threat of a warming planet. But they call it a framework they can work with to make larger reductions in the future.

Even if the Senate fails to act on the bill this year, Boxer vows to keep the pressure on, saying she stands to gain support for the bill after the 2008 elections. Democrats are expected to gain seats in the Senate.

"This is an issue the American people care about," she said. "Anyone who stands in the way will be held responsible."

Multinationals Fight Climate Change

By REUTERS

In the N.Y. Times, Monday, January 21, 2008

LONDON - Eleven companies are teaming up to see how they can work with thousands of their suppliers to curb greenhouse gas emissions, an environmental consultancy said on Sunday.

The companies in the program, called the Supply Chain Leadership Collaboration, include giants in their sectors like Cadberry Schweppes, Dell, Nestle, Pepsico, Proctor & Gamble and Tesco. The venture is being coordinated by the Carbon Disclosure Project, a British nonprofit organization that helps companies and investors to cooperate in the battle against climate change.

"Multinationals are seeking to understand where the emissions are lying in their supply chain and what risks and opportunities from climate change will be presented," Paul Simpson, chief operating officer for CDP, said.

In the pilot phase, until the end of March 2008, each company participating in the program has selected 50 suppliers to work with, the group said.

The Carbon Disclosure Project will publish a report after the first phase, recommending a standardized approach to emissions cuts. A second phase, starting in May, will include up to 2,000 suppliers associated with each participating company.

Stricter System to Trim Carbon Emissions Is Considered in Europe

By JAMES KANTER and STEPHEN CASTLE
N.Y. Times, Tuesday, January 22, 2008

BRUSSELS - European Union officials this week will propose an overhaul of the bloc's sometimes dysfunctional carbon emissions trading system, aiming to reduce corporate influence and make polluting more expensive.

The system would force more factories in Europe to pay for pollution and would seek to reduce the oversupply of permits. That, in turn, could push up their costs.

It would also be governed centrally in Brussels, rather than partly by member countries, as is now done, with the aim of reducing the ability of companies to profit by lobbying nations for more pollution permits than they need.

The draft proposal, not yet public but seen by The International Herald Tribune, is to be presented to the European Parliament on Wednesday by the president of the European Commission, Jose Manuel Barroso.

"This is certainly an example of what many developed countries need to do to stabilize greenhouse gases using stringent national policies and effective market mechanisms," said John Hay, a spokesman for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Bonn, which oversaw the negotiations that led to the Kyoto Protocol.

Lobbying from energy-intensive industries, particularly in Western Europe, means that the legislation could still face obstacles, and a review by Parliament and European governments could take more than a year.

In one concession, the countries would be allowed to keep money raised by selling permits that could amount to 30 billion to 50 billion euros a year, or \$44 billion to \$73 billion, by the end of the next decade, according to European officials who asked not to be identified because of the delicate nature of the plans.

Governments still could be urged - and may even be required - to put part of the revenue toward programs like research and development for reducing emissions and encouraging renewable sources of power, the officials said.

Henrik Hasselknippe, the director for European emissions trading analysis for Point Carbon, a research and consulting company in Oslo, said one aspect of the announcement this week would be a commitment to make polluters buy many more - and in some cases all - of their permits, starting in 2013.

Industries currently in the system, including steel factories, are allocated most of their permits by national governments and use the trading system to buy more or sell surplus.

Europeans took an early lead in efforts to curb global warming by championing the Kyoto climate treaty and by establishing the largest carbon-management system in the world. The three-year-old system involves complicated quotas that cap emissions from thousands of factories across the trade bloc. Companies buy or sell permits based on whether they overshoot or come in beneath their pollution targets.

Supporters of the system say limiting supply by stopping government handouts of permits would eventually drive up the cost of polluting and force companies to reduce emissions and adopt environmentally sound innovations.

In one of the most significant steps toward reducing corporate influence over pollution permits, the new system would take aim at electric utilities specifically, requiring them to buy all of their permits to offset greenhouse gases, instead of being allocated most at no cost.

Under the proposal, the regulators would limit the number of allowances in Europe - ending the scope for a government to allocate more than necessary - and steadily decrease the amount of allowances available after 2012 for manufacturing industries besides the power sector.

In a concession to sectors like steel, and to ease opposition from industries and political leaders in countries like France, the officials are expected to allow some free distribution of permits until 2020.

But the steel industry failed to obtain another measure it wanted to help its competitive position.

The European Union will delay a decision until at least 2010 on whether to impose a carbon tax or similar mechanisms on imports from countries where industries do not face added costs from climate legislation.

Israel Is Set to Promote the Use of Electric Cars

By Steven Erlanger

N.Y Times, Monday, January 21, 2008

JERUSALEM -Israel, tiny and bereft of oil, has decided to embrace the electric car.

On Monday, the Israeli government will announce its support for a broad effort to promote the use of electric cars, embracing a joint venture between an American-Israeli entrepreneur and Renault and its partner, Nissan Motor Company.

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, with the active support of President Shimon Peres, intends to make Israel a laboratory to test the practicality of an environmentally clean electric car. The state will offer tax incentives to purchasers, and the new company, with a \$200 million investment to start, will begin construction of facilities to recharge the cars and replace empty batteries quickly.

The idea, said Shai Agassi, 39, the software entrepreneur behind the new company, is to sell electric car transportation on the model of the cellphone. Purchasers get subsidized hardware - the car - and pay a monthly fee for expected mileage, like minutes on a cellphone plan, eliminating concerns about the fluctuating price of gasoline.

Mr. Agassi and his investors are convinced that the cost of running such a car will be significantly cheaper than a model using gasoline (currently \$6.28 a gallon here.)

"With \$100 a barrel oil, we've crossed a historic threshold where electricity and batteries provide a cheaper alternative for consumers," Mr. Agassi said. "You buy a car to go an infinite distance, and we need to create the same feeling for an electric car - that you can fill it up when you stop or sleep and go an infinite distance."

Mr. Agassi's company, Project Better Place of Palo Alto, Calif., will provide the lithium-ion batteries, which will be able to go 124 miles per charge, and the infrastructure necessary to keep the cars going - whether parking meter-like plugs on city streets or service stations along highways, where, in a structure like a car wash, exhausted batteries will be removed and fresh ones inserted.

Renault and Nissan will provide the cars. The chairman of both companies, Carlos Ghosn, is scheduled to attend the announcements on Monday. Other companies are developing electric cars, like the Tesla and Chevrolet Volt, but the project here is a major step for Renault, which clearly believes that there is a commercial future in electric cars.

Israel, where the round-trip commute between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem is only 75 miles, is considered a good place to test the idea, which Mr. Agassi, Renault and Nissan hope to copy in

small countries like Denmark and crowded cities like London, Paris, Singapore and New York. London, which has a congestion area tax for cars, lets electric cars enter downtown and park free.

Project Better Place's major investor, Idan Ofer, 52, has put up \$100 million for the project and is its board chairman. He will remain chairman of Israel Corporation Ltd., a major owner and operator of shipping companies and refineries. "What's driving me is a much wider outlook than Israel," Mr. Ofer said. "If it were just Israel, I'd be cannibalizing my refinery business. I'm not so concerned about the refineries, but building a world-class company. If Israel will ever produce a Nokia, it will be this."

Mr. Ofer has his eye on China, with its increasing car penetration, oil consumption and environmental pollution, where he has interest from a Chinese car company, Chery, for a similar joint venture.

Renault will offer a small number of electric models of existing vehicles, like the Megane sedan, at prices roughly comparable to gasoline models. The batteries will come from Mr. Agassi. The tax breaks for "clean" electric vehicles, which Israel promises to keep until at least 2015, will make the cars cheaper to consumers than gasoline-engine cars. "You'll be able to get a nice, high-end car at a price roughly half that of the gasoline model today," Mr. Agassi said.

He contends that operating expenses will be half of those for gasoline-driven vehicles, especially in Europe and Israel, where gasoline taxes are high. The company, and the consumers who use it, will normally recharge their batteries at night, when the electricity is cheapest, and they expect the batteries to have a life of 7,000 charges, though Mr. Agassi says he is counting on only 1,500 charges, which is roughly 150,000 miles, the life of the average car.

"Because the price of gasoline fluctuates so much during the life of a car, it's hard to predict the cost basis for driving," Mr. Agassi said. "But electricity fluctuates less, and you can buy it in advance, so I can give you a guaranteed price per mile, cheaper than the price of gas today."

Mr. Agassi predicts that a few thousand electric cars will be on Israeli roads in 2009 and 100,000 by the end of 2010; Israel has two million cars on the road, and about 10 percent are replaced each year.

Mr. Agassi suggested this model for the electric car - concentrating on infrastructure rather than on car production - at a 2006 meeting of the Saban Forum of the Brookings Institution, which Mr. Peres attended. He was enthralled by the idea.

Mr. Peres, who is sometimes dismissed as a dreamer by more cynical Israelis, has in the past embraced and helped to develop some successful notions - like Israel's nuclear weapons program. He is a strong believer in Israel's mission to better the world, he says, and not simply sell arms to it. Israel is the 11th-largest arms exporter, as measured by dollar sales, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

Mr. Peres, who knew Mr. Agassi's father, said in an interview that after hearing Shai Agassi speak: "I called him in and said, 'Shai, now what?' I said that now is the time for him to implement his idea, and I spoke to our prime minister and other officials and convinced them that this is a great opportunity."

"Oil is becoming the greatest problem of our time," Mr. Peres said in an interview in his office. Not only does it pollute, but "it also supports terror and violence from Venezuela to Iran."

"Israel can't become a major industrial country, but it can become a daring world laboratory and a pilot plant for new ideas, like the electric car," he said.

Mr. Peres sees this project as part of his "green vision" for Israel, arguing that what the nation may lose in tax revenue it will save in oil. He also supports a larger investment in solar power, saying that "the Saudis don't control the sun."

Mr. Ofer wants profits, but also thinks the project will help the environment, especially in developing countries. "China is on a very dangerous march from bicycles to cars without any notion of what they're doing to this planet in terms of air," he said.

And in Mumbai, he said, "you can't even see the sky."

James D. Wolfensohn, the former World Bank president, is a modest investor in the project.

"Israel is a perfect test tube" for the electric car, he said. "The beauty of this is that you have a real place where you can get real human reactions. In Israel they can control the externalities and give it a chance to flourish or fail. It needs to be tested, and Agassi is to be commended for testing it and the Israeli government for trying it."

Stockton Record Editorial Sun., Jan. 20, 2008

Color these efforts green and good

Stockton City Council members took the lead Tuesday when they voted unanimously to do more about using less.

The vote obligates city officials to measure and reduce greenhouse gas emissions and require future municipal buildings - libraries, firehouses and the like - to meet standards adopted by the U.S. Green Building Council.

Stockton is the first Central Valley city where such measures - designed to improve air quality and reduce energy use - have been adopted.

How will it be done? Among other things, when city officials buy new passenger sedans, they will be hybrids. They'll begin testing biodiesel blends in diesel vehicles. They'll ask Pacific Gas and Electric Co. to audit energy use in municipal facilities and recommend ways to reduce it.

Plastic foam products, such as cups, no longer will be purchased. City officials also will encourage recycling by placing containers shaped like soda bottles in parks and buildings. Not everyone was atwitter about these well-meaning new policies.

"It's window dressing," said the Sierra Club's Eric Parfrey. About a week earlier, he and the club had sued city officials over their new General Plan, which Parfrey's people say only encourages sprawl.

Mayor Ed Chavez accused the environmentalists of being paranoid. "We're moving in the right direction," Chavez said.

We agree. Stockton officials aren't going it alone, though.

The Greater Stockton Chamber of Commerce's green team program is designed to show business owners how recycling and energy efficiencies can add to the bottom line. The Record also has instituted a companywide recycling program.

A recycling exposition will be a part of this week's Ag Expo 2008 being held at the San Joaquin County Fairgrounds.

What Stockton City Council members have done won't keep the polar ice caps from melting. But it's a start. A good start.

Tracy Press Commentary Fri., Jan. 18, 2007

'07 Was Green, Let's Make '08 Greener

A commentary by Carl Pope, executive director of the Sierra Club.

All in all, 2007 was an unprecedented year for Americans who care about what happens to their environment. It seemed like our leaders and the media finally woke up to the realities of global warming — and it's time to start doing something about it.

It feels unmistakably as though the tide is turning, and lawmakers are beginning to catch up with the majority of Americans who want to move toward a more sustainable energy economy and re-establish the U.S. as a global environmental leader.

We celebrated the passage of the first increase in miles-per-gallon standards in 32 years as part of an historic energy bill, which is the start of a cleaner, greener energy future for America. Recognizing coal's contribution to global warming emissions, states around the country are beginning to say no to new coal-fired power plants (56 in 2007) and instead focus on investments that bring clean energy and jobs at the same time.

Court victories underscored the urgent need for action on global warming and rebuked those standing in the way. The series of victories began at the Supreme Court this spring where justices told the Bush administration that it was time to recognize global warming emissions as pollution and continued with key wins where the auto industry unsuccessfully tried to stop California and 16 other states from adopting tougher clean car standards.

Brave survivors of Hurricane Katrina testified before Congress about their experience with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, as the agency continued to house thousands of disaster victims in trailers containing dangerous levels of cancer-causing formaldehyde. The Sierra Club is also proud of work to expose the past failures of the Consumer Products Safety Commission to adequately warn citizens of the dangers posed by exposure to toxic lead in toys and other products.

With so much about the environment in the news, the year also saw a rise in the trend of "green" choices. Living a more environmentally-conscious life is now hugely popular as people grapple with ways to reduce their carbon footprint and impact on the environment.

The victories are monumental, but it is not the time to rest on our laurels. The summer of 2007 brought record melt to the Arctic ice cap, with sea ice coverage in September 38 percent below average and 24 percent below the previous record minimum set in 2005. There is much to be done in 2008. Fighting global warming remains top priority for next year.

Congress will debate how to fight global warming, how much to increase our use of renewable sources of electricity and whether to protect thousands of streams, wetlands and other drinking water sources from development. The government will decide whether to list the polar bear as "threatened" as its habitat melts away.

Of course the biggest environmental story of 2008 will be the elections. The president we elect in 2008 will have an impact on how America meets the challenge of warming that will be felt for decades to come. Citizens will have the choice of halting this year's momentum or building on 2007's progress toward a clean energy future and a safer, cleaner world we can leave for future generations of Americans.

We can also expect the outdated polluting industries of the past, such as coal and oil, to continue to spend millions of dollars trying to get in the way of America's clean energy future. Their expensive lobbying and public relations campaigns will be tough to counter, but the shades have been removed from the eyes of the public — the people understand that they don't have to settle for more mining, drilling and burning of fossil fuels. The technology exists to provide us with the energy we want, the jobs we need and the clean environment our children will depend on.

Carl Pope is executive director of the Sierra Club, an environmental organization. This was written for MinutemanMedia.org.

[Letter to the Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Friday, Jan. 18, 2008:](#)

Council needs to tackle environmental issues

The City Council elections are over, but there are some important issues or questions that we need to ask each council member. Other communities have addressed these issues, and with 2007 the hottest year on record, it is time to address these concerns here in the Valley.

- Why is the city still approving "drive-throughs" for fast food and coffee shops? Starbucks and McDonalds in the new Orchard Walk project have been approved by the Planning Commission.

The Valley is in a state of crisis with air quality. It's a cause for some medical personnel for leaving Visalia.

- Why have we not restricted the use of gas-fueled leaf blowers in the city? The pollutants from the gas engines and from the dust that is moved from the lawn to the street and back to the lawn needs to stop. Using a broom would be better for all of us, and unless the city council takes a stand, nothing will change.

- Why do we still allow fescue lawns that require water summer and winter? The Valley and California are both experiencing severe drought. Water will be as precious as oil in the Valley.

We have an agricultural industry that is the jewel of the Valley, not to mention the breadbasket of the United States, yet we threaten its very existence with cheap water that is disappearing faster than government can act.

The bigger question is not whether one can afford the cost, but will water even be available?

- Communities have restricted fireplace construction years ago. It is time to cease the use of open fireplaces in all construction. Eventually, air quality issues and the use of fossil fuels will drive these changes. After listening to a few of the debates, we are blessed with intelligent people on the council. Each of these questions, and more of a similar nature need to be asked of each council member. It is time that the city look to the future and make the right choices now. Gangs, high-density housing and traffic patterns are not the only issues in this city. Ask your council member the questions.

Why are we waiting when the obvious can be addressed now rather than later?

BILL OSAK, Visalia

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Sat., Jan. 19, 2008:](#)

Only on the bad days

It seems to me that when we have a good air day, one would not want to ruin it by burning wood in fireplaces in any Valley county. Why make it a bad air day by polluting it? If one has to burn wood to keep one's home warm, then burn it on bad air days when the air is already polluted.

How will we ever be able to breathe clean air if we pollute it on good air days?

J.R. Martin, Fresno

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses EPA's assurance that it will collaborate with San](#)

[Joaquin Valley to design a new plan that will reduce pollution in the air. For more information on this or any other Spanish clip, contact Claudia at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

La EPA busca un plan para reducir la contaminación en el Valle de San Joaquín

Noticiero Latino, Tuesday, January 22, 2008

La Agencia Federal de Protección Ambiental aseguró que colabora con autoridades del Valle de San Joaquín, California para diseñar un plan que reduzca la contaminación del aire.

El Valle es la segunda región del país con aire más contaminado después de Los Ángeles. Dos grupos ambientalistas demandaron la semana pasada a la EPA por bloquear una ley de California que habría elevado los niveles de control a la contaminación vehicular.

Una vocera de la EPA, Mary Simms, dijo que su agencia colabora con las autoridades ambientales del Valle para lograr avances diarios.

La demanda fue presentada por el Concilio para la Defensa de los Recursos Naturales y la Asociación de Residentes Irritados.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses how studies by Universities of California and Michigan show that pollution in the air, especially the pollution that comes from autos contribute to respiratory and cardiac problems.

La contaminación del aire contribuye a enfermedades cardiacas

Noticiero Latino, Friday, January 18, 2008

La contaminación del aire, especialmente la de los vehículos, contribuye también a enfermedades cardiacas, además de las respiratorias, aseguró un nuevo estudio de las universidades de California y Michigan.

El deterioro del aire podría contribuir a los males del corazón tanto como el fumar o llevar una dieta con base en grasas, informó el estudio conjunto.

El estudio fue patrocinado por el Instituto Nacional de Ciencias de la Salud Ambiental y la Agencia federal de Protección Ambiental.

El director del estudio, el latino Jesús Araujo, dijo que las peores condiciones de contaminación vehicular que afectan el sistema cardíaco se encuentran en zonas urbanas.