

Patients gasp at cost of new inhalers Environmentally friendly version phased in.

By Barbara Anderson / The Fresno Bee
Monday, Feb. 4, 2008

Asthma inhalers are going green.

And users are seeing red over paying more for the new, environmentally friendly devices.

But like it or not, asthmatics who carry inhalers containing albuterol, a quick-acting drug that opens airways, will be switched to new inhalers soon -- if they haven't already -- that are free of chlorofluorocarbons, an ozone-depleting propellant.

The old devices -- called CFC inhalers -- will be banned for use in the United States on Dec. 31.

Pharmacists say it's increasingly difficult to order CFC inhalers. Manufacturers began phasing them out a year or two ago for inhalers that contain hydrofluoroalkane, or HFA, a more ozone-friendly propellant. The propellant forces a dose of medication out of the inhaler.

The new inhalers are as effective as the old ones, pharmacists and doctors say. But they're more expensive and operating them requires some getting used to.

Overall, prices of the new inhalers are higher because there are no generic versions, said Nancy Asai, a pharmacist at Ray Fisher Pharmacy in Fresno. And that means higher insurance co-payments for the brand-name drugs. The new inhalers typically cost from \$45 to \$65, Asai said.

One brand of inhaler, ProAir HFA, is available for about \$30 at some discount pharmacies. But the old generic albuterol inhalers cost less than that.

The hope is prices for the new inhalers will drop in the future, Asai said.

David Harvey, 40, a Fresno radio salesman, paid about \$25 for his albuterol inhaler a year ago. Today, he pays about \$45 for the drug.

"Someone instituted this change," he said. "I sure as hell didn't ask for it, but I'm paying for it."

The government ban on CFC inhalers is in response to the 1987 Montreal Protocol, an international pact that called for the elimination of ozone-depleting chemicals.

The new inhalers are good for the environment, said Dr. Richard DeMera, a Fresno allergist. "We needed to do this," he said. "But patients are having to pay a higher co-pay for their inhalers."

Sonya Santellano, 30, a Fresno medical assistant, said she pays about \$50 more a month for inhalers for herself, a son and stepson.

"They're pretty expensive -- but they work," she said.

But some patients complain the new inhalers become clogged and must be cleaned daily and that they don't work as well as the old ones.

"It just doesn't seem like it packs the punch the old one did," Harvey said. "I still get the instant relief, but there does seem like there's a difference."

Patients need education about the new inhalers, said Corbin Bennett, pharmacy clinical operations manager at Kaiser Permanente Medical Center in Fresno.

Kaiser pharmacists will counsel patients when they make the switch to new inhalers in September or October, Bennett said. Kaiser members will not pay more for the ozone-friendly inhalers, he said.

Dr. Malik Baz, a Fresno allergist, said the new inhalers provide the same dose of medicine. He began prescribing the new inhalers about two years ago.

He encourages patients to keep trying the ozone-friendly inhalers. Said Baz: "All the studies show they work very effectively."

High-speed rail authority considers French collaboration

BY MARK RIVERA, Staff Reporter
Turlock Journal, Saturday, February 2, 2008

SACRAMENTO - The pace for introducing high-speed trains in California has been slow and steady, but the group charged with the task will take another step closer Wednesday.

The California High-Speed Rail Authority will hold a public meeting at the State Capitol in Sacramento to address a number of items key to the project's relation with the Bay Area and Central Valley.

French Transportation and Construction Attache Sebastien Gourguillat will make a presentation to the board about the French high-speed train program, TGV. Also at the meeting, the board will decide whether or not to enter a proposed co-operative agreement with the French Ministry for Ecology, Sustainable Development and Spatial Planning.

The TGV system in France has been in operation since 1981. The country began studies and tests of a high-speed rail system in the early 1960s. France's high-speed trains typically run around 186 mph. The authority has plans for trains in California to run at about 220 mph.

Other items to be considered at the meeting include authority staff recommending that the board create an Altamont Pass High-Speed Rail/Regional Rail steering committee that would investigate potential joint-use improvements to already-present railroads in the Altamont Pass connecting Northern San Joaquin Valley with the Bay Area.

Bundled with the recommendation for a committee is the declaration to begin work on the Bay Area to Central Valley final program Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Study and approval or selection of a preferred alternative.

The authority has two pathways from the Central Valley to the Bay Area to choose from: Altamont Pass or Pacheco Pass. Although there was no formal vote, the board agreed with staff recommendations at their Dec. 19, 2007 meeting for choosing the Pacheco Pass alternative.

"The cost has grown billions and billions of dollars because of the delays while this has been debated," Rod Diridon said about the Pacheco Pass decision in a Dec. 20, 2007 San Francisco Chronicle article. "Countries around the world are leapfrogging us and building high-speed rail systems. This is an environmental imperative. This is a transportation imperative. This is about the future of the state. Enough is enough."

A presentation will be made by professor Elizabeth Deakin from the University of California, Berkeley, on a land use and transit oriented development study that Deakin is conducting for the Central Valley.

Transit oriented development is planned with the pedestrian in mind. High-density residential, commercial and business centers are built around a major transit station, such as a high-speed rail station. This type of development reduces, but does not eliminate the need for a vehicle and makes home, work and shopping needs within walking distance for residents.

Examples of transit oriented development include the Fremont Bay Area Rapid Transit station, the South Beach-King Street and Fourth Street MUNI station in San Francisco, and the downtown Berkeley BART station.

Finally, the board will vote on a feasibility study for a high-speed rail station in the Visalia-Tulare-Hanford area, and a feasibility study for achieving zero greenhouse gas emissions electricity for the operation of the high-speed train system.

Customers revel in gas below \$3 a gallon

Stations in Visalia, Tulare ran out of fuel during consumer rush

BY KIMBERLINA ROCHA

Visalia Times Delta, February 2, 2008

Wherever a gallon of gas cost less than \$3 Friday, Visalians were filling up.

Costco on South Mooney Boulevard in Visalia sold regular gas for \$2.98 a gallon. The Arco station at Mooney Boulevard and Caldwell Avenue sold a gallon of regular gas for \$2.98 - until the supply ran out.

"Things are not supposed to be like this," Arco cashier Candelario Martinez said.

The AM/PM gas station on Cartmill Avenue in Tulare also ran dry. Gas there sold for \$2.89 a gallon before supplies ran out.

But motorists who did get sub-\$3 gas were happy to do so.

"By coming here we can save a few cents," said Les Petee of Farmersville, who filled up at the Visalia Arco.

Statewide, gas prices are dropping by about 10 cents a week. The statewide average for a gallon of gasoline Friday was \$3.12, said Marie Montgomery, spokeswoman for the Automobile Club of Southern California.

The national average was \$2.99.

"When you were paying \$3 and up, that looks pretty good," Montgomery said.

But don't expect prices to stay that way. They'll rise again at some point, Montgomery said.

"What we do know is that in the past seven years, prices have come back up and set records," she said.

Prices could climb again in April, she said. There's a possibility of record-setting prices beginning in May, she said.

That's when gas companies switch over from winter- to summer-blended fuel, a concoction of specially oxygenated fuel that's required by state law for [air-quality](#) reasons. Gas stations must begin selling summer-blended fuel by April 1, Montgomery said.

"The summer blend is more expensive to make," she said. "It's been cited as a reason why we have price spikes in the spring."

On Friday, motorists were taking advantage of the momentary price-dip at the pumps.

Sophia Lomeli of Exeter owns three cars, two Hondas and a truck. She recently traded in her Ford Expedition for a Honda Civic.

"I was paying \$70 to \$80 just to fill up," she said.

Now with more gas-saving vehicles and lower prices, Lomeli said, she's thankful for the relief.

"This is good for the economy and my wallet," she said.

Bioreactor project clears legal hurdle

By Eiji Yamashita

Hanford Sentinel, Friday, Feb. 1, 2008

Rejecting an appeal from residents and their advocates, the state environmental regulators are allowing the bioreactor project in the Kettleman Hills landfill to move forward. The decision came Wednesday. A day past its self-imposed deadline, the Department of Toxic Substances Control issued its decision to deny the appeal, eliminating a roadblock for the controversial project that has been delayed since October.

In reaction to the decision, environmental justice advocates said the denial was expected. They criticized the decision, calling it "factually flawed" and "racist in its conclusion."

Officials with Waste Management, which runs a 225-acre landfill operation in the southwestern Kings County site near Kettleman City, welcomed the long-awaited DTSC decision.

"We're very pleased with the DTSC decision in its evaluation of the appeal to ultimately deny it," said Robert Henry, district manager of Waste Management's Kettleman Hills facility.

Waste Management wants to convert 30 acres of the facility into a so-called bioreactor, calling it the "next generation" of environmentally friendly landfill. By injecting non-hazardous liquid into solid waste, it accelerates the waste decomposition process so that more waste can be crammed in and future needs for landfill expansion are reduced, Henry says.

The bioreactor is projected to increase the permitted waste disposal in the landfill by 600 tons a day, or 42 percent of what's permitted today.

Opposition groups led by San Francisco-based Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice say that's another assault on the well-being of the minority neighborhood that has endured a long history of being a dumping ground.

The DTSC issued a permit for the bioreactor project in September, despite opposition by environmental justice advocates and residents.

Among the concerns then:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has failed to consider cumulative impacts on the surrounding communities in its 2006 study on the Kettleman Hills Facility.

The bioreactor project overlays hazardous waste containing polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB), a toxic chemical once used in electronics.

Liquefied waste could leak into toxic waste underneath. The Kettleman Hills facility once had a major landfill slope failure in 1988.

Landfills aren't equally distributed. They are placed unfairly near where economically disadvantaged, Spanish-speaking people reside.

In October, Greenaction and other citizen groups appealed the DTSC decision, calling the project to a halt and urging the state to rescind the permit.

In its 21-page order just released, the DTSC rejected all 16 appeal comments, calling the opposition claims baseless.

"That's not surprising because the state of California has a 100-percent track record of supporting Chem Waste against the communities," said Bradley Angel, executive director of Greenaction.

The order stated three other groups -- El Pueblo Para El Aire y Agua Limpio (People for Clean Air and Water), Lucha Por Salud Justicia Ambiental (Struggle for Health and Environmental Justice), and Kids Protecting Our Planet -- had no standing to appeal the DTSC decision because they didn't raise issues during the designated public comment period.

That's false, Angel said, calling the DTSC statement "factually flawed."

In another instance, the order "recognized that opinions differ whether creation of increased landfill capacity is a benefit of the proposed bioreactor" because of potential issues such as increased gas emissions, odors and instability of waste mass and liner systems. But the DTSC also said these concerns have been addressed by the Waste Management project.

The DTSC acknowledged a significant air quality impact, but concluded there was no evidence that either Kettleman City or Avenal would be disproportionately affected.

Angel interprets that statement itself as "racist in its conclusion."

"They acknowledge it's true that it benefits some and it doesn't benefit others," he said. "It's environmental racism to say it's OK to harm a poor neighborhood and benefit people who don't live there."

Meanwhile, the project is set to go forward as planned, Henry said.

"We believe the project is a right thing to do for the environment," he said. "We continue to pursue the project."

Preparation for the bioreactor will involve infrastructure improvement such as drilling of wells for liquid injection and installation of automated pumping and piping, and that could take a few months, Henry said.

The legal fight is far from over.

"We'll continue to pursue a challenge, although it's undetermined what form it will take" Angel said. A civil rights lawsuit is a possibility, he said.

Communities to measure carbon footprints

County, 11 cities look to fulfill commitment to reduce greenhouse gases

By Julia Scott, STAFF WRITER

Tri-Valley Herald, Friday, February, 1, 2008

As hard as it is to count something you can't see, it's even harder to do something to minimize it.

Such is the challenge facing 11 Peninsula cities and San Mateo County as they rush to fulfill their commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions according to the U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Agreement, which commits a city to surpass the Kyoto Protocol target of reducing global warming pollution levels to 7 percent below 1990 levels by 2012.

Before giving everyone a bicycle, however, the parties - which include Pacifica, Daly City, Burlingame, Millbrae, San Carlos, Belmont, Redwood City, Foster City, San Bruno, Woodside, East Palo Alto and the county - decided to find out exactly what their environmental impacts, or "footprints," add up to. Conveniently for them, someone else is going to do the counting.

Help comes in the form of the Joint Venture: Silicon Valley Network's climate inventory project, which will calculate a city government's own emissions in a variety of areas, from electricity usage in government buildings to tailpipe emissions for employee commutes. Calculations will be based on data obtained for the year 2005.

Jointly sponsored by the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District and Joint Venture: Silicon Valley, the initiative reflects a growing awareness that cities must do what they can to reduce the causes of global warming on a local scale before the impacts start to come home to them in the form of sea level rise and unbreathable air. It also takes a regional approach to the issue, suggesting that no one can solve it alone.

"When we started talking about climate change, everyone agreed that cities needed to do greenhouse-gas inventories," said Brian Moura, assistant city manager of San Carlos and a member of the Joint Venture steering committee. "They would have had to hire consultants - the thought was if we pooled our agencies together, we could get a group discount price."

The group of participating cities and agencies in San Mateo, Santa Clara and Santa Cruz counties reached the "critical mass" of 20 members this week that was deemed necessary for the project to proceed.

Daly City and Pacifica were the last two cities to join the group, drawn by a \$6,500 grant offered by the City/County Association of Governments at the end of December to all participants. That cut costs for the six-month inventory project, which kicks off in March, to about \$8,000.

When the inventories are completed in September, it will be up to each city to lay out an action plan that commits to a variety of changes, from purchasing more hybrid vehicles for employees, to something as simple as making streetlights more energy-efficient.

The problem is that a city government's own emissions usually only account for 1 percent to

5 percent of total carbon dioxide levels, as compared with what is generated by the cars, homes, and industrial sites situated in any given city, according to Moura.

The vast majority of the emissions - 50 percent of the carbon dioxide in San Mateo County, according to the Bay Area Air Quality Management District - originate from the single-occupant commuter trips residents take every day. And that's a much harder problem to tackle, acknowledged Moura - one that will involve the input of community-led "green ribbon" task forces similar to those already formed in San Mateo, Menlo Park and San Carlos.

San Mateo's recently completed sustainability plan started as an inventory of government-only emissions but was expanded to apply to residents, companies and other sectors because of the chance to make a bigger impact. The action plan proposes wide-ranging changes to city policy, from a comprehensive green building program to more bicycle paths and walkable neighborhoods.

Expense, however, is an issue. Without the money to enforce them, many city-backed initiatives are likely to remain voluntary.

Pacifica City Manager Steve Rhodes said the inventory, which the city signed on to Monday, would allow the city to pick and choose where to take action "to make the greatest gain by putting energy into it."

In many ways, Pacifica is already ahead of the curve with its environmentally minded citizens and a biodiesel plant in the works that will be able to supply 100 percent of the government's vehicle fuel needs.

The city will likely save money by improving the efficiency of its operations, allowing the focus to shift to even more ambitious projects over time.

I think there may be potential here for things other places may not be able to achieve," Rhodes said. "It's not only to save money. It's trying to be a part of the solution to reducing global warming. For us, being a coastal community, that might be important someday."

Richmond panel recommends OK of refinery retrofit Nonbinding conditions added to project after a nearly five-hour hearing; planning commission to take up issue next

By Mike Taugher, Staff Writer
Contra Costa Times, Saturday, Feb. 2, 2008

A Richmond city panel that normally deals with lighting, screening and other aesthetic considerations recommended approval of a retrofit at the Chevron refinery but attached a laundry list of conditions.

Members of the Design Review Board criticized Chevron during a nearly five-hour, standing-room-only hearing Thursday night, but they decided they could influence the project more effectively by attaching nonbinding conditions than they could by recommending denial.

The project now goes to the Richmond Planning Commission, which can approve or reject the project. That decision can be appealed to the City Council.

After listening to a parade of speakers complain about pollution and odors from the refinery, several Design Review Board members appeared to be searching for a way to impose design restrictions that would reduce air pollution.

"There isn't any part of the design that doesn't affect public safety," Don Woodrow said.

"You folks are the biggest game in town, so it's not a big jump" to blame the refinery for air-quality problems, he said. "I'd like that to stop."

The conditions attached by the board, which can be accepted or rejected by the Planning Commission, include tree planting, accommodating the Bay Trail through refinery property, studying earthquake hazards, painting tank domes and forming a committee to explore

community complaints and assess alternative energy sources for incorporation at the refinery, among others.

Board member Ted Smith, a lifelong Richmond resident, complained bitterly that Chevron had abandoned old ties to nonprofit boards and other community organizations.

"All you do is take out of this community," he said.

"I used to be on your side. Look at your staff. There's nobody that looks like me," said Smith, who is black. "That didn't used to be the case."

Contra Costa County Assessor Gus Kramer told the design board that in light of Chevron's current appeal to reduce its property tax bill, the board should not take seriously the company's claim, in promotional materials, that the project would inject cash into the local economy.

"As soon as they get it finalized, they're going to appeal and say we were just replacing stuff," Kramer said. "I don't want you to think Richmond is going to get this windfall of millions to provide these services you so desperately need."

Chevron spokesman Dean O'Hair said Kramer was comparing apples to oranges -- the property taxes the company is appealing to the payroll and sales taxes and jobs the project will increase.

Earlier, O'Hair said the project is the latest refinery improvement intended to reduce pollution.

"This project takes us in the same direction by reducing emissions," he said.

Chevron wants to replace some facilities at the refinery and improve its ability to purify hydrogen in order to accommodate crude oil with higher sulfur content. The company says the project will not increase the amount of crude it processes, but the refinery will be able to make more gasoline that meets California's clear-air specifications.

A representative of the Bay Area Air Quality Management District told the design board that final estimates of the project's effect on air quality are still being negotiated between the company and regulators.

Chevron has said the overall effect of the project will be to reduce emissions, and that if there is an increase in emissions of a particular kind of pollution it will not be significant. The air district has scheduled a Feb. 13 meeting to discuss the project's effects on air quality.

In addition to approval from the city, Chevron also must obtain permits from the air district and the California Energy Commission.

Billions collected in state fees not spent on intended purposes

The Associated Press

In the Contra Costa Times, Monday, Feb. 4, 2008

AUSTIN—More than \$3 billion collected in state fees and taxes for specific purposes will not be spent on those programs during the current budget period, despite some complaints that the funding would be useful right away.

The unspent funds in general-revenue dedicated accounts in the 2007-2009 state budget increased from nearly \$2.65 billion in the previous budget cycle. More than 200 accounts hold state fees for dedicated purposes, ranging from parks to clean air programs and trauma care.

Dale Craymer, chief economist of the Texas Taxpayers and Research Association, said lawmakers can spend an amount equal to those account balances on other items or use the money as a budgetary cushion.

"We're basically borrowing from ourselves. It's like using the rent money to pay the food bill. Everything is fine, unless the rent comes due," Craymer said. "If you don't spend the dedicated money, then that gives you more money you can spend for discretionary purposes."

Gov. Rick Perry called on lawmakers last year to stop collecting dedicated fees unless they're allocated for their intended purposes.

"The governor has said for quite some time now the Legislature needs to make their budgeting process transparent, and they need to square up with Texans," Perry spokesman Robert Black said.

State Rep. Mark Strama, D-Austin, attempted last year to require that license plate funds always be spent on their intended purpose, such as proceeds from animal-friendly plates going to spay-and-neuter programs. The proposal failed.

"As a practical matter, you can't expect people to keep paying extra to support a cause if they're not actually supporting the cause when they pay extra, and as a matter of principle, we ought to do what we say we're going to do," Strama said.

To address such concerns, the Legislature last year eliminated a phone tax that no longer went for its original purpose. It also increased the allocation of some dedicated fees for their intended purposes. For example, the parks system received more of a sporting goods sales tax.

But large amounts of fees will remain unspent in other areas: \$199 million in the trauma care fund, financed by driver fines; \$561 million in the System Benefit Fund; \$522 million in the emissions reduction program, financed by commercial vehicle and other fees; and \$111 million in the clean air fund, which gets money from the motor vehicle inspection fee and air pollution fees.

Rep. Warren Chisum, R-Pampa, chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, said lawmakers didn't divert the dedicated funds to other programs. In some cases, the fees raise more money than is appropriate to spend, he said.

While lawmakers can spend an amount equal to the unspent balances, Chisum said, "The fund still has the money. We put the money back. It's just a bookkeeping deal."

John Hawkins of the Texas Hospital Association said hospitals could use money collected for trauma care immediately.

Parks supporters and clean-air advocates also have said their programs would benefit from dedicated funds that weren't allocated by the Legislature.

Area officials ponder going green

Forum on climate change draws about 100 leaders who swap strategies for cutting power use and becoming energy efficient.

By Chris Bowman

Sacramento Bee, Saturday, February 2, 2008

The first Sacramento regional forum about climate change drew nearly 100 area officials in from heavy rain Thursday to brainstorm ways to cut local global warming emissions.

As many as 32 city and county elected officials attended the series of speakers and discussions at California State University, Sacramento.

Participants got a crash course on the science, economics and politics of climate change as it affects California.

They swapped more than 100 strategies for cutting power use in everything from sewage treatment plants to streetlights and incorporating energy efficiency in everyday land-use decisions.

"It was the first climate change conference I had been to, so a lot of what I heard was new to me," said Peter Hill, vice mayor of Rocklin.

Rocklin was one of 12 cities participating, along with the counties of El Dorado, Sacramento, Sutter and Yuba and the area's major power suppliers - Pacific Gas and Electric Co., Roseville Electric and Sacramento Municipal Utility District.

Officials of Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District and Sacramento Area Council of Governments said they organized the event to help locally elected officials better represent community interests as state regulators and litigators escalate measures to curb heat-trapping or greenhouse emissions of carbon dioxide tied to every corner of the economy.

Top state regulators told participants they have no intention of infringing on local government's control over land use and growth.

Rather, they're looking to give communities expertise, models and money needed to shrink their "carbon footprint."

"Local action will be key to our success. We will provide the tools and support," said James Goldstene, executive officer of the state Air Resources Board, which enforces a state law requiring a rollback in greenhouse gas emissions from all sources to 1990 levels by 2020.

Added Jackalyne Pfannenstiel, chairwoman of the California Energy Commission, "There is no interest or intention or thought about challenging that authority, but a rather a question of how we can work together."

Sam Pierce, a councilman from the Sonoma County city of Sebastopol, presented a detailed look at how his community significantly cut emissions and energy use in municipal buildings and services.

Many of the changes, such as the switch to efficient lighting, will reap savings that more than offset the retrofitting costs, said Garrett Fitzgerald, director of programs at the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives, a nonprofit group in Oakland that advises local governments about ways to reduce global warming emissions.

Some cities in the region have a running inventory of municipal climate change emissions and programs to reduce them.

"There was nothing new for me," Roseville Mayor Jim Gray said of Thursday's conference. "Roseville is already out front. We have a 'green team' of employees from various departments that makes recommendations on how to make our buildings greener and reduce our carbon footprint."

Municipal services, such as garbage pickup and police protection, generally account for less than 5 percent of a community's total warming emissions, experts say.

However, small, well-advertised reductions that save not only the environment but also taxpayers' dollars build public support and confidence for switching to greener lifestyles at home, said Earl Withycombe, who sits on the board of directors for the Sacramento area chapter of Breathe California, a nonprofit public health advocacy group.

"The more models we have of energy efficiency, the more we will fire the public imagination and will to make personal lifestyle changes," Withycombe said.

Cities to be part of diesel pollution reduction

Chris Treadway

Contra Costa Times, Friday, Feb. 1, 2008

Concord is one of several target locations for a program intended to reduce diesel engine air pollution.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District on Thursday opened the application period for the Carl Moyer Memorial Air Quality Standards Attainment Program, which has \$12 million in grant funds available this year. The voluntary program provides money to allow owners of heavy-duty vehicles and equipment to retrofit or replace engines to reduce emissions below state-required levels.

The air district is targeting communities it has concluded suffer the greatest consequences of diesel pollution. Besides Concord, the target areas of eastern San Francisco, West Oakland, East Oakland/San Leandro, San Jose and Richmond will be given priority in allocating grants.

Private and public entities are eligible to submit applications, which will be accepted through April 4. Equipment that qualifies for modifications includes trucks, marine vessels, construction and airport ground support equipment, locomotives and agricultural irrigation pumps.

For details, visit <http://www.baaqmd.gov/moyer>.

U.S. close to decision on polar bears

It could be the first species to be listed as threatened with extinction primarily because of global warming.

By Kenneth R. Weiss, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer
L.A. Times, Sunday, February 3, 2008

The Bush administration is nearing a decision that would officially acknowledge the environmental damage of global warming, and name its first potential victim: the polar bear.

The Interior Department may act as soon as this week on its year-old proposal to make the polar bear the first species to be listed as threatened with extinction because of melting ice due to a warming planet. Both sides agree that conservationists finally have the poster species they have sought to use the Endangered Species Act as a lever to force federal limits on the greenhouse gases linked to global warming, and possibly to battle smokestack industry projects far from the Arctic.

"All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others," said Kassie Siegel, an attorney with the nonprofit Center for Biological Diversity. "And then there is the polar bear."

Even Frank Luntz, the political consultant who advised President Bush six years ago to focus on discrediting the science of global warming and refer to it as "climate change," has recognized the bear's potency. In an interview on the environmental website Grist.org <<http://Grist.org>>, he said the public has a "soft side" for the bear.

Federal government scientists have presented increasingly compelling evidence that the top predator at the top of the world is doomed if the polar regions get warmer and sea ice continues to melt as forecast.

Two-thirds of the population could be gone by mid-century if current trends continue, experts say. Bears are beholden to sea ice, where they perch so they can pounce on unsuspecting seals, their primary food.

Images pop up regularly of scrawny, exhausted bears dragging themselves onto ice floes looking like bones covered in sodden white rugs. So do reports of struggling bears swimming wearily in open water. It's a shocking contrast to the pop-culture image: smiling animated bears guzzling Coca-Cola in commercials, fat lounging bears drawing crowds at zoos or fluffy Polyester stand-ins adorning children's bedrooms.

"These are soft and cuddly, giving bears," said Anthony Leiserowitz, a public opinion researcher and director of the Yale Project on Climate Change. "We give them to each other on Valentine's Day and tuck them in with our children at night."

Charismatic creature

All this humanizing of the ferocious carnivore makes conservationists believe they have found the charismatic mega-fauna needed to transform the issue of global warming from a distant abstraction into something real, accessible and urgent.

The script calls for the big white bear to play a role similar to that of the American bald eagle in the 1970s, which was at center stage in the nascent environmental movement to tighten pesticide regulations and ban the insecticide DDT.

Conservationists hope the bear will focus the nation on curtailing carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases blamed for melting ice and other symptoms of a warming planet. They are eager to press this case in court; oil and gas industries and their allies fear it.

Heavy industry has reason to fear. At least one part of the environmental community believes the bear's listing would provide the leverage to stop a coal-fired power plant thousands of miles away from the Arctic.

Sen. Jim Inhofe (R-Okla.), who is known for his skepticism about global-warming measures, asked U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director H. Dale Hall last week whether listing the polar bear could be used to halt the construction of a new power plant in Oklahoma City.

"The Endangered Species Act is not the vehicle to reach out and demand all of the things that need to happen to address climate change," Hall said, to Inhofe's apparent satisfaction.

Andrew E. Wetzler, director of the Natural Resources Defense Council's endangered species project, said Hall misunderstands the legal principles underlying the act, which was fortified by a recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling that carbon dioxide can be regulated as a pollutant.

If the builders of a coal-fired plant needed a federal permit, they would probably have to show how its emissions would not erode the polar bear's habitat or jeopardize its survival, Wetzler said.

Several conservation groups have filed a lawsuit and threatened a second one to force the listing of the bear. Already, they have sued to nullify oil exploration leases in the Chukchi Sea, set for sale Wednesday, arguing that the bear's plight got short shrift during environmental reviews.

'Mother of all test cases'

Meanwhile, opposing forces representing the oil and gas industry, manufacturing and property-rights advocates have begun threatening counter-suits over the potential listing.

"This is going to be the mother of all test cases," said Alison Rieser, a lawyer and ocean policy professor at the University of Hawaii. "The legal question is whether the emissions of a proposed power plant can be tied to the cumulative effect of carbon dioxide, which is adversely affecting sea ice -- critical polar bear habitat."

Sea ice has been receding for three decades, leaving ever-expanding gaps that have forced bears into long, sometimes fatal swims. An aerial survey in 2004 found dead bears floating in the open sea off Alaska's north coast.

Scientists believe the global population of 20,000 to 25,000 polar bears is relatively robust, although they don't know much about bears in Russia and other remote Arctic places.

Unusually big melt

A well-studied population, located in Canada's western Hudson Bay, has dropped by 22% since 1987. The ice there breaks up an average of three weeks earlier than it did 30 years ago, giving polar bears there less time to hunt and build up fat reserves that sustain them until hunting resumes in the fall. As bears have become thinner, female bears' reproductive rates and the survival rates of cubs have fallen.

Such evidence persuaded the Fish and Wildlife Service more than a year ago to propose listing the polar bear as threatened with extinction because of vanishing ice.

Then last summer, an unusually big melt surprised most climate modelers, who had not forecast such a dramatic decline so soon. In September, the U.S. Geological Survey released a set of comprehensive studies that analyzed existing climate models and came up with a dire forecast: The habitat of two-thirds of the bears would disappear by 2050, as much of its range melted away for ever longer periods each summer.

Bears are expert hunters on sea ice, but so unsuccessful on land that they spend their summers fasting, losing more than 2 pounds a day, until the ice re-forms in the fall.

"If the fast gets to be much longer, they won't make it," said Steven C. Amstrup, a leading polar bear expert in Alaska and principal author of the Geological Survey reports. He and other scientists believe that the Arctic, which is warming much faster than anywhere else in the world, is changing too rapidly for the bears to adapt and find another source of food.

'Adorable and dignified'

Scientists and activists alike believe the data and the passion will make it hard for the Bush administration to refuse to list the polar bear.

"Unlike a terrorist attack, there hasn't been a vivid image that can activate public concern," said Cass R. Sunstein, a University of Chicago law professor who studies perceived costs and benefits of addressing climate change. "This is an animal that is adorable and dignified and apparently desperate. . . . So the thought that by the virtue of our actions that we are endangering them is potentially a big symbol for those concerned about climate change."

For the most part, Al Gore and others pushing for action on global warming have relied on statistical charts and a scissor lift to show off computerized projections into the future. Yet even the film "An Inconvenient Truth" included an animated bear swimming in open water without an ice floe big enough to stand on.

If the bear doesn't tug all the right heart strings, Siegel has reached around to the other end of the world to bring in another charismatic creature: the penguin.

She petitioned the Fish and Wildlife Service, arguing that half of the world's penguin populations are marching toward extinction. Among the reasons: declining krill populations and the change of snow to rain.

The downy fuzz on penguin chicks, designed to insulate them from snow, becomes sodden in puddles of rain. Chicks are freezing to death.

The penguin plan builds on the popularity of the documentary "The March of the Penguins" and the animated films "Happy Feet" and "Surf's Up," an Oscar contender.

The Fish and Wildlife Service made an initial finding last summer that the petition "presents substantial scientific or commercial information indicating that listing 10 species of penguins may be warranted."

Number of Homes Using Wood Stoves Rises

By C. J. HUGHES

N.Y. Times, Sunday, February 3, 2008

FOR three decades, Robin Norton of Bethany, Conn., heated her 2,000-square-foot home the way many people do: by burning oil. In 2004, though, fed up with the \$1,200 annual bill, Ms. Norton, an emergency medical technician, switched to a wood-fired boiler.

Tucked into a shed in her nearly four-acre backyard, the dishwasher-size unit sends hot water through pipes into her house, where it is converted to enough hot air in winter that she keeps the thermostat set at 74 degrees. But the system can also warm a pool "so my grandkids can swim in April," she said.

The Nortons are part of a small but growing number of families who use wood-fired boilers and wood stoves to heat their homes; sales are up 20 percent a year for the last four seasons, vendors in the metropolitan area say.

Sales have risen despite environmental concerns. Wood-fired boilers can generate thick smoke round the clock throughout the year, and some municipalities have restricted their use.

Ms. Norton did suffer a few pangs of guilt when she bought her boiler, although not for environmental reasons; her husband, Chip, works for a heating-oil company. They were quickly eased by their oil bill last year: \$7. And that was pricier than the wood, which loggers give them free.

"We would be freezing otherwise, now that oil costs over \$3 a gallon," she said.

New York's state average as of Jan. 21 was \$3.48 a gallon, about 40 percent higher than the mid-January rate of \$2.48 last year, according to the Energy Information Administration, a division of the federal Department of Energy.

For homeowners looking for alternate fuel sources, wood is gradually becoming more popular, according to census data. Wood is winning out over oil, propane and natural gas, vendors of wood stoves say, whether the new units are traditional log-burning kinds or the more environmentally friendly versions that use sawdust pellets.

Wood stoves and boilers are often used in conjunction with oil furnaces and tend to be found in rural areas, census records show. These areas have more single-family homes than apartments; boilers need yards, while stoves can require special chimneys.

In Hudson County, N.J., and Nassau County, N.Y., for example, boilers are practically nonexistent, American Community Survey census records show.

But from 2003 to 2006, more homes in Fairfield County, Conn., and Westchester, Orange and Putnam Counties in New York used wood for heating, while in New Jersey, Bergen, Essex, Middlesex, Morris, Passaic and Union Counties saw upticks. Those areas totaled about 7,500 wood-heated homes in 2006, the data show.

Wood-burning homeowners say the savings are considerable once they pay off the equipment, which can cost \$3,000 to \$5,000 for a new stove or boiler, and a few thousand dollars for installation. The cost of a month's supply of wood can run a quarter of that of oil, the difference between \$200 and \$800, and even less if a homeowner cuts or collects the wood.

Plus, in a time of collective guilt about energy consumption, wood may have an old-fashioned feel-good quality about it.

But critics say wood smoke contains potentially hazardous grit, which is practically invisible yet can damage lungs if inhaled.

Although cars and power plants also generate these harmful particles, wood smoke in Connecticut in winter accounts for up to 38 percent of the particles, said Alison Simcox, who studies the state's air quality for the Environmental Protection Agency.

One wood boiler can produce the emissions of 205 oil furnaces and 20 indoor wood stoves, according to a 2006 report from the Northeast States for Coordinated Air Use Management, a 40-year-old independent group.

"Many people do not grasp the pollution potential of this source, and I feel like a killjoy when I talk to them about it," Ms. Simcox said. "But southwestern Connecticut is getting blanketed by wood smoke, and it's significant."

This pollution is particularly dangerous in winter, when cold weather traps smoke in valleys, said Peter Babich, a state environmental analyst with the E.P.A.

"And fuel prices aren't getting cheaper, so it will continue to be more of an issue," he said.

Since 1988, the agency has imposed emissions standards on indoor stoves to cut down on particles, though wood boilers have been tougher to regulate.

In 2005, the Connecticut Legislature's effort to ban them was shot down under aggressive lobbying by the Hearth, Patio and Barbecue Association, a Virginia-based trade group representing manufacturers, local legislative and industry officials said. But the legislative effort did result in new rules, including that boilers must be 200 feet from neighbors' houses and that no painted wood can be burned.

Suffolk County on Long Island passed a law in 2006 that restricts boilers' use to colder months, and not near hospitals and schools, until the beginning of 2010, when they will be banned outright except for natural disasters.

All told, 62 counties, towns or villages in New York have banned or restricted wood-fired boilers. Most are upstate, though the list includes Warwick in Orange County and all of Rockland County; Rockland will adopt whatever regulation is passed by the State Department of Environmental Conservation, which is "reviewing proposals now," said Yancey Roy, a spokesman.

No New Jersey towns have restricted or banned wood-fired boilers, and no proposals are before the Legislature, said Darlene Yuhas, a Department of Environmental Protection spokeswoman.

For their part, boiler-makers agreed last year to tighten standards; many boilers will now emit no more than 0.60 pounds of particles per million BTUs of heat, down from about 1.2 pounds, said Lisa Rector, a senior policy analyst with the Northeast air-use management group.

In the meantime, smoke will continue to pour from heating units fueled by wood, whether it comes from outside the house or within, as at the 4,000-square-foot home of Jim Pasquale, a software executive in Warwick.

He has used a wood stove since 1993 in conjunction with an oil furnace. A more-efficient stove, bought in December, however, has allowed him to sharply scale back oil use, he said, from 12 gallons a day to 5 ½, for a monthly savings of roughly \$570.

"I'm reducing my dependency on fossil fuel," Mr. Pasquale said, "by getting back to basics."

Polluting Trucks Face London Charge

In the S.F. Chronicle, Monday, February 4, 2008

LONDON, United Kingdom (AP) -- Trucks that produce high levels of pollution will have to pay \$400 a day to drive into London under rules that came into effect Monday.

Mayor Ken Livingstone says the "low-emission zone" will improve air quality and reduce pollution-related deaths. But groups representing truckers claim it will be expensive to implement and bring little benefit.

The plan uses a network of cameras to monitor vehicles entering the city. Their license plate numbers will be checked against vehicle records to see whether they meet European Union standards for exhaust emissions.

Those that do not must register and pay 200 pounds a day - the current equivalent of \$400 - or be fined \$2,000.

The zone initially applies to diesel-fueled trucks over 13.2 tons that don't meet EU standards, but will be extended to smaller vehicles - including buses, minibuses, large vans and ambulances - beginning this summer. Cars and motorcycles are exempt.

London's program claims to be the world's largest low-emission zone. Similar zones exist in several European cities including Berlin and Stockholm, Sweden.

In 2003, Livingstone introduced London's congestion charge, a toll equivalent to \$16, charged on every car entering central London during office hours on weekdays. The charge has been credited with cutting traffic gridlock and increasing the number of bus and bicycle journeys.

Airbus jet first airliner to use alternative fuel

From Reuters

In the L.A. Times, Saturday, February 2, 2008

BRISTOL, ENGLAND -- An Airbus A380, the world's largest airliner, became the first commercial jet aircraft to use alternative fuel Friday, marking a milestone on the road to biofuels.

The double-decker A380 needed no modification to use the gas-to-liquid, or GTL, fuel, which was designed to be mixed with regular jet fuel so the airplane "does not know the difference," Airbus said.

Airbus hopes the plane, hit by production delays, will become the centerpiece of efforts to develop the next generation of cleaner fuel at a time when the aviation industry is under pressure over the effects of emissions on the climate.

Sebastien Remy, head of Airbus' alternative fuel program, said the fuel used Friday was no cleaner in carbon dioxide emissions than regular fuel, but it had local air quality benefits because it produced no sulfur.

By 2025, he said, a quarter of jet fuel could be some form of alternative fuel.

The fuel used, a mix of 60% standard jet kerosene and 40% GTL, was used in one of the A380's four engines. The GTL was made from natural gas, a fossil fuel and not a biofuel, which are made from renewable resources.

But Remy said GTL was the first step to developing biomass-to-liquid fuel, which can be made from a variety of organic sources including wood chips and crops.

He wants to avoid competing for food crops, and said the research emphasis was on growing biomass where food is not grown. Algae could eventually be one source.

The A380 took off from Filton, England, and landed at Toulouse, France.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Sunday, Feb. 3, 2008:](#)

Keep Valley issues in mind when voting Water, air, immigration -- candidates' positions matter.

From immigration to water to air quality, much is at stake in the presidential primary Tuesday for Valley residents and voters. It's important to take the time to sort out where the candidates are on these issues.

Start with immigration, perhaps even more contentious an issue than the Iraq war. The issue is crucial in the Valley, where the agriculture industry, in particular, is heavily dependent on immigrants -- legal or otherwise -- to supply the work force that labors in the fields and packing houses.

All of the candidates in both parties support increased enforcement along the border. Among the Democrats, Sens. Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama both favor comprehensive reform.

So does Republican Sen. John McCain, though McCain says he would first secure the border. McCain's rival, former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney, wants tamper-proof ID cards issued to legal immigrants, so employers could quickly check their status. Clinton opposes giving driver's licenses to illegals; Obama would permit it.

Both Democrats and McCain favor an agricultural guest-worker program. Romney attacked McCain on the issue, saying the Arizona senator favors "amnesty" for illegals.

When it comes to air quality, both Obama and Clinton have supported California's efforts to implement much tougher greenhouse gas emissions rules, which the Bush administration has sought to thwart.

McCain has not specifically taken a position on the California effort, but has called for increased fuel efficiency. Romney attacked McCain in the Michigan primary for that stance. Romney has supported the Bush administration's contention that one national standard is better public policy than letting California -- and other states that choose to adopt California's regulations -- enforce stricter rules.

Unfortunately, most of the candidates have had little to say on the water issues that face California.

Clinton has said that she favors "conservation and underground storage" as means to extend water supplies. "Building new reservoirs should not be the first response to our water needs," she told The Denver Post.

McCain, as a westerner, has a good understanding of the chronic water problems facing western states in general.

On another issue with resonance in the Valley, both Obama and Clinton strongly support efforts to get the U.S. government to officially recognize the Armenian genocide, and to pressure Turkey to do likewise.

McCain has said he recognizes the genocide, but opposes official policy statements to that effect because it would upset Turkey, an important ally in the Middle East. Romney has never declared support for or opposition to genocide recognition, which is curious -- Massachusetts, where he served as governor, is home to a significant Armenian-American population.

These are all serious issues, and in many cases there are important distinctions between the candidates. Voters have an obligation to study the issues and then choose carefully. After all, one of these people will be the next president of the United States.

[Modesto Bee, Letter to the Editor, Monday, February 4, 2008](#)

Inland port project right for valley

If there was a proposal that would simultaneously create jobs, reduce traffic and cut smog in the valley, would you approve of it? The inland port at Crows Landing would do all of this. The only thing holding this project back is shortsighted people who do not want this in their back yard. It is the right thing for the valley and so we need to work together and get it done.

A train moves one ton of cargo 406 miles on one gallon of fuel. This kind of efficiency is what we need.

MARTIN LYONS, Ripon

[Letter to the Merced Sun-Star, Saturday, Feb. 2, 2008:](#)

Don't diss Wal-Mart

Editor: I don't know anything about Ryan Kelley who wrote the recent letter "No to Wal-Mart center," but I believe he is well fed and has plenty of spendable cash, because he is trying hard to cause an excellent employer to go elsewhere to build its distribution center. Every city up and down the Central Valley has a distribution center, so what's up with turning this one away? I question his "research." Was it really research or merely his attempt to justify his already established position on the project?

The location is not horrible. It is proposed within already existing zoning, no variations required. It is close to a brand-new, major freeway interchange to accommodate auto and truck traffic, and in an area where the existing zoning calls for the intended use. It's almost impossible for a spot to be better suited for the project.

Air quality? There is no argument when it comes to air quality, but as long as we all (Ryan, too) drive internal combustion driven vehicles, we will continue to cause pollution. But as far as it being an argument against the distribution center, it is not even a point. The distribution center will be built and almost certainly somewhere close to our area. So the air we breathe will be the same, no matter which county gets the income.

And the traffic increase is, again, going to come about, no matter what. The 900 diesel trucks he mentions are going to be operating in Merced and surrounding counties. The next industry he decided to slam was farming. Hello! Does he have any clue where he lives and how well fed and clothed he is? He didn't make many points with that remark.

Then he remarked about the supposed bad reputation Wal-Mart has in environmental issues. Well, I don't have any research to cite there, but the jump he made was to assume ("I wonder" was the phrase he used) that they will be bad violators. To me, that shows an already existing negative attitude toward the project, not an open mind.

Merced County needs tax revenue and its residents need well-paying jobs. Wal-Mart's checks don't bounce. This is a clean industry and Wal-Mart is a proven industry, worldwide, that wants to come here to do business. That's what it's all about. I really don't see all this "harm" Ryan sees the project is bringing to Merced County.

Jim Nash, Merced

[Sacramento Bee, Letter to the Editor, Thursday, January 31, 2008](#)

Why make the air even worse?

Re "In Yuba, 'N' is for No," editorial, Jan. 18: I am a resident of south Nevada County and am very close to where this housing development is proposed. I am for rural quality and good country living. To have a massive housing project of this nature in my backyard would have a negative impact.

The amount of increased smog and emissions from the thousands of new commuters would be terrible. Nevada County already has some of the worst air in the nation. To add that much more bad air to be blown up into our foothills is not all right. We have kids, organic farms, schools, businesses and a lovely community that values what we have. Please say No on the Yuba Highlands project.

- Tina Collins, Grass Valley

[N.Y. Times editorial, Monday, Feb. 4, 2008:](#)

Late and Lame on Warming

Even allowing for the low expectations we bring to any lame-duck president's final State of the Union address, President Bush's brief discussion of climate change seemed especially disconnected from reality: from the seriousness and urgency of the problem and from his own responsibility for obstructing progress.

His call for a new international agreement to address global warming was disingenuous, coming as it did from a president who rejected the Kyoto Protocol as soon as he moved into the White House. His promise to work with other nations on new, low-carbon technologies is one he has been unveiling for the last seven years.

We were told that Mr. Bush's thinking on global warming had evolved. So there were slim hopes that, after years of stonewalling, he might agree to work with Congress on a mandatory program of capping carbon emissions. That would begin to address the problem at home and give the United States the credibility it needs to press other major emitters like China to act. No such luck. Mr. Bush remains wedded to a voluntary approach that has not inspired industry to take aggressive action.

Meanwhile, the stonewalling continues. Despite heavy pressure from Congress and many state governors, the Environmental Protection Agency shows no sign of reversing its decision to prohibit California and more than a dozen other states from moving forward with aggressive measures to cut greenhouse gas emissions from automobiles.

Nor has the E.P.A. made any visible effort to comply with the Supreme Court's landmark decision last spring requiring the agency to begin regulating carbon dioxide emissions from vehicles. Mr. Bush said he would follow the court's order and the E.P.A. promised at least a draft of new regulations by last fall. We are still waiting.

The administration has long trumpeted technology, not regulation, as the answer. There was no trumpeting last week, when it unexpectedly canceled FutureGen - its much-touted, \$1.8 billion attempt to develop a cutting-edge coal plant that would turn coal to gas, strip out and store underground the carbon dioxide that contributes to climate change, and then burn the remaining gas to produce hydrogen and electricity. And what of Mr. Bush's hydrogen-powered Freedom Car? That, too, has receded from view.

These setbacks do not mean that government should not seek new technologies to address global warming. Continuing research at all levels is vital. The error is placing too much faith in grandiose projects and technological leaps to solve a problem that is urgently here and now. The most realistic path to reducing global warming gases is to limit emissions across the economy by putting a price on carbon. That would give private industry strong incentives to develop greater efficiencies and cleaner fuels.

This is the path called for in a bill now before Congress. Sponsored by Senator John Warner and Senator Joseph Lieberman, it would impose binding targets on greenhouse gas emissions. It is also the course that Mr. Bush has stubbornly and dismayingly resisted since he arrived in Washington. With a year left in office, Mr. Bush could still make a difference - but not with more empty promises and obstruction.

[Blurb from Valley Voice Newspaper, Monday, February 04, 2008](#)

What's New

The small farming community of Arvin in Kern County is the recipient of more than a half-million dollars in funding from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to switch out municipal fleet vehicles for cleaner models. In an agreement approved by the Arvin City Council last week, the Air District awarded Arvin \$546,700 because its geography and location in the Valley make it the most challenging place in the air basin to reach attainment for health-based federal air-pollution standards -- specifically for ozone (smog). Arvin is also the initial target of a new Air District program to replace gross-polluting cars with newer, cleaner models.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the link between truck driver's who use diesel and heart disease. Harvard's study has shown that they are 50 percent more likely to die of cardiac problems. For more information on this clip, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Harvard vincula muertes por afecciones cardiacas con el consumo de diesel

Radio Bilingüe, Friday, February 1, 2008

La Universidad de Harvard presentó hoy nuevas evidencias sobre la contaminación que causan los vehículos, especialmente que consumen de diesel, como causa de muertes por afecciones cardiacas.

Los camioneros sufren 50 por ciento más muertes por enfermedades del corazón que el resto de la población.

Harvard estudió archivos médicos de 54 mil conductores que trabajan regularmente con camiones de carga en el país.

La Oficina de Recursos del Aire de California calificó el estudio de la Escuela de Medicina de Harvard como el más completo hasta ahora.