

## **Our bad air could be bad for the brain, too**

BY STACEY SHEPARD, Californian staff writer  
Bakersfield Californian, Monday, March 24, 2008

Medical research has already shown that fine particulate pollution in Kern's air is bad for the heart and lungs but new research indicates it may be bad for the brain, too.

A University of California, Irvine experiment found mice exposed to fine particulate pollution in Riverside and Los Angeles developed brain inflammation caused by damaged tissue.

The changes in the mice's brains were similar to those found in people with Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease, although it's unclear at this point if the pollution actually causes the diseases, said Michael Kleinman, a toxicologist and adjunct professor at UC Irvine.

Kleinman said the findings are some of the first to suggest air pollution may be associated with neurological disease. He recently presented them at the Society of Toxicology Annual Meeting in Seattle.

"We were surprised that particles could affect the brain that way," said Kleinman.

Past research has linked particulates to a higher risk of heart disease, clogged arteries and reduced heart function, and can cause early death, asthma attacks and impaired lung development in children.

Particle pollution occurs when tiny specks of dust, chemicals and soot from vehicles, factories and farms become concentrated in the air. The valley's meteorology and geography helps trap the pollution in the air.

Southern California and the San Joaquin Valley have some of the worst particle pollution in the country.

In the past six months, Bakersfield violated the national standard for fine particulates on 63 days, compared to 25 days in Riverside and 23 days in Los Angeles, according to preliminary state data.

Riverside and Los Angeles, however, experience the pollution year-round while the San Joaquin Valley tends to see it only during winter months.

The mice in the study were exposed to concentrations of particles that would be found on a day when pollution violates the national standard for five hours a day, three days a week for six weeks, Kleinman said.

The small particles are believed to enter the blood stream through the lungs and then penetrate a protective layer between blood vessels and brain tissue, Kleinman said. Another theory suggests the particles may enter the brain after being inhaled through the nose, via the olfactory nerve.

Jean Ospital, the health effects officer for the South Coast Air Quality Management District, told the *Riverside Press-Enterprise* that the brain inflammation could be a normal reaction and might have other causes.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District recently drafted a plan to bring the valley into compliance with national standards for fine particulate matter by 2014. The plan will be voted on by the district's governing board on April 30.

"More recent studies and the overwhelming body of evidence shows that PM 2.5 has more severe health effects than ozone," said Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. "The district is pursuing many measures to address PM 2.5."

## **Heart disease a surprising diagnosis for many women**

By BARBARA ANDERSON, McClatchy Newspapers  
Modesto Bee, Saturday, March 22, 2008

FRESNO, Calif. - Vicki Westburg made excuses for being tired and short of breath.

She blamed long, stressful days on her job as a special education administrator for a weariness she couldn't shake. And she thought her labored breathing was due to asthma.

When she woke gasping for breath on New Year's Eve a year ago and her husband rushed her to the hospital, Westburg, 48, of Fresno, Calif., suspected an asthma attack.

Instead, she was stunned: Tests showed congestive heart failure. "The left side of my heart was just not functioning," she said.

Westburg is among 8 million women nationwide diagnosed with heart disease -- and that doesn't include many others who don't even realize they have it.

Heart disease is the No. 1 killer of women in the United States, claiming the lives of more women each year than men. But in doctors' offices across the country, heart disease in women often goes undiagnosed. Their symptoms don't mirror those seen in men, and women tend not to recognize the warning signs, doctors say.

Like a lot of women, Westburg ignored her symptoms and kept working.

"I'll get better," she remembers thinking. "I'll get better."

### NOT JUST A MAN'S DISEASE

We expect men to die of heart disease. But it has been killing more women nationwide than men each year since 1984, and the gender gap shows no signs of going away.

The number of women who die from breast cancer and all other forms of cancer combined doesn't equal the death toll from cardiovascular disease, including heart attacks and strokes, according to the American Heart Association.

This year, an estimated 490,000 women nationwide will die of heart disease.

In the Valley, women have some of the highest heart-disease death rates in California. The latest figures available from the state show that in 2005, heart disease killed 2,803 women in the San Joaquin Valley and 24,702 statewide.

Doctors say several factors appear to be at play in the Valley, including [air pollution](#) that can trigger heart attacks and elevated levels of obesity and diabetes, which are risk factors for heart disease that can be controlled.

Eleven percent of Valley women age 40 and older have been diagnosed with heart disease, according to a 2005 statewide health survey. That rate is among the highest for women in California.

And even more Valley women almost certainly have the disease but don't know it.

Nearly half of women who have a heart attack had never been diagnosed with heart problems, according to a June 2006 program brief on women's cardiovascular health by the federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.

The agency cited a review of medical records of 150 Minnesota women who suffered heart attacks between 1996 and 2001.

The women had made 8,732 visits to doctors and had 457 hospitalizations in the 10 years before their first heart attacks, the report said. Doctors diagnosed only 52 percent with heart disease before they had heart attacks.

### AN UNPLANNED RETIREMENT

Westburg knew something was wrong. Her 50- to 60-hour workweeks as manager of special education services and programs at the Fresno Unified School District had never bothered her, but she found herself leaving meetings early to lie down in her office.

She could barely walk a flight of stairs. She had to ask her secretary to drive her to meetings that were only two blocks away.

Westburg now recognizes her symptoms were those of heart disease. At the time, she said, "I kept thinking it was just overwork -- stress. All the things that women say to ourselves."

But even doctors were puzzled by her symptoms. There was little reason to suspect serious heart problems. She was overweight and had a rapid heartbeat, but other than that, she didn't have risk factors -- high blood pressure, high cholesterol or a family history of heart disease. She never smoked.

After her January 2007 trip to the emergency room, she had a triple bypass to clear arteries and surgery to repair a damaged heart valve.

Westburg took a medical retirement from the school district, where she worked for 23 years in various positions. Now she spends long hours in bed. When she ventures out of her northwest Fresno home for a walk, she uses a motorized scooter.

"I'll have to have a transplant at some point," she said.

If Westburg had complained of chest pains, her heart problems might have been caught earlier, family members said.

But the possibility of heart disease never came up, said Westburg's sister, Louanne Kruse, 50, of Fresno. "If she'd just said she couldn't breathe -- 'it feels like an elephant sitting on my chest' -- that might have triggered something," Kruse said.

#### SYMPTOMS CAN MISLEAD

Women's symptoms don't make it easy for doctors to detect heart disease.

In men, chest pain or pain in the arm or jaw are classic signs of coronary artery disease, which can lead to a heart attack when an artery is blocked. In women, those signs may not be present.

Even when women with coronary artery disease exercise, "they may not get the typical chest pain," said Dr. John Telles, a Fresno cardiologist.

Instead, women can have an array of subtle symptoms: unusual tiredness, anxiety, problems breathing, indigestion, trouble sleeping. These can be mistaken for other ailments. Doctors are still trying to understand why women have different symptoms.

But without chest pain to warn them, women may not seek treatment for heart disease until it's an emergency.

That was the case with Annette Ash Butler, 54, a singer-songwriter from Clovis, Calif.

She knew she had high cholesterol. A doctor recommended medication. She tried diet and exercise instead.

Butler didn't know she had heart problems. She had no chest pain. While taking dance classes at Fresno City College last year, she had back pain on her right side. She thought the pain was related to her kidney.

On Dec. 11, she was at home. She felt nauseated and had a tingling numbness in her right arm and leg. She was having a heart attack.

Butler didn't recognize what was happening -- and neither did emergency room doctors at first, she said. They left her on a gurney in a hallway for several minutes, but "once they realized I was having a heart attack, they took me right in," she said. She needed a stent to open a blocked artery.

Emergency room doctors fail to diagnose about 2 percent of patients with heart attacks because they don't have typical symptoms, according to the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. The misdiagnosed patients tended to be women younger than 55 or minorities reporting shortness of breath instead of chest pain, the agency said.

#### INEQUALITIES

Doctors are trying to understand why heart disease kills more women than men.

The American Heart Association says 77 percent of women age 40 and older -- compared to 82 percent of men -- survive a year after a first heart attack.

One reason doctors suspect for the difference: Women's heart disease often has progressed by the time they are treated for it. And the longer heart disease goes undetected and untreated, the greater the risk of complications from procedures or surgery.

But research also suggests women receive fewer standard drugs for their heart disease than are prescribed for men, and that they also have fewer procedures and operations to open clogged arteries.

An analysis of 327,040 men and women who had had heart attacks found women were less likely to receive drugs -- aspirin, beta-blockers, intravenous heparin or nitrate therapy -- during the first 24 hours in a hospital.

The women also were less likely to get angiography to examine blood vessels and angioplasty, a balloon procedure to open them. They also were less likely to have coronary bypass surgery than men, according to the Agency on Healthcare Research and Quality. And the women were more likely to die while in the hospital, the agency said.

"Women tend to be underdiagnosed, undertreated and have higher complication rates in therapy than we see in men," said Dr. John A. Ambrose, chief of cardiology at the University of California at San Francisco-Fresno Medical Education Program.

Operating on women with advanced coronary artery disease can be technically challenging, said Dr. Richard Gregory, medical director of cardiothoracic services at Community Regional Medical Center and Fresno Heart & Surgical Hospital.

Women's hearts, valves and arteries are smaller than men's. And the chest area is smaller, giving doctors less room to work during open-heart surgery, he said.

Inserting stents in small arteries also can be difficult. Stents are tiny metal-mesh cylinders that are slipped inside arteries to keep them open.

Complicating things further, women with heart disease tend to have other chronic health conditions, such as diabetes, said Dr. Pervaiz Chaudhry, a UCSF-Fresno clinical associate professor and chairman of the cardiothoracic surgery division at Saint Agnes Medical Center.

Older and sicker patients benefit from coronary bypass surgery that is done on a beating heart instead of using a heart-lung machine, Chaudhry said.

Last month, he performed a double bypass surgery on Marie Smith, 79, of Dinuba, Calif. Her heart was kept beating during surgery.

"She did not have any complications, and she just straightforward flew through it," he said.

A week after the operation, Smith said she felt "oh, a lot better." In the three to four months beforehand, Smith said, she had some chest pains, and she began to tire easily.

"I just couldn't breathe," she said. "I'd take a little step or two, and I was out of breath."

## THE EMOTIONAL TOLL

Living with heart disease isn't easy. Ongoing struggles with fatigue and shortness of breath reduce the quality of life.

And younger women may be more affected emotionally and otherwise by congestive heart failure than older women and men, according to the federal health-care research agency.

Westburg said it's been difficult adjusting to life with a failing heart.

"I don't work. I'm still not able to unload the dishwasher. I don't drive very often," she said. "So I went from total independence to having to be very dependent."

Visits to the emergency room when her blood pressure plummets have become routine. So have trips to cardiac rehab, transplant specialists and doctors' offices.

Her days at home consist of naps, writing on the computer, watching television. When she has the strength, she fixes breakfast -- a microwave muffin -- for her husband, Dan, before he leaves for his job as a teacher.

Faith and family keep her from getting depressed, she said. Westburg belongs to NorthPointe Community Church.

But she knows heart disease may shorten her life.

"I wrote my family letters and put them in the safe. I said goodbye to them."

## **Critics say leaf blowers foul the air**

**Air, noise pollution prompt some municipalities to regulate and even ban the machines.**

By Jim Steinberg

The Fresno Bee, Monday, March 24, 2008

Carlos Huerta takes pains to keep his Fresno clients' lawns and gardens neat, and says he blows grass clippings and fallen leaves into neat piles. The sensitive word is "blows."

Trouble is, says Milicent Milroddian of Fresno, some environmental groups and an increasing number of municipalities, there is much to condemn in leaf blowers. Noise for one. Dust, gasoline fumes, pollen and air pollution, allergies and global warming waft along with steadfast spoken and written complaints about these machines and people who wield them.

Milroddian urged the city to "stop the use of blowers."

"I take a broom, and sweep up all the lawn clippings and dirt from the garden that makes its way to the gutter," Milroddian wrote in a letter to The Bee. She added, "I don't make my neighbor be the recipient" of her gardening.

Gardener Ken Holland of Fresno operates Down to Earth Landscaping. He spoke in well-grounded sentences about what he saw as common sense about blowers.

Untrained operators rather than the machines themselves are most at fault, Holland said. The blowing gardener, whether for-hire or do-it-yourself, should aim down and go with the wind. Most people "don't know about that."

He suggested standing away from a curb and blowing leaves and grass clippings toward that property. Some debris may waft onto neighbors' yards, but Holland said any capable and legitimate gardener knows how to confine and retrieve his stuff.

In California, more than 20 cities, including Beverly Hills and Berkeley, banned leaf blowers for the noise they make. Other jurisdictions regulate time of use and noise.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has calculated that a gas-powered lawn mower pollutes in one hour about as much as 40 late-model automobiles. The district has studied the effect of leaf blowers on Valley air but has concluded that other sources contribute far more to air pollution.

That conclusion leaves critics of leaf blowers unimpressed. They focus instead on what they see as a needless addition to the sum of air contaminants.

The questions blow a continent away from the San Joaquin Valley.

Emmett Pepper, Hudson Valley and Connecticut program director for Citizen's Campaign Fund for the Environment, said from Groton, Conn., that running an internal combustion leaf blower for 30 minutes "is like driving a car 1,000 miles. The older ones are worse."

This isn't as big a deal as auto pollution, Pepper said, but it is bad enough: "There aren't as many as cars, yet they are small and deadly."

Fresno officials direct leaf blower noise complaints to the Fresno Police Department.

Huerta said he and his father, Ruben Huerta, rely on this loud machine to make a living. If they didn't use the blowers, Ruben said, they would have to spray leaves and clippings with a garden hose to clean them up because that does the next best job to a blower.

Huerta, 20, has used leaf blowers since he was 10. He and his father try to corral the clippings and leaves early on summer days to beat the heat, but they wait until after 7 a.m. because of noise. Nobody has complained about gas fumes, Huerta said. Just noise. And they've spent hundreds of dollars to try to address the complaints about noisy blowers:

"We got a quieter one, but it broke down in two months."

## **Ozone Alert: Did Bush interfere in setting smog standard?**

By The Washington Post

in the Modesto Bee, Saturday, March 22, 2008

Last week the Environmental Protection Agency tightened the limits on the amount of smog-inducing pollutants that could be released into the air from 84 parts per billion to 75 parts per billion. This is important. Not since 1997 had the ozone standard been strengthened.

The EPA estimates up to 2,300 fewer premature deaths and savings of up to \$19 billion in health-care costs by 2020. But the intervention of President Bush in the decision has environmental activists questioning whether politics trumped science in fashioning the new ozone rules.

Good ozone is what protects Earth from the burning rays of the sun.

But bad ozone, which can lead to and aggravate respiratory ailments during long exposure, forms when sunlight and heat at the ground level mix with the emissions from cars, power plants and other entities. The Clean Air Act regulates the bad ozone on two levels. The primary standard seeks to protect public health while the secondary one guards the public welfare or the overall environment. A unanimous Supreme Court ruled in 2001 that in setting the new limit, only science can be considered, not the costs of implementation.

There was a vigorous debate within the administration over how to monitor and measure the two standards and over whether to join the two standards under a common approach or to deal with them separately. The back-and-forth is discussed in the EPA's final rule, including Mr.

Bush's decision last week that the two standards should be joined.

Environmentalists are enraged because, they say, the president usurped EPA Administrator Stephen L. Johnson's authority under the Clean Air Act to make the final determination. They are also unnerved that the agency ignored a scientific advisory panel's recommendation of limits between 60 and 70 parts per billion for public health. And they are concerned that Mr. Bush's "consistent with administration policy" justification for joining the standards is a cover for letting cost considerations determine the new limits.

In fact Mr. Johnson wants the law changed so that costs can be counted when pollution standards are crafted. The administration's rationale: What's the use in passing standards that states and counties can't afford? Under the previous standard, 85 counties were in violation, including a few between Washington and New York. That number shoots up to 345 under the new rules. Mr. Bush's intervention may touch off a useful debate.

## **Air quality good this weekend**

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Saturday, March 22, 2008

Tulare County's air quality index was observed as good Friday, and the forecast for the weekend in the Valley is expected to remain the same, according to a report from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Tulare, Kings, Stanislaus, San Joaquin, Merced and Madera counties are all expected to have a good rating for air quality through Sunday. Kern and Fresno counties are projected to be good to moderate.

For more information, visit [www.valleyair.org](http://www.valleyair.org).

## **Supes push back West Park vote**

Patterson Irrigator, Friday, March 21, 2008

A proposed 4,800-acre industrial park near Crows Landing has generated plenty of controversy in the past year, but there was no debating a move Tuesday to postpone a final decision on the master plan.

The Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to wait to vote until after the California Transportation Commission has decided whether to award the plan bond money.

Developer PCCP West Park LLC's plans would link the Port of Oakland to a new industrial park on and around the former 1,527-acre Crows Landing Naval Air Facility. It would include an inland port where containers would be shipped in and out by train.

Transportation commission staff recommended March 10 that the project receive \$25 million in state infrastructure bond money. That would cover nearly half of the projected \$52 million first phase.

The cities of Patterson and Newman and a few other West Side jurisdictions have opposed West Park's plan because of its size, its use of rail and potential worsening of traffic and air quality. However, county supervisors gave the plan their preliminary approval in 2007 and previously had expected to review a master development agreement April 8.

The Patterson City Council recently recommended in a letter to county supervisors that the board put off its final vote until after the transportation commission made its decision.

"The outcome of the CTC bond funding awards will have an impact on the viability of the project as it is currently proposed," Patterson Mayor Becky Campo wrote in the March 5 letter. "Due to that fact, it would appear that any decision prior to the CTC decision would be premature."

County and West Park officials have said they agree.

## **Air Force prod aids coal-to-fuel plans**

By MATTHEW BROWN, Associated Press Writer  
Modesto Bee, Saturday, March 22, 2008

MALMSTROM AIR FORCE BASE, Mont. - On a wind-swept air base near the Missouri River, the Air Force has launched an ambitious plan to wean itself from foreign oil by turning to a new and unlikely source: coal.

The Air Force wants to build at its Malmstrom base in central Montana the first piece of what it hopes will be a nationwide network of facilities that would convert domestic coal into cleaner-burning synthetic fuel.

Air Force officials said the plants could help neutralize a national security threat by tapping into the country's abundant coal reserves. And by offering itself as a partner in the Malmstrom plant, the Air Force hopes to prod Wall Street investors - nervous over coal's role in climate change - to sink money into similar plants nationwide.

"We're going to be burning fossil fuels for a long time, and there's three times as much coal in the ground as there are oil reserves," said Air Force Assistant Secretary William Anderson. "Guess what? We're going to burn coal."

Tempering that vision, analysts say, is the astronomical cost of coal-to-liquids plants. Their high price tag, up to \$5 billion apiece, would be hard to justify if oil prices were to drop. In addition, coal has drawn wide opposition on Capitol Hill, where some leading lawmakers reject claims it can be transformed into a clean fuel. Without emissions controls, experts say coal-to-liquids plants could churn out double the greenhouse gases as oil.

"We don't want new sources of energy that are going to make the greenhouse gas problem even worse," House Oversight Committee Chairman Henry Waxman, D-Calif., said in a recent interview.

The Air Force would not finance, construct or operate the coal plant. Instead, it has offered private developers a 700-acre site on the base and a promise that it would be a ready customer as the government's largest fuel consumer.

Bids on the project are due in May. Construction is expected to take four years once the Air Force selects a developer.

Anderson said the Air Force plans to fuel half its North American fleet with a synthetic-fuel blend by 2016. To do so, it would need 400 million gallons of coal-based fuel annually.

With the Air Force paving the way, Anderson said the private sector would follow - from commercial air fleets to long-haul trucking companies.

"Because of our size, we can move the market along," he said. "Whether it's (coal-based) diesel that goes into Wal-Mart trucks or jet fuel that goes into our fighters, all that will reduce our dependence on foreign oil, which is the endgame."

Coal producers have been unsuccessful in prior efforts to cultivate such a market. Climate change worries prompted Congress last year to turn back an attempt to mandate the use of coal-based synthetic fuels.

The Air Force's involvement comes at a critical time for the industry. Coal's biggest customers, electric utilities, have scrapped at least four dozen proposed coal-fired power plants over rising costs and the uncertainties of climate change.

That would change quickly if coal-to-liquids plants gained political and economic traction under the Air Force's plan.

"This is a change agent for the entire industry," said John Baardson, CEO of Baard Energy in Vancouver, Wash., which is awaiting permits on a proposed \$5 billion coal-based synthetic fuels plant in Ohio. "There would be a number of plants that would be needed just to support (the Air Force's) needs alone."

Only about 15 percent of the 25,000 barrels of synthetic fuel that would be produced daily at the Malmstrom plant would be suitable for jet fuel. The remainder would be lower-grade diesel for vehicles, trains or trucks and naphtha, a material used in the chemical industry.

That means the Air Force would need at least seven plants of the same size to meet its 2016 goal, said Col. Bobbie "Griff" Griffin, senior assistant to Anderson.

Coal producers have their sights set even higher.

A 2006 report from the National Coal Council said a fully mature coal-to-liquids industry serving the commercial sector could produce 2.6 million barrels of fuel a day by 2025. Such an industry would more than double the nation's coal production, according to the industry-backed Coal-to-Liquids Coalition.

On Wall Street, however, skepticism lingers.

"Is it a viable technology? Certainly it is. The challenge seems to be getting the first couple (of plants) done," said industry analyst Gordon Howald with Calyon Securities. "For a company to commit to this and then five years later oil is back at \$60 - this becomes the worst idea that ever happened."

Only two coal-to-liquids plants are now operating worldwide, all in South Africa. A third is scheduled to come online in China this year, said Corey Henry with the Coal-to-Liquids Coalition.

The Air Force is adamant it can advance the technology used in those plants to turn dirty coal into a "green fuel," by capturing the carbon dioxide and other, more toxic emissions produced during manufacturing.

However, that would not address emissions from burning the fuel, said Robert Williams, a senior research scientist at Princeton University. To do more than simply break even, the industry must reduce the amount of coal used in the synthetic-fuel blend and supplement it with a fuel derived from plants, Williams said.

Air force officials said they were investigating that possibility.

In a recent letter to Defense Secretary Robert Gates, Rep. Waxman wrote that a promise to control greenhouse gas emissions from synthetic fuels was not enough. Waxman and the committee's ranking Republican, Virginia's Tom Davis, cited a provision in the energy bill approved by Congress last year that bars federal agencies from entering contracts for synthetic fuels unless they emit the same or fewer greenhouse gases as petroleum.

Anderson said the Air Force will meet the law's requirements.

"They'd like to have (coal-to-liquids) because of security concerns - a reliable source of power. They're not thinking beyond that one issue," Waxman said. "(Climate change) is also a national security concern."

[Fresno Bee, Editorial, Monday, March 23, 2008:](#)

### **Sort out process for filling vacant seats on regional air board Put new procedures in place before they become needed.**

Appointments to seats reserved for representatives of Valley cities on the regional air district board are in a muddle, after the group that has made selections in the past bowed out of the process. It's incumbent on all those involved to come up with a new method for filling the seats, and soon.

That shouldn't be too hard. The California League of Cities is backing out of its arrangement to do the choosing under threat of a lawsuit. And though we've been mostly satisfied with the League's choices in the past -- particularly the last two, Fresno City Council Member Henry Perea and Arvin City Council Raji Brar -- there are better ways to make the choices.

The League, though comprised of elected officials from around the state, is not a governmental agency. That raises issues of accountability.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is unique among state air districts in using the League to make appointments. Other districts employ selection committees that already exist in every county to fill seats on a variety of boards and agencies.

It shouldn't be too hard to come up with a mechanism for using such committees in the eight counties that make up the Valley air district to choose city representatives. And those committees are governed by the same open meeting laws and public access rules that apply to city councils and boards of supervisors -- restrictions that don't apply to the League of Cities.

Tulare County Supervisor Steve Worthley, a member of the Valley air board, suggested that the various city councils in the region should themselves vote on the representatives. That might work as well.

The number of city representatives on the Valley air board rose from one to three after passage of Senate Bill 719 last year. That law was passed in part because of concerns that an air board dominated by county supervisors -- one from each of the eight counties -- was too beholden to established interests and not aggressive enough in pursuing the tough new regulations needed in the Valley.

In addition, SB 719 also added two other seats, to be filled with a scientist and a medical expert appointed by the governor. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has yet to make those appointments, which is another situation that needs rectifying soon. Adding those new voices to the board was a long, hard fight that took several tries, but it was necessary to bring the public's voice more clearly into the air board's deliberations.

One of the city seats -- the one now held by Perea -- will become vacant next year. It's imperative that a new, transparent process for filling the positions be in place before then.

[Fresno Bee, Editorial, Sunday, March 23, 2008:](#)

### **We're all to blame for dirty air Choices we make each day contribute to the problem -- let's all fix it.**

Who's to blame for the Valley's poor air quality? There are a lot of suspects on that most-wanted list. But in order to finger the chief culprit, all any of us has to do is look in the mirror.

We've written a great deal about the big-picture measures we need for cleaner Valley air -- building high-speed rail, a more equitable share of state funds for air quality improvements -- but there are myriad small ways that each of us can affect the quality of the air we breathe.

Here's a suggestion for this election year. The streets are crawling right now with candidates for mayor of Fresno, the Fresno City Council and the county Board of Supervisors. They're showing up at people's doors, voter forums and other venues. Get in their faces about air quality.

Take Fresno's transit system. Most people think it's a good idea. But most people won't use it. It's sometimes unpleasant and always inefficient and inconvenient. So tell candidates for city offices that you want more and better transit.

Tell county candidates you want a better regional transit system, with more buses and better coordination of schedules. Tell them you want a universal county bus pass available.

Tell them all you want land use and planning policies that give the highest priority to cleaner air. That means an end to urban sprawl, denser neighborhoods that are easier to navigate on foot or on a bike, and less money spent on providing services to far-flung areas.

Tell them you want the city and county to increase use of solar power for public facilities.

When you're done telling the candidates what you want, tell others as well.

Fresno and the Valley are perfectly positioned to become a world center for solar technology, alternative fuel research and other energy efforts, all of which can have a tremendous impact on air quality. Support efforts by Fresno State and UC Merced to engage in the work of priming the entrepreneurial pump, just as high-tech Silicon Valley prospered because of the presence of Stanford and Berkeley.

Above all, be willing to share the burden. No single sector of the Valley -- agriculture, industry, commerce, schools, government or private citizens -- is solely responsible for bearing the costs of cleaning up our air.

Some -- ag and business, for example -- have already seen their costs rise to meet higher regulatory standards. The courts have upheld new fees on development to mitigate the pollution it causes. There's been plenty of grumbling over the intermittent ban on those cozy winter blazes in the fireplace.

It's going to get tougher. New state and federal standards are coming, and we haven't even met most of the old ones yet.

Our bad air already costs the Valley and its residents more than \$3 billion each year, in premature death, loss of productivity because of illness and crop damage. That's everybody's problem, and everybody must be part of the solution.

Changing the way we live is never easy. We'd rather let someone else do the work, or find convenient scapegoats instead of looking in that inconvenient mirror.

Perhaps we need to revive the old World War II poster that sternly asked: "Is your trip necessary?" Back then, the entire nation shouldered an immense burden together. It's worth remembering, in the context of today's clean air struggle, how collective behavior worked then: We won that fight. We can win this one the same way -- with everyone doing their part.

[N.Y. Times, Editorial, Monday, March 24, 2008:](#)

### **Parks in Peril**

The country's treasured open spaces are no more immune to air pollution from coal-fired power plants than are its big cities. Sulfur dioxide causes acid rain and kills trees. Mercury emissions poison streams. Nitrogen oxides and sulfates create smog and haze.

For all these reasons, Congress in 1977 amended the Clean Air Act to require the Environmental Protection Agency to make a special effort to clean the air in national parks, wildlife refuges and other places of "scenic" and "historical" value it hoped to leave in somewhat better shape for future generations.

No administration since, Democratic or Republican, has paid any attention to this mandate, and despite high hopes, the Bush administration seems likely to fail as well. Two weeks ago, the antiregulatory

brigade in the Office of Management and Budget killed ozone standards that would have offered stronger protections for plants, trees, crops and wildlife. And the Environmental Protection Agency, ignoring protests from its own regional offices and the National Park Service, is nearing approval of regulations that would make it easier to build coal-fired plants near parks and wilderness areas without installing pollution controls.

Improving the national parks was one of President Bush's two big environmental promises in the 2000 campaign. The other was his pledge to control greenhouse gas emissions, abandoned the day he rejected the Kyoto Protocol on climate change. As for the parks, Mr. Bush has commendably increased their budgets and started a separate centennial campaign to encourage private contributions on an unprecedented scale. Unfortunately, his enthusiasm for cleaner air in the parks is not nearly as strong as his fealty to the utilities.

In 2003, for instance, his proposal for revising the Clean Air Act, known as Clear Skies, would have stifled dissent by making it harder for the Park Service and other agencies to object to new power plants. In 2005, an otherwise admirable E.P.A. plan to reduce power plant pollution east of the Mississippi, known as the Clean Air Interstate Rule, also provided cover for many of the dirtiest plants to avoid expensive pollution controls. And in 2006, the White House weakened a proposed rule that would have greatly reduced the airborne particulates that ruin the scenic views in many parks.

The net result is that one in three national parks suffers from one or another form of air pollution, including immensely popular destinations like Yosemite in California, Great Smoky Mountain, straddling the Tennessee-North Carolina border, and Gettysburg.

The air in these parks will only get worse if the administration proceeds with its latest rules opening the way for more downwind power plants. Members of Congress and nearly every environmental organization have asked Mr. Bush to abandon this ruinous idea. Doing so would improve not only the parks but also whatever positive legacy Mr. Bush hopes to leave behind.

[Modesto Bee, Guest Commentary, Monday, March 24, 2008:](#)

### **GREGORY MEEKS & MICHAEL SHANK: The Security Council must act preemptively - on climate change**

The United Nations tackled the task of troubleshooting climate change last month. Between holding special General Assembly meetings at headquarters in New York, bringing 100 environmental ministers to Monaco in the largest meeting of ministers since Bali, and launching a Climate Neutral Network to highlight best practices in tackling global warming, the UN appears to be doing what it can to ensure that climate change does not fall off the political radar. Yet, it still isn't enough. A concerted international strategy, on a par with the seriousness and scope of an UN Security Council resolution, is what's needed to counter this climate crisis.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon was right in comparing the effects of climate change to the effects of war, given the potential level of human and environmental devastation potentially wrought by rising sea levels and increasingly catastrophic weather conditions. Philanthropist Sir Richard Branson, who keynoted UN General Assembly deliberations on climate change, was correct to call for a "war room" to adequately respond to a rapidly warming planet.

Both leaders recognize the need for serious strategy and the comparisons to war were not casually made. The threat to international peace and security calls upon nothing less than the purview of the UN Security Council.

Under Article 39 of the UN Charter, the Security Council maintains the right to identify threats to international peace and security and to devise means to counter these threats. The potential impact of that on climate change is substantial: the Security Council's toolbox includes the capacity to cap greenhouse-gas emissions on every country and sanction those who fail to comply. Both a carbon tax, as well as a carbon-trading scheme, could incentivize countries to reduce emissions below even capped levels.

It is a moral imperative that the Security Council acts quickly. While island nations like Palau and the Maldives stand to face warlike scenarios sooner than the Security Council's five permanent (P5) members - China, Russia, United States, Britain, and France are not immune. Moreover, the culpability of the P5's populaces in contributing to climate change must be recognized. China and the US rank as the world's top two greenhouse-gas emitters.

Not surprisingly, this may well account for the Security Council's reluctance to tackle climate change with carbon caps and concomitant sanctions. The P5 has a hard enough time wrestling with resolutions that put parameters on their own political prowess. To expect them to write a resolution that restricts their right to pollute may be unrealistic. But the alternatives to inaction on this issue are dire.

Disappearing Pacific islands, due to rising sea levels, are projected for within our lifetime. Catastrophic weather conditions accosting the coastal regions of China, the US, and the UK, once mere prediction, are already taking place. Conflicts escalating over depleted natural resources, due to disrupted and rising temperatures, are already occurring. The planet may not wait patiently until the Security Council overcomes its propensity for political pandering.

Unless we act now, and with formidable preemptive force, more of this is what could face the international community. Transcending the Security Council's usual scope of nation-state conflicts, climate change-related conflict will affect all of us - with particular devastation to developing countries not represented by the P5. Thus it is incumbent upon the Security Council, which has a responsibility to protect weaker member states, to step up and save the world.

A global threat requires global commitment. And that commitment can be best coordinated in the Security Council.

Representative Gregory Meeks (D) of N.Y. is vice chair of the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific and the Global Environment. Michael Shank is the government relations adviser at George Mason University's Institute for Conflict Analysis.

[Modesto Bee, Guest Commentary, Saturday, March 22, 2008:](#)

### **ROBERT P. MARTIN: Cleaning up the air, down on the farm**

?????? public got out of it was a proposal by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to eliminate the requirements for industrial farming facilities to disclose toxic gas emissions, as currently mandated by law. While few could fault the EPA for trying to take the concerns of the animal agriculture industry into consideration, developing a new policy on agriculture air emissions that ignores the concerns, advice and input from any other stakeholder just plain stinks.

A \$100 billion annual industry, livestock and poultry are raised on over 1.3 million farms across the United States. But, whereas in years past farms raising animals were spread over a wide area, and located far from cities and towns, that is no longer the case.

With increasing land costs and today's marketplace favoring the economy of larger scale production, bigger industrial food animal production facilities have become the norm. In 1934, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, there were 11,405 facilities that hatched chickens, but by 2001 that number had declined to just 323. In fact, consolidated animal feeding operations (CAFOs), the largest and most concentrated farms, make up only 5 percent of livestock operations yet produce 40 percent of U.S. livestock production. Sometimes containing thousands to tens of thousands of animals, these industrial farms produce enormous amounts of waste.

A source of dust, noxious gases and unpleasant odors, air emissions from industrial farms are nothing to sneeze at. According to the National Academy of Sciences, CAFO emissions of ammonia make up a startling half of the nation's entire ammonia emissions inventory. This poses not only a huge disposal problem but a serious threat to human health.

Many of the compounds, like ammonia, emitted by CAFOs are known to be toxic to the nervous system in sufficient concentration, and can cause respiratory symptoms, disease and impaired function. Releases of toxic fumes resulting from certain waste disposal practices also can prove fatal. Last summer, methane gas emissions from a manure pit in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley killed five people. Studies of residents

living near industrial farms have documented increased rates of neurobehavioral and neuropsychiatric abnormalities.

This, in part, is why the EPA has required, since 1980, that farms report large emissions of dangerous gases such as ammonia and hydrogen sulfide. So EPA's publication of the proposed rule eliminating air pollutant disclosure requirements for industrial farms is deeply troubling.

For years, agriculture industry lobbyists have been trying to eliminate CAFO emission reporting requirements. In 2005, representatives for poultry and egg production industries submitted a petition to the EPA arguing the reporting rules were "inappropriate, unwise public policy," and it appears that administration officials were listening. The problem, however, is that they seem to have been uninterested in hearing what other stakeholders had to say.

Decisions such as this, with the potential to impact rural communities in dramatic ways, should not be made lightly. Given the opposition that the publication of this rule has generated, there should have been consultation with others before a decision was reached.

But it appears that the EPA did not even seek input from its own Farm, Ranch, and Rural Communities Advisory Committee - a group recently organized to advise EPA officials on how to manage controversial issues such as air pollution from agriculture. Worse still, the agency didn't even wait for the results of its own two-year nationwide study of CAFO air emissions started last June. Designed to gather data from 24 sites in nine states, the study, ironically, was trumpeted by EPA Administrator Stephen L. Johnson as an opportunity to, "do what's good for agriculture, good for our environment, and good for the American people."

While the emissions of farms have been the topic for countless jokes over the ages, the threat posed by noxious gasses emissions from industrial farms to our nation's rural communities is no laughing matter.

Issuing a controversial proposed rule that exempts large animal feeding operations from reporting noxious gas releases, without consulting your own advisory committee or newly gathered research, is not only bad policy but an abrogation of public trust.

The millions of people across America living today near large industrial farms deserve better. The EPA owes the public a serious accounting of the decision making process on these draft rules.

*Robert P. Martin is the executive director of the Pew Commission on Industrial Farm Animal Production, 1900 L Street NW, Suite 312, Washington, D.C. 20036; e-mail: .RMartin@pcifap.org*

[Letters to the Fresno Bee, Monday, March 24, 2008:](#)

### **A done deal**

So The Bee and the Valley air district have figured out how to solve the Valley's air problem -- by making scapegoats of those few people who still use their fireplaces for warmth, and yes, heaven help us, for a little pleasure over a four-month period.

What will they hit in the summer? Barbecues on the patio with little or no wind? If they really want to solve the problem, how about doing something about lines of cars lined up waiting for trains to pass, or to grab snacks at a drive-through? We can count them, but does the air board or The Bee have any idea how many people use their fireplaces on any given day, and just how much PM whatever is flung into the atmosphere?

No way. An uneducated guess will be made, and that will be that! No sense crying any more about it. The die is cast, the deal is done, and all we need now is for the fat lady to sing! That will be at the meeting, which the board conveniently scheduled for a weekday morning at 9 a.m. Guess who will be there to celebrate? The board members and the proponents of the wood-burning ban. They will have won!

*Leonard E. Goldberg, Fresno*

### **'Cleaner alternatives'**

Thank you for your editorial in support of efforts by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to take further steps to protect local residents from wood-smoke pollution.

Fine soot particles in wood smoke are a serious health problem. They are linked to lung and heart disease and can increase asthma attacks, hospitalizations and premature death. The elderly, children and those with lung and heart disease are at greatest risk. These particles are particularly harmful because they are small enough to lodge deep in the lungs.

Just as we regulate polluting vehicles and factories for health reasons, it makes sense to regulate smoke from wood burning that fills the air and lungs with dangerous pollutants. We encourage the public to consider the health of their neighbors when using a fireplace or wood-burning stove where smoke is visible.

There are alternatives to reduce this pollution. There are also special considerations if wood is a sole source of heat. We hope that with education, people will burn less and choose cleaner alternatives to burn or heat their home.

For more information, visit [www.californialung.org](http://www.californialung.org) or contact the American Lung Association of California in Fresno at (559) 222-4800.

*Barbara Beedon, Regional Vice President  
American Lung Association of California*

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses 11 cases of intoxication due to derailment of train in Mecca. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

### **Peligro de intoxicación sobre rieles**

***En 2007, en LA hubo 11 casos de derrame de materias tóxicas***

Claudia Núñez

La Opinion, Monday, March 24, 2008

La noche del 5 de marzo, mientras decenas de personas dormían, un riachuelo de líquidos tóxicos comenzó a emanar de entre los retorcidos vagones de un tren que acababa de descarrilarse en la comunidad de Mecca, a menos de tres horas de Los Ángeles.

Cerca del lugar, niños, ancianos y adultos, en su mayoría campesinos inmigrantes de bajos recursos, dormían ajenos al peligro de intoxicación al que se enfrentaban.

Este reciente descarrilamiento, que provocó la evacuación de 50 familias, fue un eslabón más del alarmante aumento de derrames tóxicos que ha sufrido el sistema ferroviario en los últimos 12 meses, los peores en más de una década, según datos de la Administración Federal de Transporte Ferroviario (FRA).

Estadísticas nacionales indican que el derramamiento de materiales peligrosos aumentó 53.6%, un índice nunca antes visto.

En total, el año pasado hubo 2,547 accidentes ferroviarios, de éstos, 73 resultaron en fisuras que permitieron la expulsión de químicos tóxicos, según la agencia federal.

"Los índices son muy preocupantes. No olvidemos que basta un solo derrame para matar a miles", expresó Patricia Abbate, directora ejecutiva de la organización Ciudadanos por Rieles Seguros (CRS).

Investigaciones privadas avalan las palabras de Abbate. Un estudio reciente de la Universidad Estatal de Pennsylvania, determinó que si un vagón con 90 toneladas de cloruro sufriera una fisura ya fuera por un accidente o un ataque terrorista podría formar una nube de 40 millas de largo y 10 millas de ancho, que alcanzaría a matar en un área urbana como Los Ángeles, hasta 100 mil personas en menos de 30 minutos.

"Las muertes sucederían mucho antes de que los servicios de emergencia llegaran al lugar y si el accidente pasara en una zona tan densamente poblada como Los Ángeles, eso se transformaría en un embudo de tránsito incontrolable", indicó.

Cada día cerca de dos millones de vagones cargados con productos flamables, corrosivos o venenosos, destinados al mercado industrial y a la agricultura, así como miles de toneladas de armamento para uso del Ejército atraviesan el estado de California.

Los condados de San Bernardino y Los Ángeles, con cerca de 2.5 millones de personas viviendo en los alrededores de las vías del tren, registraron el volumen más alto de derrames tóxicos en todo el estado.

Para finales de 2006, el condado de Los Ángeles contaba con seis casos de materiales tóxicos liberados accidentalmente, para 2007 los incidentes habían aumentado a 11.

Asimismo, la ciudad de Corona, en el condado de Riverside, se ubicó en la décima posición entre las 10 ciudades con el mayor número de accidentes ferroviarios en todo el país, según información del Centro de Investigación de Materiales Tóxicos de la Universidad de Louisville.

Las causas, dicen expertos, van desde fallas en el mantenimiento de las vías férreas, vagones deficientes, errores humanos y el acelerado aumento de cargamento tóxico de las dos compañías privadas mayoritarias, Union Pacific y BNSF, que sirven de vía de desfogue del puerto de Long Beach.

"Los errores más persistentes que hemos visto son el sellado deficiente de los tanques y los vagones de carga de tóxicos y errores humanos al cerrar las válvulas de escape de los vagones", expresó Joseph Boardman, director ejecutivo del FRA.

Según la Asociación Americana de Trenes, el año pasado el transporte materiales tóxicos por tren aumentó hasta en un 60%, por el alza en la gasolina y los problemas viales que genera transportarlos.

Este alto volumen de tóxicos y armamento corriendo por las vías del tren, transformó a la industria ferroviaria en una preocupación de seguridad nacional, especialmente después de enero de 2005, cuando en el poblado de Graniteville, Carolina del Sur, nueve personas murieron y cientos resultaron heridas tras el choque entre dos trenes que provocó fisuras en uno de los vagones que transportaba gas cloruro.

Más de cinco mil personas fueron evacuadas tras el peligro de que inhalaran la nube de humo de gas cloruro, un tóxico que puede matar en cuestión de minutos.

"De ocurrir uno de estos incidentes en el condado de Los Ángeles, miles de familias estarían en peligro. Es por eso que es urgente que inicien una investigación a profundidad para conocer lo que está ocasionando el aumento tan alto de accidentes relacionados con materiales tóxicos", dijo Abbate.

Lane Kent, portavoz de BSNF, aclaró que esta empresa es una de las más seguras de la nación y que pese al número de incidentes, la transportación de cargamento tóxico por vías ferroviarias es casi un 100% más seguro que las autopistas.

"Estamos trabajando con el Departamento de Seguridad Interna (DHS) para evitar que nuestros vagones sean blanco de un ataque terrorista. Invertimos millones de dólares en entrenamiento y seguridad de nuestros sistemas. Por motivos de seguridad los detalles no podemos darlos a conocer al público pero existe una colaboración especial con las agencias de seguridad nacional", dijo.

Pero el informe U.S. Railroad and Opportunities for Terrorist Threats ratifica que, además de las fallas técnicas o de mantenimiento, existen dos errores fundamentales en el sistema ferroviario. Uno, es el fácil acceso a los vagones lo que pudiera provocar el robo de armamento o la utilización de éstos como una bomba tóxica y dos, la falta de información y entrenamiento a los vecinos que radican junto a las vías del tren sobre qué medidas podrían tomar en caso de un accidente.

Según entrevistas recabadas por La Opinión, son raras las ocasiones en que clínicas o escuelas ubicadas cerca de las vías del tren, reciben información acerca de qué tipo de cargamentos transportan los vagones.

"En lo que llevo trabajando para esta clínica, nunca he recibido información de qué es lo que cargan esos trenes. Para mí el incidente de los químicos fue algo inesperado", detalló la administradora de la clínica local en el Valle de Coachella, a menos de 15 millas de donde sucedió el incidente de Mecca.

Esa misma falta de información la compartieron los 75 vecinos evacuados en esa localidad rural.

"No nos dejaron llevarnos nada. Todos estábamos muy asustados y no sabíamos qué hacer. Nos hablaban en inglés y no entendíamos nada. Todavía después de que nos dijeron que ya podíamos regresar a las casas nos daba miedo, sobre todo por los niños. Aquí [en Mecca] nadie tenía idea de que esos vagones llevaban tóxicos", dijo María Cervantes, madre de tres hijos quien vivió refugiada con su familia en una escuela local por cuatro días tras el accidente de Mecca.

El pasado 9 de marzo, los Cervantes regresaron a su hogar con un cheque por 1,375 dólares como compensación por el accidente, suma que pudo cubrir deudas, pero no el temor con el que ahora duermen.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the approval for the Clean Truck Program in San Pedro, California.](#)

### **Anuncian aprobación de programa "Camiones Limpios" en San Pedro, California**

Carlos Quintanilla

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Friday, March 21, 2008

Decenas de camioneros del Puerto de San Pedro, California celebraron como una victoria la aprobación del programa "Camiones Limpios". Mediante el citado programa, las empresas transportistas tendrán la responsabilidad de renovar paulatinamente los cerca de 17 mil camiones del referido puerto para reducir la contaminación. Asimismo, el citado programa propone que los chóferes de San Pedro trabajen como empleados y no como contratistas independientes. El alcalde de Los Ángeles, Antonio Villaraigosa hizo el anuncio del programa Camiones Limpios: "Y con esta iniciativa vamos a decir que Los Ángeles va a ser líder internacionalmente en limpiar el aire y hacer crecer el comercio en el puerto". Se estima que la mayoría de camioneros que labora en el Puerto de San Pedro, son de origen latino.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses new discoveries can improve air quality in hundreds of cities.](#)

### **Nuevo descubrimiento puede mejorar la calidad del aire de cientos de ciudades**

Noticiero Latino, San Diego, CA

Radio Bilingüe, Friday, March 21, 2008

Científicos de la Universidad de California en San Diego (UCSD, por sus siglas en inglés) revelaron hoy un nuevo descubrimiento que podría mejorar la calidad del aire de las principales ciudades en el mundo.

Químicos de la UCSD descubrieron que el ozono en las ciudades se forma por una reacción química que se origina por el vapor.

Los investigadores informaron que esa reacción se conocía pero carecía hasta ahora de la importancia que realmente representa en la generación de ozono, el peor contaminante de la atmósfera terrestre.

Un reglamento internacional basado en ese descubrimiento puede mejorar el aire que respiran unos cien millones de personas en las ciudades más contaminadas del mundo.