

Waiting to inhale

Don't take a breath without the report from our Air Pollution Control District

By Robert Krier, Union-Tribune Staff Writer

San Diego Union-Tribune, Thursday, Jan. 31, 2008

There's so much pollution in the air now that if it weren't for our lungs, there'd be no place to put it all. - Robert Orben, magician and comedy writer.

Robert Orben's line has a timeless quality to it. He uttered it in 1927.

But back then, few people knew what they were putting into their lungs. Pollution may have been a problem, but it wasn't measured with any regularity.

Today, people with or without respiratory conditions pay much closer attention to the air they breathe, and nearly every major metropolitan area in the country has an agency that monitors air quality. In San Diego County, it's the Air Pollution Control District.

Meteorologists at the district office in Scripps Ranch not only gauge air quality around the county, they predict how good, or bad, it's going to be. Their forecasts, which they release in the late afternoon each day for the next day, often help sensitive people plan their outdoor activities.

With exhausts from millions of cars, fixed sources such as factories and power plants, smog blown in from L.A. or elsewhere, plus smoke from the occasional massive wildfire, the forecasters have a lot to keep an eye on.

Reliable air samples and knowledge of local weather patterns, which greatly affect pollution levels, are the district meteorologists' bread and butter.

Measuring air

The district has nine air-monitoring stations around the county, from Otay Mesa to Oceanside, and Alpine to Escondido. The stations measure pollutants and chemical compounds, some down to as fine a scale as parts per billion or trillion.

In San Diego County, only two pollutants, ozone and fine particulates, commonly reach levels that pose a health risk. The district's daily air-quality index, which rates the air in categories that range from good for everyone to hazardous for anyone, is based on those ozone and particulate levels.

Intake valves on the roofs of the stations feed sampled air down to sophisticated monitors, which are kept in temperature-controlled trailers. If the temperature in the trailer varies a few degrees, the data is invalidated. Filters on the intake valves for the particulate matter monitors must be changed after 24 hours of use.

"They have to be handled with gloves and tiny tweezers, because if you touch it, the oil from your finger will throw off the reading," said Bill Brick, senior meteorologist for the district. "We're measuring micrograms per cubic meter.

"We have to know exactly how much air went through that filter over a 24-hour time period. There are all kinds of quality-control things."

The pollution readings, which are fed in real time to forecasters in the district's office, are just part of the meteorologists' calculation for their daily air-quality forecasts.

Inversion and dispersion

In the warmer months, from April through October, ozone, the major ingredient in smog, is the primary pollution concern in San Diego. Ozone can restrict airways and make breathing difficult.

In the winter (and during fires), fine particulates, material up to 2.5 microns (millionths of a meter; a human hair is 60 microns wide) in diameter, pose the most significant risk. Fine particles can penetrate deep into the lungs and damage tissue.

Wind, temperature, the marine layer and air pressure all play important roles in air quality, especially when smoke is lingering. The district's forecasters weigh those factors, plus

atmospheric conditions far outside the region and pollutant levels the previous day when they make an air-quality forecast. Winds from the north can blow pollutants from Los Angeles into San Diego County.

“Our primary thing is to look at the weather and see how that is going to diffuse, mix and move about the pollutants that are put into the atmosphere by human and natural activities,” Brick said. “We start with synoptic scale, very big stuff, and work our way down. We have to get down to the level of what’s the stability of the atmosphere going to be in the lowest 50 or 100 meters.”

Inversion layers, where warm air aloft traps cool, moist air near the surface, are often keys to air quality. A very low inversion of a couple hundred feet can result in extra pollution in coastal areas, while spots above the inversion experience relatively clean air. A taller inversion can cause pollutants to pile up in higher-altitude places such as Alpine. No inversion at all allows greater mixing and dispersion of pollutants and better air quality.

The top of the marine layer often marks the location of the inversion. When the inversion breaks up, trapped pollutants are dispersed.

The district’s meteorologists use computer models to help figure out where and when the marine layer will end, but they don’t count on the models.

“Once you start relying too much on models, that’s when you’re in trouble,” said meteorologist Adam Canter. “That’s when you’re wrong. Because models will do well to a certain extent, but sometimes they’ll be completely wrong, and other times there’ll be little intricate details that the model misses. Experience is probably the most important forecasting tool.”

Health standards for most pollutants are based on exposure averaged over 24-hour periods, so the district’s forecast is for a 24-hour average. That often confuses people who want to know what a couple of hours of exposure to higher levels of pollutants will do to them, Brick said. He doesn’t have an answer for them.

High expectations

Some county residents expect more from the meteorologists than they can deliver.

“Sometimes, people want to know the exact air quality at their spot,” said Bill Reeve, one of the district’s four forecasters. “They give their address and everything. It’s kind of hard to do that.”

One morning a couple of weeks after the fires started in October, one of the station’s hourly reports showed unhealthy air because of high levels of particulate matter. Brick said the meteorologists automatically check the readings at neighboring stations to verify the accuracy.

“If it’s just one hour, I’m not going to be that concerned about it,” he said. “We understand enough about these analyzers to know that they glitch sometimes.”

When the forecasters checked the hourly pollutant levels at the suspect station, they saw wild swings, including negative numbers that showed there was a data-collection flaw.

If there had been a series of confirmed, hazardous pollution readings, then the forecasters would begin the warning process.

“We’d start with the county health officer, then notify the local schools,” Brick said. “We issue a press release and things like that.”

Improving air

Fortunately, the need for warnings hasn’t come up too often. In general, air quality in San Diego County has improved in recent years.

The county hasn’t had a stage I smog alert, which occurs when ozone levels reach 20 parts per hundred million, since 1991. The number of days when ozone levels exceeded California’s stringent one-hour standard of 7 parts per hundred million rose slightly in 2006, but the number was still less than half of what it was 10 years ago.

Brick said that pollution from factories and power plants has been reduced, but the biggest reason for the improved air quality is more stringent controls on auto emissions.

"As the older cars go to the junkyards and get replaced with cleaner cars, each car is producing a whole lot less emissions than before," he said.

The average level of fine particulates in the atmosphere has also declined since monitoring began in 1999, although the October fires could inflate last year's average. Unhealthy air was recorded at one or more station around the county on five days after the fires began.

The worst air quality in the county during the October fires was in Escondido, which was hit by the Witch Creek fire. Particulate levels were considered very unhealthy to hazardous at times.

Brick often hears from people who think the county's air quality is worse than the district reports. Rather than downplay unhealthy air, the district takes the opposite approach, he said.

"We tend to forecast a little bit on the health-protective side," he said. "We're more concerned about protecting the public health than getting the number absolutely right."

He has faith in statistics that show a long-term trend toward improving air quality in the county.

"We know we're collecting good data," he said. "If people choose not to believe it, there's nothing I can do about it. But those people are in the minority."

State to probe development of 'green' chemicals Experts are unveiling ideas for a state effort to develop and use 'green' substitutes for toxic compounds.

By Marla Cone, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer
L.A. Times, Thursday, January 31, 2008

In an effort to reduce industry's reliance on toxic compounds, state environmental officials today will lay out a framework for transforming California into a leader in the development and use of "green" chemicals.

The proposals are an attempt to change the approach to environmental health from a chemical-by-chemical squabble to a wholesale shift in the way industry manufactures compounds used in products as varied as prescription drugs, plastic food packaging, pesticides, cosmetics and household cleaners.

State officials today will unveil the initial ideas for spurring innovation that could lead to nontoxic substitutes for many of the thousands of chemicals on which industries rely. The strategy, if adopted, would be the first in the nation.

About 80,000 compounds are used commercially in the United States, and many are polluting the water and air, accumulating in human bodies, spreading globally in the environment and harming wildlife. For nearly all of them, the effects on human health are unknown.

The report by the state Department of Toxic Substances Control will list 818 ideas to be considered. Detailed recommendations are expected to be sent to Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger in July.

"The goal is to blast California way ahead of the world," said Maureen Gorsen, director of the Department of Toxic Substances Control. "We're trying to develop an entirely new state policy framework to move California to a . . . sustainable society. No government's ever done that."

Linda Adams, secretary of the state Environmental Protection Agency, initiated the effort in April by authorizing Gorsen's department to collect ideas for promoting "green chemistry." Eight months of blogging, forums and other attempts to solicit ideas from business leaders, scientists, environmentalists and academic experts followed.

The state's initiative was spurred by a UC Berkeley report in March that said the United States had fallen behind in protecting people and the environment from toxic chemicals. The report, commissioned by the Legislature, encouraged California to act in the wake of weak federal regulations.

Among eight recommendations considered fundamental is changing the state's procurement process to take into account the environmental effects and "life cycle" costs when contracts are awarded and products purchased. For example, this could lead to the purchase of more alternative-fuel vehicles.

Another key recommendation is to expand state programs for helping businesses prevent pollution.

Other priorities include training new scientists at state universities to design safer chemicals and developing a curriculum to introduce the concepts in schools.

The state's list does not include new bans or other restrictions on chemicals. But three of the fundamental policies involve creating a new regulatory and enforcement system, strengthening consumer protection laws and better informing consumers about toxic substances in products.

"These foundational recommendations are a good start," said Michael Wilson, a research scientist at UC Berkeley's Center for Occupational and Environmental Health who was the lead author of the report that spurred the state effort.

But Wilson warned that state officials would need political will to make necessary changes. He said five of the eight recommendations would require little effort by chemical and product manufacturers, even though his reports "clearly point out that manufacturers will need to shoulder much more responsibility."

Environmental leaders say that California needs to overhaul its laws and policies, and that until that happens, they will keep lobbying the Legislature to ban many chemicals in consumer products, particularly those used by children.

"Right now, it still needs teeth," said Dan Jacobson, legislative director of Environment California. "We applaud the process, but there's not enough detail in there to applaud the policy," he said.

"These proposals aren't going to reduce people's exposures to dangerous chemicals. In the summer, when this goes to the governor, they are going to have to come out and say we need programs that phase out dangerous chemicals."

Chemical industry representatives have encouraged government grants, training, awards and other support of green chemistry but say mandatory replacement of chemicals is foolhardy because it limits choices for consumers and industries and could lead to riskier substitutes.

Exposure to toxic compounds is costing Californians an estimated \$2.6 billion a year in medical expenses for cancer, asthma and other diseases and lost wages, according to the report by Wilson and other UC Berkeley and UCLA researchers.

Higher Costs Cited as U.S. Shuts Down Coal Project

By MATTHEW L. WALD

N.Y. Times, Thursday, January 31, 2008

WASHINGTON - The Energy Department on Wednesday canceled its main program for demonstrating how to use coal without adding to global warming, saying the project needed an overhaul to rein in soaring costs.

The announcement ends a program started four years ago and described at the time as “one of the boldest steps our nation has taken toward a pollution-free energy future.” The program, called FutureGen, was also intended to provide hydrogen for fuel-cell cars and other uses.

But the estimated cost has risen to about \$1.8 billion from \$1 billion, and officials feared it would increase. The department said it would start over with a new program, but that is unlikely to happen before the Bush administration leaves office.

The deputy secretary of energy, Clay Sell, said that the program would be revamped to split off the costs of building a new coal-fired power plant, which would be paid for by the project's industrial partners, from the cost of the technology to capture the emissions of carbon dioxide, which the government would help finance.

The chief executive of the FutureGen Alliance, the consortium of 13 parties assembled at the Energy Department's invitation to build the plant, said the cancellation would set back the effort by at least two years and probably four, at a time when companies are making construction decisions on plants that will operate for decades.

The executive, Michael Mudd, said that the cost increase had been driven by inflation in plant construction costs, and not by any change in the scope of the project or its technical challenges. The FutureGen Alliance announced in December that it had chosen a site in Mattoon, Ill., for construction, with the carbon dioxide being injected into the ground nearby.

About \$50 million has been spent, with about \$40 million of that taxpayer money, he said. Utilities are reporting rapidly rising prices for stainless steel, concrete, labor and other components of plant construction.

Mr. Sell said the Energy Department had not realized how much the cost had risen until it signed an agreement with the 13 partners nearly a year ago, which called for the department to pay 74 percent, and the partners, including some from China, Germany, Britain and Australia to pay the remaining 26 percent.

Having the government pay only for the capture and disposal portion was a better deal for taxpayers, he said.

“We are much more confident in this approach moving forward than we were in the previous one,” he said.

But Senator Richard J. Durbin, Democrat of Illinois, criticized the cancellation and said he would seek to revive the project.

“Who can take the secretary seriously at this point?” he asked. “What community, what state, would make application for a new plant after what we have just been through in Illinois?”

He said the state's Congressional delegation was “determined to find an environmentally responsible way to use our coal to generate electricity.”

In his State of the Union address, President Bush called for a continued push for clean-coal technology but argued against the use of so-called earmarks by lawmakers to insist upon spending on pet projects.

Mr. Sell said that the cancellation did not represent a step away from coal as a fuel.

"We believe in the future of coal," he said. The budget request that the White House will send to Congress next week will include \$648 million for new "clean coal" research, 25 percent more than the request for the current year, he added.

Mr. Sell said the new approach was justified because in contrast to 2003, several private companies are now planning to build gasification plants, and it would be easier to piggyback on one of those. The plant can be built so the end project is hydrogen, which is burned in a jet engine for conversion to electricity.

But he acknowledged that the decision to start over also backs away from that technology decision. The new structure, he said, would allow for a conventional plant that pulverizes coal and burns it, with the carbon dioxide captured from the smokestack.

Ernest J. Moniz, under secretary of energy in the Clinton administration and an author of a report by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on the future of coal, said the new approach could work well, but "I'd like to see us get going quickly."

US scraps futuristic coal plant

By H. JOSEF HEBERT , Associated Press Writer
Modesto Bee, Wednesday, January 30, 2008

WASHINGTON - The Energy Department on Wednesday canceled a futuristic, virtually emissions-free coal plant scheduled to be built in Illinois, saying it preferred to spend the money on a handful of projects around the country that would demonstrate the capture and burial of carbon dioxide from commercial power plants.

"This restructuring ... is an all-around better deal for Americans," said Energy Secretary Samuel Bodman in making the announcement to scuttle the FutureGen program.

Bodman said the Energy Department would solicit industry applications for participation in the new carbon capture projects. The idea is for the government to pay for building the carbon capture and storage facilities and industry to build the modern coal-burning power plant. Each project would be designed to capture 1 million metric tons of CO₂, the leading greenhouse gas linked to global warming, officials said.

The shift has stunned officials in Illinois, where an industry group announced in December it would build the \$1.8 billion FutureGen plant, three-fourths of which was being paid for by the federal government - funds now no longer available.

The FutureGen program was envisioned as a unique research project that would trigger development of a virtually pollution-free coal plant where carbon dioxide emissions would be captured and buried deep beneath the earth. It would produce both electricity and hydrogen.

First proposed nearly a decade ago with an estimated cost of just under \$1 billion, its cost has soared to nearly double that. The project for years had trouble getting adequate funds and some critics long ago dubbed it "Never Gen." But in 2003, President Bush hailed it as a potential breakthrough in clean coal technology and a key to eventually achieve wider use of hydrogen as a fuel.

The FutureGen Alliance issued a statement saying it "remains committed to keeping FutureGen on track" but it was unclear how that would be possible without the federal funding.

Michael Mudd, the alliance's chief executive officer, called the project "America's best hope for near-zero emission coal technology" as quickly as possible. "It will take four to five years for DOE to evaluate new proposals, place contracts, and conduct environmental reviews for new projects," said Mudd in a statement on the Alliance's Web site.

The Energy Department on Wednesday cited its concern about the FutureGen cost escalation. Officials said it was preferable to pursue separate clean coal technologies instead of what one official called "a living laboratory" concept. It will begin a process leading to a solicitation of industry bids for projects by the end of the year.

"There was a consensus view that the price of this project will only increase," said Deputy Energy Secretary Clay Sell of the FutureGen program.

Sell said FutureGen was viewed as having little prospect of commercial viability. If industry pulled out of the program at some point in the future "it would put taxpayers at risk," said Sell.

The announcement to cancel the program came 43 days after the FutureGen Alliance, the private coalition developing the program, announced it would build the plant in Mattoon, Ill., winning a competition with two other sites in Texas.

Illinois' congressional delegation waged a last ditch, and unsuccessful, appeal to the White House to keep the project intact.

Illinois Reps. John Shimkus and Timothy Johnson, both Republicans, contacted President Bush aboard Air Force I.

"President Bush did take the time to listen to our concerns," said Shimkus.

Some Illinois officials, noting Bush's connections to Texas, said they believe the plant was scuttled because the industry group had selected Mattoon, Ill., over a proposed site in Odessa, Tex.

Sell called such a charge "outrageous" and said the department had tried to keep the FutureGen Alliance from making a site selection on Dec. 18, so as not to give false hope to the people of Mattoon, where the project would have brought thousands of construction jobs.

Sell said he and Bodman learned only last March that FutureGen's cost had escalated from an original \$950 million to \$1.8 billion. "I knew (then) that we were in to something that would not end well," Sell told reporters in a conference call Wednesday.

The department will propose as part of its fiscal 2009 budget to be unveiled next Monday \$241 million for demonstration programs involving carbon capture and storage from coal-burning power plants, including \$156 million related to the FutureGen "restructuring."

Gas Prices Seen Spiking Again in Spring

By JOHN WILEN, The Associated Press

Modesto Bee, Wash. Post, Contra Costa Times and others Thurs., Jan. 31, 2008

NEW YORK -- Get ready for another surge in gasoline prices.

Experts are predicting pump prices, which jumped by almost a dollar a gallon in each of the last two springs in many parts of the United States, will spike again this year as refiners and gas stations switch from winter- to summer-blended fuels.

The increases, starting as early as February in southern California, could push the average national price to a record \$3.50 a gallon or more by June.

That would be 17 percent higher than today's average of just under \$3 a gallon, which already is about 80 cents a gallon higher than year-ago levels thanks to the surge of crude oil that took futures prices briefly to \$100 a barrel. Prices in urban areas on each coast could approach \$4 a gallon.

And the reason for the spring price shocks? Analysts say it's linked to a shortage of alkylate, a little-known and expensive gasoline additive that some in the industry are calling "liquid gold." It

has become a must-have ingredient since refiners stopped using MTBE two years ago when the potentially cancer-causing additive was found to be seeping into ground water.

The alkylate shortage has become the most important driver of summer gas prices, said Doug Leggate, an analyst at Citigroup Global Markets. "Supply of (alkylate) will set the price of summer gasoline -- not inventory levels," he said.

Oil companies deny they are purposely limiting production of alkylate, which like gasoline, jet fuel and asphalt is a byproduct of the oil refining process. But only recently have some started studying how they can boost output, and alkylate prices today are more than 15 percent higher than spot gasoline prices. That means overall costs will jump when it is added in larger quantities to summer-blend fuel.

Without additives, gasoline doesn't burn completely, increasing tailpipe air pollution. And untreated gas evaporates more quickly in hot weather, potentially causing vapor lock when it changes from a liquid to a gas and blocks fuel lines.

The federal government long ago required refiners to boost the oxygen content of summer-blend gasoline to make it burn more completely, a problem that was solved by adding MTBE and, more recently, ethanol.

But ethanol also has a high evaporation rate, so refiners increasingly have turned to alkylate, which Tom Kloza, publisher and chief oil analyst at the Oil Price Information Service in Wall, N.J., calls the "magic bullet" in making summer gasoline.

Alkylate and other gasoline additives don't raise the same safety issues as MTBE because they don't bond with water as effectively as MTBE did, analysts say.

Demand for alkylate changes with the seasons, falling in autumn and rising in the spring. On average, alkylate makes up about 10 percent of a gallon of gas, though that rises to as much as 15 percent in summer. But making more of it is not as simple as throwing a switch since the underlying chemical properties of oil limit how much of any one refined petroleum product can be produced.

On average, about 44 percent of each barrel of oil ends up as gasoline, 22 percent as diesel fuel and heating oil, 9 percent as jet fuel, and about 4 percent each as heavy fuel oil and liquefied petroleum gas, according to the Energy Department. The remainder is comprised of smaller products and additives.

The refining process is loud, hot and smelly. Boilers separate, or "crack," oil into new substances by subjecting it to high temperatures and pressure. As different products are boiled out, pipes carry them to other boilers or vessels where they're further refined, mixed with other substances or cleaned of pollutants and toxins.

Alkylate is made via a chemical reaction sparked when olefin fluids and isobutane -- two of the smaller byproducts of the main gasoline producing unit -- are mixed with acid.

"As opposed to the (gasoline unit) that cracks big components into small, this one takes two components and basically combines them," said Mark Fligner, director of planning and economics at Valero Energy Corp.'s refinery in Paulsboro, N.J., across the Delaware river and just south of Philadelphia.

Owners of about two-thirds of U.S. refineries have invested the \$100 million or more it takes to add an alkylate unit. The rest have to buy alkylate on the spot market if they want to use it as additive in their gasoline supplies.

Refiners aren't gaming the system, purposely limiting alkylate production to boost gas prices, said John Auers, senior vice president at Turner Mason & Co., a Dallas consultancy. "They're not because they can't," he said. "You can't make more alkylate than you have feedstocks."

But there are tradeoffs that every refiner must weigh. For example, olefins and isobutane are in high demand for use in producing other lucrative products like plastics. Refiners can tweak their main gasoline producing unit to make more olefins and isobutane, but that would cut the gasoline output.

Alkylate prices have jumped from 77 cents a gallon in the summer of 2001 -- when MTBE was still in use -- to nearly \$3 a gallon at points over the past two summers. Wednesday's price on the spot market was \$2.72 a gallon, 40 cents more than the spot price of gasoline, according to Platts. Retail prices for gas are higher because things like state and federal taxes are added. In recent summers, that spot market differential has jumped as high as 60 cents.

Refiners place the blame for spring gas price increases on crude costs, environmental regulations that have increased the overall cost of refining, and their inability to expand or build new refineries fast enough to keep up with gasoline demand.

UN: climate change may cost \$20 trillion

By JOHN HEILPRIN, Associated Press Writer
in the Modesto Bee, Wednesday, January 30, 2008

UNITED NATIONS - Global warming could cost the world up to \$20 trillion over two decades for cleaner energy sources and do the most harm to people who can least afford to adapt, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon warns in a new report.

Ban's report provides an overview of U.N. climate efforts to help the 192-nation General Assembly prepare for a key two-day climate debate in mid-February. That debate is intended to shape overall U.N. policy on climate change, including how nations can adapt to a warmer world and ways of supporting the U.N.-led negotiations toward a new climate treaty by 2009, U.N. officials said Wednesday.

The treaty, replacing the Kyoto Protocol when it expires in 2012, could shape the course of climate change for decades to come. The Kyoto pact requires 37 industrial nations to reduce greenhouse gases by a relatively modest 5 percent on average.

Much of the focus has been on the United States, the only major industrial nation to reject the treaty, and on fast-developing nations such as China and India. Many are looking to next year, when a new U.S. president takes the White House. The leading contenders in both political parties favor doing more than the voluntary approaches and call for new technologies that President Bush espouses.

In his 52-page report, Ban says that global investments of \$15 trillion to \$20 trillion over the next 20 to 25 years may be required "to place the world on a markedly different and sustainable energy trajectory." Today, the global energy industry spends about \$300 billion a year in new plants, transmission networks and other new investment, according to U.N. figures.

Srgjan Kerim, a Macedonian diplomat and economics professor who is president of the U.N. General Assembly, told The Associated Press that cutting greenhouse gases alone will not be enough to pull island nations, sub-Saharan Africa and other particularly vulnerable parts of the world back from the brink of irreversible harm.

"Cutting emissions is a very important dimension, but that's not enough for this equation," Kerim said in an interview this week. "Inventing new technologies, renewable energies, investing more in research and development, is also a very viable way and remedy for resolving the problem."

In December, under the auspices of the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change, the 186 nations that attended a climate meeting in Bali, Indonesia, agreed on a "Bali Roadmap" of principles to craft a successor to the Kyoto treaty.

Last year, a Noble Prize-winning U.N. network of climate and other scientists warned of rising seas, droughts, severe weather and other dire consequences without sharp cutbacks in emissions of the industrial, transportation and agricultural gases blamed for warming.

That network, called the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, advised that emissions should be reduced by 25 percent to 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2020.

"Climate change and its implications is a broader process, more profound than negotiations among member states," Kerim said. "So our aim, our goal is to support that process, not to replace it."

Kerim said he wants to encourage partnerships between businesses and governments, and that he would refrain from encouraging nations to assign blame - and added responsibility - to the United States and other rich nations for their historical pollution.

"To approach the issue must be a forward looking way," he said. "We have to now try to find a way out. And to find a way out, you don't look in the rear mirror which shows you the back of your car."

British billionaire Richard Branson, who has decided to invest heavily in "biofuels" along with his Virgin brand of several hundred companies, will be a special guest at the assembly meeting, Kerim said.

"He was one of the first who reacted and who said that he's prepared to finance projects for clean energies and technologies," Kerim said.

Like Ban, who told the AP in December that his No. 1 priority is persuading the world to agree to new controls on global warming gases before the end of 2009, Kerim calls the challenges of climate change "my flagship topic."

In his report, Ban warned that global warming would probably affect women more than men. "The challenge of climate change is unlikely to be gender-neutral, as it increases the risk to the most vulnerable and less empowered social groups," he said.

Annie Petsonk, a lawyer for the advocacy group Environmental Defense, said global warming will most affect poor people and minorities, because the wealthy can spend more to adapt. "Women in poorer communities are going to face greater challenges protecting their children from the spread of diseases, polluted water, water shortages and so on," she said.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish says California will substitute toxic chemicals for others that are less harmful to people and the environment. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Sustituirá California químicos tóxicos para la salud y el ambiente

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Thursday, January 31, 2008

El Departamento para el Control de Substancias Químicas de California informó que sustituirá decenas de miles de compuestos dañinos a la salud humana y al medio ambiente por otros que sean inofensivos.

La directora del referido Departamento, Maureen Gorsen dijo que hoy presentará un programa de sustitución para cuantos químicos tóxicos sea posible, de una lista de 80 mil compuestos que autoriza el gobierno federal.

California se convierte con esa medida en el primer estado en el país en eliminar masivamente los tóxicos.

El costo por consumir sustancias químicas tóxicas cuesta al estado unos dos mil 600 millones de dólares anuales, de acuerdo con estudios de la Universidad de California en Berkeley.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the failed initiative that would have penalized gross-pollutant vehicles in California.](#)

Falla iniciativa que multaría a vehículos contaminantes en California

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Wednesday, January 30, 2008

Un legislador de California informó que tuvo que retirar una propuesta de ley que de haberse aprobado habría sancionado compras de vehículos contaminantes y en cambio premiado a quienes adquieran modelos híbridos. El asambleísta demócrata Ira Ruskin, dijo que su propuesta carecía de apoyo suficiente. La idea era aumentar dos mil 500 dólares a los vehículos contaminantes y descontar la misma cantidad a los llamados eco-amigables. Ruskin elaboró su propuesta luego de que el gobierno federal se negara a permitir a California activar una ley ambiental en diciembre pasado.