

Vouchers for cleaner heating

FROM STAFF REPORTS

Tri-Valley Herald, Saturday, Feb. 9, 2008

TRACY - Valley residents looking to jettison their old, polluting wood stoves and fireplace inserts in exchange for cleaner models can now get a little help from the San Joaquin Air District.

In a combined effort with nonprofit "Operation Clean Air" and the Air District's Burn Cleaner Fireplace and Wood Stove Change-out operation, the program is offering vouchers to be used toward the purchase of cleaner natural gas or propane stoves and fireplace inserts.

"These devices can be very expensive, so we hope that this program will encourage people to make the investment in a cleaner, lower-polluting model," said Air District spokesperson Jaime Holt.

The \$350 vouchers may be used at one of several participating retailers, who will oversee installation of the new device and will confirm the old device was replaced or removed and destroyed.

Particulate pollution from older wood stoves and inserts is a significant contributor to wintertime air pollution in the Valley. Officials project the cash incentive will motivate people who have been considering upgrading their stove or insert to finally make the change.

"(Operation Clean Air) is committed to seeing clean air in the San Joaquin Valley and this program is a great way for Valley residents to get involved," said Hal Bolen, chairman for Operation Clean Air.

Applications for the program will be accepted until April 30, or until the program funds are expended.

For more information or to apply for the program, visit <http://www.valleyair.org> or call the district at 559-230-6000.

A hazy shade of winter

Calm weather allows tiny debris to accumulate in the air.

By Mark Grossi

The Fresno Bee, Saturday, Feb. 9, 2008

A reprieve from winter storms is bringing balmy afternoons to the San Joaquin Valley, but it's also making a mess of the air.

Tiny bits of soot, dust and chemical debris have accumulated in the air since Sunday -- the result of mild, calm weather that traps the pollution in the Valley.

"You can see the particulate levels are climbing just by following the air quality index each day," said meteorologist Gary Arcemont of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. "Now it's unhealthy for people with sensitive lungs."

The air district today is asking residents in Fresno County to refrain from using fireplaces and wood-burning stoves.

Officials made the same request of residents in Tulare and Kern counties.

Wood fires emit specks of soot and ash. The microscopic particles -- 30 of which would fit across the width of a human hair -- evade the body's defenses and lodge deep in the lungs. This can trigger asthma and other problems.

The air is not dirty enough for the district to issue a ban on residential wood burning. But people with sensitive lungs are advised to refrain from vigorous outdoor activity over the next several days in the region's most polluted counties.

No storms are forecast for next week, and temperatures are expected to climb into the mid-60s. The National Weather Service expects only light wind.

The pattern is familiar in the Valley when winter storms depart, followed by mild weather or fog. The lack of wind or air movement sets the stage for pollution problems.

A stormy January this year appears to have reduced the number of bad-air episodes, though a full analysis is not yet available. Fresno recorded 3.32 inches of January rain, which is more than an inch above the average for the month.

But, for clearing out pollution, rainfall isn't the most crucial part of the storm, Arcemont said.

"We've actually seen particulates increase when there's light rain," he said. "The cleansing comes when the air mass changes. That's what happens when a storm passes through."

Last season during a mild, dry winter, the air district banned wood burning in fireplaces 12 times for Fresno County. This season, only six bans have been ordered for this county. The last one was on Dec. 13.

The season for wood-burning restrictions ends Feb. 29.

But Arcemont said the chances of further mandatory curtailments begin to diminish by mid-February.

"Usually, you start seeing an end to the winter particulate problems as the month moves on," he said.

"We get more air movement as we start getting toward spring, so smoke from fireplaces doesn't tend to get trapped in inversion layers as much."

Ag businesses leaving valley as farmers struggle to meet regs

By Tim Moran, The Modesto Bee

Modesto Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Monday, Feb. 11, 2008

Milk and related dairy products are the No. 1 farm commodity in the Northern San Joaquin Valley, earning dairy farmers more than \$1.3 billion in 2006.

That's a good thing, right? What's more wholesome than milk?

Well, clean air and water would be right up there on the list.

The San Joaquin Valley faces an uphill battle to reach compliance with federal air quality standards, and groundwater contamination is a growing concern.

Dairies have been identified as potentially significant sources of air and water pollution in the valley, and some fear the cost of meeting tougher environmental standards will prevent those businesses from expanding or force them to move out of the state.

"California is a great place to live, but a tough place to do business," said Michael Marsh, chief executive officer for Modesto-based Western United Dairymen.

In 2006, the state had a net loss of 69 of its 2,043 dairies, according to statistics from the California Department of Food and Agriculture. The Northern San Joaquin Valley counties of Merced, Stanislaus and San Joaquin accounted for the loss of 47 of those dairies. Southern valley counties Fresno and Tulare had a net gain in dairies.

Dairies are closing or moving to states with fewer regulations, such as Texas, Idaho, New Mexico, Michigan and New York, Marsh said.

To build a dairy in the valley, a farmer needs permits from the local city or county, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District and the Regional Water Quality Control Board. Getting environmental reports and permits can take five years, and cost \$750,000, Marsh said.

Foster Farms is starting that process for an expansion of a dairy farm near Hickman. The company wants to expand from 720 cows to 2,400, and will need to do an environmental impact report.

An initial study of the project showed potentially significant effects on air and water quality. That finding triggered the environmental impact report. The reports can cost \$100,000 to prepare, according to Stanislaus County Planning Department Director Ron Freitas.

Frequently, dairy operators who go through the lengthy and expensive process find themselves being sued by someone, Marsh said.

Farmers usually win the cases, Marsh said, but a trip through the state courts can cost \$600,000 in nonreimbursable legal fees.

In Idaho, Marsh said, the permitting process costs \$15,000, and a dairyman can be milking cows in 90 days.

On the other hand, in an effort to meet federal ozone and dust standards, and a 2013 deadline to get into ozone compliance, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District requires new or expanding dairies to use best available control technology to curtail air emissions, said Dave Warner, director of permit services for the district.

"Even with the controls, there are some significant emissions in the larger dairies we see in the San Joaquin Valley."

Regulation-dairy size link

Dairy industry officials say the increasing level of regulation is, in part, what's driving the trend toward larger dairies. Dairy men need to spread the cost of regulation over a larger number of animals to maintain a profit.

The district isn't just singling out dairies, Warner added.

"From our perspective, all expansions -- dairies, warehouses, new subdivisions -- all have significant impacts that require careful thought," he said. "It's a wide-spread problem we are all responsible for."

Water regulations pose an even bigger challenge for dairies. The waste water and manure generated by dairies pose a potential threat to ground water and surface water, and the state and regional water quality boards have ramped up requirements.

New wastewater discharge regulations that went into effect in May cost a 1,000-cow dairy \$40,000 to \$60,000 the first year, and \$30,000 to \$40,000 each year after that, Marsh said.

"The additional financial burden will probably close some dairies," Marsh said. "We will lose some farms in Stanislaus County."

Many more will stay, meet the regulations and improve air and water quality, Marsh said.

"The costs are extraordinary, but we are doing it. We are enhancing the environment on farms. Our producers are committed to staying in California and complying with the regulations," Marsh said.

Carlos Estacio, a Turlock area dairyman, is one example. "My feeling is, there are some bad dairy men, but the majority, we are doing a fantastic job. We don't want to pollute the land. We live on our land. Why would we want to pollute it?" Estacio said.

But compliance for dairy men, who operate on thin and sometimes nonexistent profit margins, is difficult. They can't simply raise the price of milk, because the price is regulated by the state.

"I know we have to keep our air clean, but if they keep driving agriculture out of the state, what do we have left? Housing, with more and more cars," Estacio said.

Ultimately, the city or county involved is the lead agency for conducting environmental reviews, and must weigh the pollution issues against the benefits and decide whether to go ahead with the project.

"We look at overriding considerations," Freitas said. "The economic benefit, the number of jobs, how it plays into the local economy. We have a lot of milk processors, not just liquid milk but cheese, butter, dry milk."

Until a few years ago, new and expanding dairies in Stanislaus County didn't need a use permit from the county. It was agriculture, and farmers had a right to farm, Freitas said.

But as water quality concerns grew, the industry and the county worked out a permit process for confined animal operations, which included dairies and poultry farms.

The use permit requirement put dairies under the California Environmental Quality Act.

New technologies are giving dairies options that may make the environmental impact reports unnecessary, Freitas said. Organic dairies that feature less confinement in favor of pasture grazing, and covered methane digesters over dairy waste ponds are examples, Freitas said.

Fleeing the Golden State is not a solution, he added.

"You can't run away from something, you have to deal with it head-on," he said. "With a 3,000-cow dairy, you are basically operating a sewage treatment plant, no matter where you are. You have to become a steward of the land."

The states with less regulation are likely to get stricter if dairies start to congregate in an area, Freitas said. "At some point in time, someone will stand up and say, 'Wait a minute.' One or two won't hurt, but a whole bunch causes problems," Freitas said.

Southern California Water Woes Could Drive Warehousing Here

Valley Voice Newspaper, Monday, Feb. 11, 2008

San Joaquin Valley - One of the fastest growing warehousing areas of California - the Inland Empire - could see its growth throttled, now that the state is suffering under both long-term drought and uncertainty over deliveries of water from northern California to southern California.

In a sign their woes are mounting, large scale developments have been told by the Eastern Municipal Water District they may not be able to move forward on plans because the water agency questions whether it will be able to certify that the long term water supply is available for their projects.

A planned distribution center to be built by the big shoe company Sketchers USA is now on hold as the water agency says state law forces them to assess the needs of large projects over a 20-year period to determine if the supply is there. Increasingly, the agencies are having trouble making that a finding.

Like all the water districts in the Metropolitan Water District Group, this area has suffered under its own drought and an eight-year drought along the Colorado River that historically supplies this region as well.

Now a new state water supply assessment puts an exclamation point on the water crisis. "This water crisis is real," says Tim Quinn, general manager of the Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA).

"It's not just farmers in the Valley and home builders in L.A. that are affected by the water shortage -- it's our entire economy."

State Water Project

The Department of Water Resources on January 22 released the Draft State Water Project Delivery Reliability Report 2007. This report updates DWR's estimate of its ability to maintain current (2007) and future (2027) State Water Project (SWP) delivery reliability.

The report, issued every two years, also identifies factors that may impact water availability and changes that can be made to improve future water supply reliability. The report concludes that continued declines in water supply reliability are likely if water delivery through the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta remains unchanged. Additional factors that could inhibit water delivery include Delta pumping restrictions to help protect threatened and endangered species and the near-term effects of climate change.

The report shows that future SWP deliveries will be impacted by two significant factors. The first is climate change, which is altering hydrologic conditions in the state. The second is significant restrictions on SWP and Central Valley Project (CVP) pumping in accordance with December 2007 federal court imposed interim rules to protect delta smelt.

It shows a continued eroding of SWP water delivery reliability under the current method of moving water through the Delta.

The analysis shows that annual SWP deliveries would decrease virtually every year in the future (93% of future years). These reductions would amount to a 20% reduction from current levels about one-fourth of the time, and greater than 30% in one-sixth of future years.

The report discusses areas of significant uncertainty to SWP delivery reliability:

- The recent and significant decline in pelagic organisms in the Delta (open-water fish such as delta smelt and striped bass);
- Climate change and sea level rise; and
- The vulnerability of Delta levees' to failure due to floods and earthquakes.

Timothy F. Brick, chairman of the board of directors of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, said, "This sobering assessment of the state's water situation serves as a reminder that, despite the recent rains, the problems in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta remain unresolved. Metropolitan believes that steps can be taken to provide reliability and restore the Delta and looks forward to working with the state. We face a new reality in Southern California that will require conservation each and every year in order to keep our supplies and demands in balance."

Impact Now Being Felt

While Eastern Municipal Water District has routinely approved such industrial projects in the past, a court ordered shutdown of water from the Delta south of perhaps 30% of the supply has put a kink in plans to supply both the needs of warehousing and new planned subdivisions in the Inland Empire area.

At a water conference in recent days, Southern California water officials, including the big Metropolitan Water District, are urging more conservation efforts as the state can't seem to come up with a unified plan for a water bond.

"We can't move the water through the Delta," says ACWA (Association of California Water Agencies) General Manager Tim Quinn, who notes "wet weather won't make the difference long term anymore."

Eastern Metropolitan is postponing nine industrial and residential projects, the big ones are Western Realco's 1.6-million-square-foot distribution center and the Rados Companies 1.1-million-square-foot distribution center. Although there are six huge warehousing projects, mostly in the Moreno Valley, in limbo while the agency studies if it can justify a "will serve" letter.

The area faces both a declining water supply and predictions of exponential growth. The Moreno Valley now has a population of 660,000 but is projected to grow to 1.5 million.

Already, the Inland Empire is the home to some of the nation's largest distribution facilities that include Toyota, APL Logistics, Whirlpool Corp. and others.

Large distribution centers looking to serve the southland like to locate on the outskirts of the metro area, the fastest growing of those areas has been the Inland Empire. But Kern, Kings and Tulare County have enjoyed some of that business as well. Inland warehousing is highly dependent on L.A. area port activity that declined for the first time in 2007 after years of rising. Fully 80% of the state's imports flow through the two L.A. area ports.

Hoping to take advantage of the spillover effect from the L.A. area are developers like the Allen Group which have large industrial parks with room to grow in Shafter and Visalia - all along busy shipping lanes. Tejon Ranch at the base of the Grapevine, and other nearby industrial areas, could benefit as well.

A double tracking of the rail line over the Tehachapis in the next few years could boost chances the Central Valley gets to be acknowledged as an "inland port" in the future as well. Increasingly logistic planners want to put truckloads on rail to move to and from distribution centers based on not just efficiency and cost, but [air pollution](#).

'Carbon-offset' forest registers its biggest sale yet

By Jim Downing

Sacramento Bee, Monday, Feb. 11, 2008

The Humboldt County forest that has been one of the country's highest-profile sources of "carbon offsets" has logged its largest sale ever, a deal the forest's managers say demonstrates the market's confidence in the value of their product.

Natsource Asset Management LLC, a New York firm that deals in credits for greenhouse gas emissions reductions and renewable energy development, purchased 60,000 tons of carbon dioxide emissions reductions from the Van Eck Forest for an undisclosed price. The deal was the forest's biggest sale by a factor of 10.

Emissions reductions from such projects typically sell for about \$15 a ton. The revenue helps cover the cost of managing the forest so that it soaks up carbon from the atmosphere.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Assembly Speaker Fabian Núñez all have purchased carbon offsets from the Van Eck Forest, which is managed by the Pacific Forest Trust, a San Francisco nonprofit group.

The deal is the first completed under regulations adopted by the California Air Resources Board in October. The development of a domestic market for carbon offsets has been hampered by a lack of standards that has, in some cases, led to the sale of carbon credits of questionable value.

The air board's rules are meant to standardize procedures for measuring the amount of carbon stored by a forest, so that the offsets generated will hold their value in national and international markets.

"We are hoping that deals like this will provide policymakers around the world with the confidence they need to ensure that forestry becomes part of the solution to address climate change," said Laurie Wayburn, president of Pacific Forest Trust.

Panel strikes down EPA's mercury emissions cap, credits

Judy Pasternak, Los Angeles Times

In the L.A. Times, S.F. Chronicle, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Saturday, Feb. 9, 2008

Washington -- New coal-fired power plants might have to include strict controls to keep mercury out of the air in the wake of a federal court ruling Friday.

A three-judge appeals panel struck down a market-based effort by the Bush administration that would have allowed some generators of electricity to buy their way out of meeting their pollution reduction targets.

The Environmental Protection Agency now must either pursue the matter further in court or go back to the drawing board and write rules to regulate mercury in both new and existing plants. The agency said Friday that is it reviewing the decision and has not decided its next move.

The appeals panel's unanimous decision said that the administration violated the Clean Air Act in 2005 when it established a national cap for mercury emissions and permitted power plants running on coal or oil to purchase credits from less-polluting plants.

The EPA illegally took the power plants off a list of industries that are required to use the best available technology at every facility to reduce mercury venting to the greatest degree possible, the judges wrote. EPA's defense was "not persuasive," they added.

A coalition of environmental groups and 17 states challenged the policy, which was to take effect in 2010.

Environmentalists criticized what is called the cap-and-trade approach for mercury because it tends to accumulate near its source, rather than dispersing like other pollutants that have been regulated under similar mechanisms. The challengers said mercury hot spots could endanger children living near power plants that use the credits to send extra pollution into the air.

Coal-fired power plants, which provide half of America's electricity, are major sources of mercury, as well as of sulfur and carbon dioxide.

"Today's ruling adds to the momentum against dirty power in this country," said John Walke, an attorney for the Natural Resources Defense Council, which was one of the petitioners. "It's a very big deal."

The EPA had said the cap-and-trade program would cut mercury emissions by 70 percent from 1999 levels by 2018, but critics had said that requiring controls on every plant could cut emissions even further, by 90 percent.

Jeffrey Holmstead, a former EPA official who oversaw the creation of the vacated rule, said that coming up with a new rule will take years and that in the meantime, he expects a thicket of challenges and litigation at the state level.

Court Strikes Down EPA's Plan on Mercury

By H. JOSEF HEBERT, Associated Press Writer
In the S.F. Chronicle, Saturday, Feb. 9, 2008

WASHINGTON (AP) -- A federal appeals court said Friday the Bush administration ignored the law when it imposed less stringent requirements on power plants to reduce mercury pollution, which scientists fear could cause neurological problems in 60,000 newborns a year.

A three-judge panel unanimously struck down a mercury-control plan imposed by the Environmental Protection Agency three years ago. It established an emissions trading process in which some plants could avoid installing the best mercury control technology available by buying pollution credits.

Environmentalists and health experts argued that such a cap-and-trade mechanism would create "hot spots" of mercury contamination near some power plants. Seventeen states as well as environmental and health groups joined in a suit to block the regulation, saying it did not adequately protect public health.

Power plants are the biggest source of releases of mercury, which finds its way into the food supply, particularly fish. Mercury can damage developing brains of fetuses and very young children.

The court decision was the latest in a string of judicial rebukes of the Bush administration's environmental policies. The Supreme Court last year took the administration to task for not regulating greenhouse gases. Courts have also rejected administration attempts to overhaul federal forest policies and streamline fuel economy standards for small trucks.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit said that the EPA violated the federal Clean Air Act when it scrapped a mercury-control policy established in December 2000 under the Clinton administration. Utilities were required to install the best available technology to capture mercury from power-plant smokestacks.

That policy was anticipated to capture more than 90 percent of mercury releases. The cap-and-trade approach imposed by the EPA in March 2005 envisioned capturing 70 percent of emissions by 2018.

The court held that the EPA failed to show that its new approach would not harm the environment or that emissions at all plants not "exceed a level which is adequate to protect public health with an ample margin of safety."

"This three-judge panel has done the world a favor and helped save lives," said Connecticut Attorney General Richard Blumenthal, whose state participated in the lawsuit.

EPA spokesman Jonathan Shradar said the agency was reviewing the decision, but he indicated it was not giving up on the cap-and-trade approach to reducing mercury.

"This rule is still our policy until we evaluate how to move forward," said Shradar. He emphasized that the court did not rule directly on the merits of the cap-and-trade approach but that "they ruled against the process."

But it was clear the agency now would have to re-examine its approach to capturing mercury from power plants. "Because of the court's action the U.S. now has no national regulation to cut mercury emissions from existing power plants," he said.

Environmentalists, hailing the decision as a victory for public health, predicted it will require the EPA to issue the more stringent emissions requirements that were proposed eight years ago.

"This means the EPA is going to have to go back and do a real job of regulating all the toxics coming out of these plants," said Earthjustice attorney James S. Pew, who argued the case on behalf of several environmental organizations. He said EPA "is now under a simple, legal obligation to get those overdue rules out."

Industry organizations had strongly supported the cap-and-trade mercury plan, arguing that the requirements for the best available technology at all plants would be too costly, may not even be achievable, and delay mercury reduction.

Dan Riedinger, a spokesman for the Edison Electric Institute, an association of power companies, called the court decision "a major setback ... to establish clear mercury regulations for coal-burning power plants."

"Now EPA has to go back to the drawing board, pushing mercury regulations far off into the future," said Riedinger .

Mercury is a powerful neurotoxin. About 8 percent of U.S. women of childbearing age have enough mercury in their blood to cause concern for a future pregnancy. The National Academy of Sciences estimates that 60,000 newborns a year could be at risk of learning disabilities because of mercury their mothers absorbed during pregnancy.

"The mercury emitted by our nation's coal-fired power plants pose serious health risks for all Americans," said Georges Benjamin, executive director of the American Public Health Association. The association was among a number of public health groups, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, that filed papers in support of the states' lawsuit.

Joining New Jersey in the lawsuit were: California, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont and Wisconsin.

EPA's relaxed emissions rule struck down

By Larry Wheeler, Gannett News Service
In USA Today, Sunday, Feb. 10, 2008

WASHINGTON - A federal appeals court struck down an Environmental Protection Agency regulation on mercury emissions Friday that environmentalists had criticized as weak and illegal.

The decision marked a victory for 14 states, environmental groups and American Indian tribes that had challenged the EPA's Clean Air Mercury Rule. But it did not guarantee the deep cuts in mercury emissions those groups seek.

Coal-burning power plants are the single largest domestic source of mercury emissions. Nearly 500 plants supply about half the nation's electricity.

A three-judge panel on the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia ruled the EPA violated the Clean Air Act in 2005 when it exempted coal-burning power plants from the act's most stringent requirements for cleaning up hazardous pollutants.

Friday's decision means the EPA must start over in crafting a regulation to cut mercury emissions.

The judges also invalidated the agency's plan to adopt a "cap and trade" program to cut mercury emissions from power plants. The program would have allowed power plants to buy and sell mercury pollution credits.

"We're disappointed that the court rolled back the first ever regulation of mercury emissions from power plants," said Jonathan Shradar, an EPA spokesman.

He said it's too soon to say what the EPA will do now to regulate mercury emissions from power plants.

Environmental groups welcomed the court's decision and called on the EPA to enact a more aggressive regulation.

"We are looking forward to working on rules that reflect the most stringent controls achievable for this industry, as the Clean Air Act requires," said Ann Weeks, attorney for the Clean Air Task Force.

Environmental groups interpret the Clean Air Act as requiring the EPA to reduce mercury emissions from coal-burning power plants by an estimated 90%.

Industry officials say such an approach would cost too much and would mean higher electricity rates for everyone.

Many power plants already are installing scrubbers and other devices aimed at reducing pollutants that contribute to smog and acid rain. Some of those devices also trap some mercury emissions.

U.S. power plants currently emit 48 tons of mercury into the air each year, with 11 tons deposited onto U.S. soil and surface waters, the EPA estimates.

A spokesman for Edison Electric Institute, an association representing the \$298 billion-a-year electric utility industry, called the court decision "a major setback for federal efforts to establish clear mercury regulations for coal-fired power plants."

"The emissions cap-and-trade program sought by EPA put us on a path to cutting mercury emissions by 70%," said the spokesman, Dan Riedinger. "Now EPA has to go back to the drawing board, pushing mercury regulations far off into the future."

Mercury is a toxin that can accumulate in fish as methyl mercury, which poses a health hazard to humans. Developing fetuses, breast-fed infants and children are especially vulnerable.

The U.S. seafood industry has mounted an aggressive campaign to publicize the health benefits of eating fish and shellfish while downplaying the risks posed by consuming some species - such as tuna and swordfish - known to have high concentrations of methyl mercury.

Congressman subpoenas EPA files on California ruling

Rep. Waxman wants the EPA to hand over documents related to its rejection of California's request to impose stricter emission standards.

By Richard Simon, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer
L.A. Times, Saturday, Feb. 9, 2008

WASHINGTON -- The chairman of a key congressional committee issued a subpoena Friday to compel the Environmental Protection Agency to turn over documents on its decision to deny California permission to implement its own global warming laws.

Escalating the fight over the decision, Rep. Henry A. Waxman (D-Beverly Hills), chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, directed the EPA to provide uncensored copies of its staff recommendation to agency Administrator Stephen L. Johnson before he rejected California's request to enact tailpipe emission standards stricter than the federal government's. The EPA was told to respond by noon Tuesday.

"The committee is simply trying to understand if the decision to reject California's plan was made on the merits, so I'm especially disappointed that EPA is refusing to provide the relevant documents voluntarily," Waxman said. "But we will try to get to the bottom of this."

An EPA spokesman said the agency has not allowed congressional investigators to photocopy "sensitive internal documents," but has let them inspect them under the supervision of agency employees. "They've seen all of these documents, everything," said spokesman Jonathan Shradar.

The EPA has also turned over some documents, but they were heavily redacted, so much so that some pages were largely blank. The agency has resisted turning over nonredacted documents to Congress, contending that they are protected under attorney-client privilege. California and more than a dozen other states that want to enact similar laws have sued to overturn Johnson's decision.

The agency has also argued that releasing the documents could have a "chilling effect" on candid discussions within the EPA. Vice President Dick Cheney also cited the need to keep internal deliberations private in fighting congressional efforts to force him to disclose details of private meetings he held as the White House drafted its energy policy, an initiative sparked in part by another California issue -- the 2000-01 electricity crisis.

The subpoena comes as Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), who heads the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, has given the EPA until Friday to provide similar records, including correspondence with the White House.

Boxer and Waxman have each launched investigations into whether Johnson acted against the recommendations of his legal and scientific staff.

Twenty-two senators from both parties are sponsoring legislation to overturn the decision.

On Friday, a group of senators, led by Boxer, also asked Congress' investigative arm, the Government Accountability Office, to launch an investigation into the EPA's decision.

Johnson has said he reached his decision independently, denying charges that he was swayed by political pressure from the White House or the auto industry.

Shradar said the congressional investigations are "not going to change the administrator's decision. He still stands by his decision."

Johnson has contended that fuel-economy rules in the recently enacted federal energy legislation would help reduce greenhouse gas emissions throughout the United States, a national approach that he has said is preferable to a "patchwork of state rules."

Air regulators want to charge businesses that pollute

In the S.F. Chronicle, Fresno Bee and other papers, Saturday, Feb. 9, 2008

Air regulators in the San Francisco Bay Area are proposing an innovative way to curb pollution: charging businesses a fee according to the amount of greenhouse gases they emit.

This is the first such proposal in California, and perhaps the country. Under this plan, businesses from oil refineries to bakeries would pay 4.2 cents per metric ton of carbon dioxide released.

This would mean that the biggest greenhouse gas emitter in the Bay Area, the Shell oil refinery in Martinez, would have to pay \$186,475 a year, since it spews 4.4 million metric tons of gases annually.

The fees were proposed this week by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District. They'll be discussed over the next few months. A final vote is expected in May.

Regulators put price on emissions

Air district wants thousands of firms to pay fees based on greenhouse gases

By Paul Rogers, Medianews Staff

Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald, Saturday, Feb. 9, 2008

In the first such program in California, and perhaps the United States, Bay Area air pollution regulators are proposing to charge an annual fee to thousands of businesses based on the amount of greenhouse gases they emit.

The fee -- 4.2 cents per metric ton of carbon dioxide -- would affect everything from oil refineries to power plants, and landfills, factories and small businesses such as restaurants or bakeries.

The largest emitter of greenhouse gases in the Bay Area, the Shell oil refinery in Martinez, would pay \$186,475 a year for its 4.4 million annual metric tons of emissions. The largest emitter in Santa Clara County, the Hanson Permanente Cement Plant in Cupertino, would pay \$44,507 a year for its 1.05 million tons.

After years of voluntary measures, the fees, proposed this week by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, set a precedent as the first time that businesses and government agencies would face financial consequences for contributing to global warming. If successful, the fees could be copied all over the state and country, perhaps ultimately at much higher prices.

"The climate is changing, and we think that everybody needs to help with the solution and pay their fair share to reduce greenhouse gases," said Jack Broadbent, executive officer of the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, in San Francisco.

"This is the next step in addressing the problem. The public is demanding that we be part of the solution."

The air district, a state agency, for the past 50 years has regulated smog in the nine counties around the Bay -- Santa Clara, Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, San Francisco, San Mateo and Napa counties, and portions of southwestern Solano and southern Sonoma counties.

The air district's board will begin discussing the rule as early as later this month and could take a final vote by May.

Almost certain to draw controversy and national attention, the proposal is designed to raise \$1.1 million a year, Broadbent said. It is not a "carbon tax," but a cost recovery fee, he said, because the money would not go into a general fund, but it would be used to pay for the air district's global warming reduction programs.

The proposal also is being closely watched around the state because it would represent the first time that companies have been hit with fees based on their greenhouse gas emissions. Nearly every program in the United States to reduce greenhouse emissions has been voluntary to date.

Environmentalists on Friday called the rule a watershed event.

"There are costs associated with emitting carbon dioxide, and the people who emit it should pay the costs," said Carl Pope, national executive director of the Sierra Club.

Pope noted that in April, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that carbon dioxide is a pollutant that can be regulated under the Clean Air Act, just like other chemicals that cause smog. That changes everything, he said.

"That ruling is going to trigger a whole series of regulatory responses like this," Pope said. "This is the first one that has a fee associated with it. You are going to see fees, and emissions standards, and permits for coal-burning power plants turned down. The country has now decided we are going to clean up carbon dioxide like we clean up other types of air pollution."

Industry officials reacted warily to the rule.

Tupper Hull, a spokesman for the Western States Petroleum Association in Sacramento, said hitting oil refineries and power plants with fees could end up hitting consumers in the pocketbook.

"This proposal will raise the cost of producing energy and fuel for California consumers, and at a time when consumers have concerns about what they are paying," he said. "We can't say how much that is, but it is a significant concern."

Hull also said that if some of the other 30 air districts in California -- or cities or counties -- begin copying the idea, the state will have a confusing patchwork of rules right at the time it is trying to craft a statewide solution to global warming under a law signed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger two years ago.

Under the proposal, all 10,000 "stationary sources" of air pollution that the air district regulates would be subject to the fee, including businesses and government agencies. They would pay it annually as part of getting their overall air quality permit renewed. Small businesses would pay perhaps \$10 or less. Large businesses that burn a lot of fuel and use large amounts of energy would see costs in the tens of thousands of dollars.

The fee does not affect homeowners or motor vehicles.

Of the 10 largest greenhouse gas emitters in the Bay Area, five are oil refineries in the Martinez-Richmond area, and four are large power plants in the same area. One, the cement plant in Cupertino, isn't a power plant or oil refinery. The district has computed rankings on everything from landfills to the United Airlines maintenance facility at San Francisco International Airport, the 30th largest Bay Area greenhouse gas emitter, with 114,427 metric tons of greenhouse gases. It would have to pay \$4,805 under the proposed rule.

Once a carbon fee is in place, critics worry, it could easily increase. But that's the best way to cut greenhouse gases, say some experts.

"I think this is tremendously gutsy," said Dan Kammen, a physicist who is director of renewable energy programs at UC Berkeley.

"Emissions in California are still going up. All the nice paperwork is not going to make emissions go down until we put a price on what we don't want -- which is greenhouse gas emissions."

Europe set up a carbon-trading market after its countries signed the Kyoto agreement. Under that "cap and trade" system, companies are limited in the amount of carbon dioxide they can emit. If they emit less, they can sell credits to other companies that exceed their limits. Currently, the market cost is about \$40 a ton, Kammen noted. California is studying the idea of creating a similar carbon market, and all three leading presidential candidates -- Hillary Rodham Clinton, Barack Obama and John McCain -- have said they support creating a national mandatory cap-and-trade program. Northeastern states also are setting up a similar market for power plants.

"What the air district is doing is what every economist knows is coming -- but somebody has to go first," he said.

A majority of climate scientists agree that the Earth is warming because of the build-up in the atmosphere of carbon dioxide from the burning of fossil fuels, which trap heat. The 10 hottest years since modern records began being kept in the 1880s all have occurred since 1990, according to the National Climatic Data Center, a federal agency in North Carolina.

ONLINE

To read the proposed rule, go to <http://www.baaqmd.gov/pln/ruledev/workshops.htm>.

GM chief urges dealers to oppose states' greenhouse gas limits

By TOM KRISHER, AP Auto Writer
Modesto Bee, Saturday, Feb. 9, 2008

SAN FRANCISCO - General Motors Corp. CEO Rick Wagoner urged a group of auto dealers Saturday to lobby against individual states trying to set their own limits on greenhouse gas emissions.

Wagoner, speaking to the National Automobile Dealers Association convention in San Francisco, said several states want to go beyond requirements passed by Congress.

If that happens and automakers must focus on state regulations, they won't be able to focus as much on alternative fuel vehicles to reduce oil consumption and pollution, he said.

"We're not going to be able to accomplish everything that we otherwise could," Wagoner said.

EPA Administrator Stephen L. Johnson in December denied a federal waiver that would have allowed California to enact its own law slashing greenhouse gas emissions from cars and trucks.

Other states could then have followed suit and 12 were ready to do so, with others making preparations.

Because global warming is an international phenomenon not unique to California, the state doesn't need its own standards to meet "compelling and extraordinary conditions" as set out in the law, Johnson has said.

California contends that its law, which would have forced automakers to cut emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases by 30 percent in new cars and light trucks by 2016, is stronger and would take effect more quickly than the new federal fuel efficiency law.

"We need to work together to educate policymakers at the state and local levels on the importance of tough but national standards," Wagoner told the dealers group.

He also said dealers and automakers should push for infrastructure to handle new technologies including hydrogen and ethanol fueling stations and charging stations for electric vehicles.

After the speech, Wagoner said dealers gave automakers valuable help as Congress was debating stronger fuel economy standards last year.

"Dealers are very effective in the political process because we don't have a plant in every state," he said. "We have dealers in every state."

About 10,000 auto dealers and their spouses are attending the four-day NADA convention.

Berkeley may declare smell a nuisance

By Doug Oakley, Staff Writer

Contra Costa Times, Saturday, Feb. 9, 2008

Berkeley is hoping to force Pacific Steel Casting to change its smelly ways by declaring the company a public nuisance after 25 years of complaints about the Second Street foundry.

City councilwoman Linda Maio said Thursday that she's waited long enough for the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, a state agency, to pressure the company to stop showering the city with a burning plastic smell.

To do that, she will bring an item before the council at Tuesday's meeting asking the city's Zoning Adjustments Board to declare the company a nuisance and attach conditions to its operating permit spelling out actions and dates of compliance.

"We've waited and waited and waited," Maio said. "We waited for the air district to do its thing, we waited for Pacific Steel to do their thing, and we're still smelling the smell. I'm frustrated."

The union that represents about 600 workers at the foundry plans to bring 400 to 500 of its members to Tuesday's meeting.

Workers and management are afraid modifications to the company's city permit will force it to close.

Ignacio De La Fuente, vice president of the West Coast Glass Molders International Union and president of the Oakland City Council, said Maio has probably already cost the company jobs because of her move to regulate it.

"I think that Linda Maio has no clue the damage she has already caused," De La Fuente said. "Having the news all over the damn country that the city is going to declare them a nuisance means customers will protect themselves and go to other suppliers. I can already predict some of my members are going to lose their jobs, and I guarantee we are never going to forget it."

Since 2005, Pacific Steel, which does about \$100 million in sales a year, has been in and out of court with a number of parties over its emissions. In that year, the air district signed a settlement agreement ordering Pacific Steel to control odor; in 2006 the air district settled a lawsuit with the company that required a number of actions to stop the smell; in 2007 the air district ordered the company to write a health risk assessment to the community; and more recently the district installed a permanent air-monitoring device near the plant.

Also in 2006, Pacific Steel settled a federal lawsuit with Communities for a Better Environment that required it to take further measures to control emissions.

"They have done some things, and we appreciate that, but they ramped up their production, and that just meant more bad smells," Maio said. "The air board has confirmed the smell comes from them, many times. What I want to do is take control of the situation, and set dates and milestones for real change."

Maio said she wants better pollution-control systems at the plant, and she wants it to stop using products and chemicals that can cause pollution.

Mayor Tom Bates, one of 22 directors on the air district board, said the company's city permit allowing it to operate "is wide open" and he wants to change that.

"We want the zoning board to look at their use permit and put some conditions on it to make sure they do something about the noise and odor and environmental problems they are causing," Bates said.

During a tour of the plant Thursday, Pacific Steel General Manager Joe Emmerichs said the steel-making process does not smell.

"We're the cleanest and the best foundry in the United States," Emmerichs said. "We're continuously doing things to control pollution without the air district telling us. I've been here 45 years, I'm almost 70, and I have never gotten sick."

Emmerichs said any modification to its use permit that reduces its hours or production will cause it to close.

"We can't tell our customers 'wait a week.' We can't do that," Emmerichs said.

But Maio said the city is not aiming to shut down the plant. She has e-mailed workers at the plant telling them that, and she reiterated it Thursday.

"They need to take charge more, and that's what this is about," Maio said. "We know there are other things they can do."

De La Fuente, the union vice president, said he thinks Maio intends to close the foundry because every time the city declares a company a nuisance, it closes.

"Her answer that it's not going to close is either naive or hypocritical," De La Fuente said. "The damage is already done. The question is how much."

Study: Ethanol may add to global warming

By H. JOSEF HEBERT - Associated Press Writer
Sacramento Bee and Modesto Bee, Friday, Feb. 8, 2008

WASHINGTON -- The widespread use of ethanol from corn could result in nearly twice the greenhouse gas emissions as the gasoline it would replace because of expected land-use changes, researchers concluded Thursday. The study challenges the rush to biofuels as a response to global warming.

The researchers said that past studies showing the benefits of ethanol in combating climate change have not taken into account almost certain changes in land use worldwide if ethanol from corn - and in the future from other feedstocks such as switchgrass - become a prized commodity.

"Using good cropland to expand biofuels will probably exacerbate global warming," concludes the study published in Science magazine.

The researchers said that farmers under economic pressure to produce biofuels will increasingly "plow up more forest or grasslands," releasing much of the carbon formerly stored in plants and soils through decomposition or fires. Globally, more grasslands and forests will be converted to growing the crops to replace the loss of grains when U.S. farmers convert land to biofuels, the study said.

The Renewable Fuels Association, which represents ethanol producers, called the researchers' view of land-use changes "simplistic" and said the study "fails to put the issue in context."

"Assigning the blame for rainforest deforestation and grassland conversion to agriculture solely on the renewable fuels industry ignores key factors that play a greater role," said Bob Dinneen, the association's president.

There has been a rush to developing biofuels, especially ethanol from corn and cellulosic feedstock such as switchgrass and wood chips, as a substitute for gasoline. President Bush signed energy legislation in December that mandates a six-fold increase in ethanol use as a fuel to 36 billion gallons a year by 2022, calling the requirement key to weaning the nation from imported oil.

The new "green" fuel, whether made from corn or other feedstocks, has been widely promoted - both in Congress and by the White House - as a key to combating global warming. Burning it produces less carbon dioxide, the leading greenhouse gas, than the fossil fuels it will replace.

During the recent congressional debate over energy legislation, lawmakers frequently cited estimates that corn-based ethanol produces 20 percent less greenhouse gases in production, transportation and use than gasoline, and that cellulosic ethanol has an even greater benefit of 70 percent less emissions.

The study released Thursday by researchers affiliated with Princeton University and a number of other institutions maintains that these analyses "were one-sided" and counted the carbon benefits of using land for biofuels but not the carbon costs of diverting land from its existing uses.

"The other studies missed a key factor that everyone agrees should have been included, the land use changes that actually are going to increase greenhouse gas emissions," said Tim Searchinger, a

research scholar at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs and lead author of the study.

The study said that after taking into account expected worldwide land-use changes, corn-based ethanol, instead of reducing greenhouse gases by 20 percent, will increase it by 93 percent compared to using gasoline over a 30-year period. Biofuels from switchgrass, if they replace croplands and other carbon-absorbing lands, would result in 50 percent more greenhouse gas emissions, the researchers concluded.

Not all ethanol would be affected by the land-use changes, the study said.

"We should be focusing on our use of biofuels from waste products" such as garbage, which would not result in changes in agricultural land use, Searchinger said in an interview. "And you have to be careful how much you require. Use the right biofuels, but don't require too much too fast. Right now we're making almost exclusively the wrong biofuels."

The study included co-authors affiliated with Iowa State University, the Woods Hole Research Center and the Agricultural Conservation Economics. It was supported in part indirectly by grants from NASA's Terrestrial Ecology Program, and by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. Searchinger, in addition to his affiliation with Princeton, is a fellow at the Washington-based German Marshall Fund of the United States.

The study prompted a letter Thursday to President Bush and Democratic and Republican leaders in Congress from nearly a dozen scientists who urged them to pursue a policy "that ensures biofuels are not produced on productive forests, grassland or cropland."

"Some opportunities remain to produce environmentally beneficial biofuels" while "unsound biofuel policies could sacrifice tens of hundreds of million of acres" of grasslands and forests while increasing global warming, said the scientists, including four members of the National Academy of Sciences.

Biofuels Deemed a Greenhouse Threat

N.Y. Times, Friday, Feb. 8, 2008

Almost all biofuels used today cause more greenhouse gas emissions than conventional fuels if the full emissions costs of producing these "green" fuels are taken into account, two studies being published Thursday have concluded.

The benefits of biofuels have come under increasing attack in recent months, as scientists took a closer look at the global environmental cost of their production. These latest studies, published in the prestigious journal *Science*, are likely to add to the controversy.

These studies for the first time take a detailed, comprehensive look at the emissions effects of the huge amount of natural land that is being converted to cropland globally to support biofuels development.

The destruction of natural ecosystems - whether rain forest in the tropics or grasslands in South America - not only releases greenhouse gases into the atmosphere when they are burned and plowed, but also deprives the planet of natural sponges to absorb carbon emissions. Cropland also absorbs far less carbon than the rain forests or even scrubland that it replaces.

Together the two studies offer sweeping conclusions: It does not matter if it is rain forest or scrubland that is cleared, the greenhouse gas contribution is significant. More important, they discovered that, taken globally, the production of almost all biofuels resulted, directly or indirectly, intentionally or not, in new lands being cleared, either for food or fuel.

"When you take this into account, most of the biofuel that people are using or planning to use would probably increase greenhouse gases substantially," said Timothy Searchinger, lead author of one of the studies and a researcher in environment and economics at Princeton University. "Previously there's been an accounting error: land use change has been left out of prior analysis."

These plant-based fuels were originally billed as better than fossil fuels because the carbon released when they were burned was balanced by the carbon absorbed when the plants grew. But even that

equation proved overly simplistic because the process of turning plants into fuels causes its own emissions - for refining and transport, for example.

The clearance of grassland releases 93 times the amount of greenhouse gas that would be saved by the fuel made annually on that land, said Joseph Fargione, lead author of the second paper, and a scientist at the Nature Conservancy. "So for the next 93 years you're making climate change worse, just at the time when we need to be bringing down carbon emissions."

The Intergovernment Panel on Climate Change has said that the world has to reverse the increase of greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 to avert disastrous environment consequences.

In the wake of the new studies, a group of 10 of the United States's most eminent ecologists and environmental biologists today sent a letter to President Bush and the speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, urging a reform of biofuels policies. "We write to call your attention to recent research indicating that many anticipated biofuels will actually exacerbate global warming," the letter said.

The European Union and a number of European countries have recently tried to address the land use issue with proposals stipulating that imported biofuels cannot come from land that was previously rain forest.

But even with such restrictions in place, Dr. Searchinger's study shows, the purchase of biofuels in Europe and the United States leads indirectly to the destruction of natural habitats far afield.

For instance, if vegetable oil prices go up globally, as they have because of increased demand for biofuel crops, more new land is inevitably cleared as farmers in developing countries try to get in on the profits.

So crops from old plantations go to Europe for biofuels, while new fields are cleared to feed people at home.

Likewise, Dr. Fargione said that the dedication of so much cropland in the United States to growing corn for bioethanol had caused indirect land use changes far away. Previously, Midwestern farmers had alternated corn with soy in their fields, one year to the next. Now many grow only corn, meaning that soy has to be grown elsewhere.

Increasingly, that elsewhere, Dr. Fargione said, is Brazil, on land that was previously forest or savanna. "Brazilian farmers are planting more of the world's soybeans - and they're deforesting the Amazon to do it," he said.

International environmental groups, including the United Nations, responded cautiously to the studies, saying that biofuels could still be useful. "We don't want a total public backlash that would prevent us from getting the potential benefits," said Nicholas Nuttall, spokesman for the United Nations Environment Program, who said the United Nations had recently created a new panel to study the evidence.

"There was an unfortunate effort to dress up biofuels as the silver bullet of climate change," he said. "We fully believe that if biofuels are to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem, there urgently needs to be better sustainability criterion."

The European Union has set a target that countries use 5.75 percent biofuel for transport by the end of 2008. Proposals in the United States energy package would require that 15 percent of all transport fuels be made from biofuel by 2022. To reach these goals, biofuels production is heavily subsidized at many levels on both continents, supporting a burgeoning global industry.

Syngenta, the Swiss agricultural giant, announced Thursday that its annual profits had risen 75 percent in the last year, in part because of rising demand for biofuels.

Industry groups, like the Renewable Fuels Association, immediately attacked the new studies as "simplistic," failing "to put the issue into context."

"While it is important to analyze the climate change consequences of differing energy strategies, we must all remember where we are today, how world demand for liquid fuels is growing, and what the realistic alternatives are to meet those growing demands," said Bob Dineen, the group's director, in a statement following the Science reports' release.

"Biofuels like ethanol are the only tool readily available that can begin to address the challenges of energy security and environmental protection," he said.

The European Biodiesel Board says that biodiesel reduces greenhouse gasses by 50 to 95 percent compared to conventional fuel, and has other advantages as well, like providing new income for farmers and energy security for Europe in the face of rising global oil prices and shrinking supply.

But the papers published Thursday suggested that, if land use is taken into account, biofuels may not provide all the benefits once anticipated.

Dr. Searchinger said the only possible exception he could see for now was sugar cane grown in Brazil, which take relatively little energy to grow and is readily refined into fuel. He added that governments should quickly turn their attention to developing biofuels that did not require cropping, such as those from agricultural waste products.

"This land use problem is not just a secondary effect - it was often just a footnote in prior papers,". "It is major. The comparison with fossil fuels is going to be adverse for virtually all biofuels on cropland."

[Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Commentary, Saturday, Feb. 9, 2008:](#)

GLOBAL WARMING: Forests make for a cooler planet

It's virtually impossible not to contribute to the buildup of greenhouses gases being blamed for global warming. Just about everything we do, from turning on the lights to going to the movies, releases carbon dioxide.

Some people ease their guilt by sponsoring the planting of a tree to minimize their "carbon footprint." This modern form of repentance may help them sleep at night, but is it the best way to address global warming?

It seems logical enough. After all, trees do absorb carbon dioxide, store the carbon in wood fibers and release oxygen. It's called photosynthesis, and it's how trees naturally help clean the air.

But tree sponsors don't always get the results they expect. Planting trees in and of itself it may not reduce carbon emissions at all.

Trees planted today will die some day. When they decompose, the carbon they removed from the air while they were growing gets released back into the atmosphere. There's no net carbon reduction. Only when you do something with the wood do you get the tree's full global cooling benefit.

That's why spending \$100 just to plant a tree sounds funny to forestry students like me — kind of like paying top dollar to walk into a play in the middle of act two and leaving before act three begins.

California's foresters plant trees as part of a cycle that removes millions of tons of carbon dioxide from the air every year. That cycle conserves water quality and wildlife habitat, and includes harvesting trees after their peak carbon-absorbing years to store the carbon in wood products like lumber and furniture for homes. On private forestland, harvested sites are replanted to continue the cycle and remove more carbon dioxide.

The cycle is ultimately influenced by consumers, and therein lies the golden opportunity to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

It comes down to supply and demand. The greater the demand for wood, the more trees are planted. Buying wood products accomplishes the objective of sponsoring a tree, and does so more effectively.

Using wood also helps save energy. Many sawmills run their entire operations off energy produced from wood scraps — clean energy that doesn't burn fossil fuels. Some mills even make additional electricity available on California's power grid to replace carbon-spewing coal-based energy.

Plus, using more wood can mean using less plastic, steel and concrete — energy-intensive materials whose manufacturing processes emit greenhouse gas emissions. So whereas pouring a patio causes an increase in greenhouse gases, building a typical redwood deck stores about a half-ton of carbon.

For Californians, choosing California-grown wood has the greatest effect on fighting global warming. Buying California grown can reduce our dependence on imports, which means burning fewer fossil fuels to bring wood to market. California now imports roughly 75 percent of its wood, much of it from places with far fewer environmental protections in place.

California's forestry laws, for instance, protect water quality, wildlife habitat and soil resources. They require that private forestlands be managed sustainably, with growth exceeding harvest so our forests will stand tall and productive for generations. Contrast that to tropical forests where deforestation accounts for a quarter of the world's greenhouse gas emissions.

Consider, too, the alternative to harvesting trees. With harvesting down about 90 percent on California's public forestlands and 60 percent on private forestlands during the last 20 years, many forests have become dangerously overgrown. More than 350,000 acres have burned this year alone, and more than 2 million acres have gone up in smoke since 2000.

That smoke is just as nasty as it looks, too. Wildfire smoke often drifts across thousands of miles, releasing millions of tons of carbon and particulate pollutants as it fouls the air for weeks at a time.

There's a better way to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions than sponsoring a single tree. California's forestlands have the potential to remove an additional 10 million tons or more of carbon every year. Send a signal to plant more trees. Store more carbon in wood in your own home and back yard.

Choose California-grown wood, the local tool for fighting global warming.

Darcy Brown is a senior forestry student at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo and recently served as an intern at the California Forest Products Commission. She is a former resident of Sanger.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Monday, Feb. 11, 2008:](#)

'All can do our part'

While I wonder, with J.R. Martin (letter Jan. 19), why we choose to use our fireplaces on good air days, I'm also in favor of expanding that to farms and ag businesses.

I've driven by farms during burn-approved days to see fires with smoke that can be seen for miles. Why leave the responsibility only to residential dwellings when we all can do our part? Don't ask one part of society to give up something and exclude another.

Jim Godwin, Fresno