

Fire destroys 12 homes near Yosemite National Park

By Tracie Cone, Associated Press

In the Fresno Bee, Monday, July 28, 2008

Little relief from hot weather is expected this week as crews fight to contain a wildfire near an entrance to Yosemite National Park that has destroyed 12 homes and forced the evacuation of nearly 200 others.

The blaze had charred more than 26,000 acres - over 40 square miles - since Friday as wooded slopes ignited. Besides the homes destroyed, the fire had also engulfed 27 other buildings.

Officials ordered the evacuations of 195 homes under immediate threat, but some residents defied orders and stayed to protect their property. About 2,000 homes faced at least some danger from the fast-spreading flames, said Wayne Barringer, a state fire spokesman on the scene.

Most of the evacuated homes are in the town of Midpines, about 12 miles from the park. The southern edge of the blaze was as little as two miles from Mariposa, a town of about 1,800 residents.

"My house is about 100 yards from some fire right now and that's freaking me out," said John Romero, who answered his phone Sunday evening during a break from digging trenches and clearing brush with a little tractor.

Romero said his brother, Tony Romero, has an adjoining property with a 50,000-gallon swimming pool. The brothers planned to pump water from the pool to defend their homes if the fire advanced that far.

He said the air was thick with smoke. "I feel like I've smoked two packs of cigarettes, and I don't smoke," Romero said.

Weather early this week is expected to bring little change from the hot, dry conditions that have plagued California for months. High temperatures are expected to remain in the low- to mid-90s, with low humidity and afternoon wind, National Weather Service meteorologist Dan Gudgel said early Monday.

"It'll be a challenging fire for them to fight," Gudgel said.

The fire was 10 percent contained Sunday evening.

State fire officials said the blaze was ignited by sparks created from firearms used for target practice, but would not elaborate.

Mary Ann Porter, a nursing assistant who lives in Midpines, left her goats, chickens and dog when she evacuated Sunday morning. Porter, who lives with her daughter and grandchildren, said the family took pictures and some computer hard drives.

"One of the blessings of living up here is that you adapt and learn to accept things," she said at the evacuation center in Mariposa.

To protect firefighters battling flames beneath power lines, electricity was cut to a wide area fire officials said.

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ames Guidi Jr., a spokesman for Pacific Gas & Electric, said the transmission line that fed power to Yosemite was destroyed by the fire on Saturday. Mobile generators were being set up to restore power to the whole park and about 500 customers nearby by Monday evening. In all, about 1,000 customers in the area had lost power, Guidi said.

Farther north, in Siskiyou County, authorities reported the death of a second firefighter in as many days. The victim died Saturday while scouting a blaze, Siskiyou County Sheriff's Department spokeswoman Susan Gravenkamp said Sunday. On Friday, a firefighter was killed by a falling tree while battling another Northern California wildfire.

In Southern California, about 4,000 visitors were evacuated Sunday from the Los Angeles zoo, and California condors and vultures in the zoo were relocated, as a brush fire spread through nearby Griffith Park.

The 25-acre fire was contained in under three hours, and no injuries were reported.

In Montana, air tankers dropped fire retardant along a ridge near the Red Lodge Mountain Ski Resort on Sunday to protect the resort from a wildfire. Resort employees were ready to operate the resort's snowmaking equipment to spray cascades of water against the fast-moving blaze, said Forest Service fire information officer Jeff Gildehaus.

Fire officials ordered evacuations Sunday as the fire west of Red Lodge moved steadily toward the east.

The fire on the Custer National Forest had grown to more than 2,500 acres by Sunday evening and burned five summer homes and an outhouse in the historic Camp Senia area, Gildehaus said.

In the path of flames

Fast-moving wildfire burns near Yosemite National Park, where power is out.

By Jeff St. John and Doug Hoagland / The Fresno Bee

Monday, July 28, 2008

A fast-moving wildfire near Yosemite National Park claimed a dozen homes and prompted hundreds more evacuations Sunday, as thousands of firefighters struggled to keep it from engulfing nearby communities.

Fire crews had built containment lines around 10% of the more than 26,000-acre fire by Sunday night, and officials said cooler conditions were aiding firefighting efforts.

Still, fire officials ordered additional evacuations of about 430 homes in the Greeley Hill area, in the Mykleoaks subdivision, and along Whitlock Road, French Camp Road and Grosjean Road, said Rick Benson, Mariposa County administrative officer. On Saturday, about 170 homes in the Midpines area were evacuated.

The so-called Telegraph fire, yet another in an already devastating California fire season, continued to threaten nearly 2,000 homes in the Mariposa County foothills that serve as Yosemite's western gateway.

The fire crept within two miles of Mariposa, where hospital officials prepared to evacuate 29 patients to Valley hospitals -- or have firefighters surround the hospital to defend it if flames get close.

In Yosemite, hotels and restaurants got by on generators after power lines to Yosemite Valley were shut down because of the potential risk to firefighters working beneath the wires. A transmission line that carries electricity to the park was then brought down by the fire, PG&E spokesman James Guidi Jr. said.

Three firefighters were treated for minor injuries, said Mike Mohler, a spokesman for Cal Fire. The fire had destroyed 12 homes and 27 outbuildings as of Sunday night, he said.

The fire threat led authorities Sunday to issue an evacuation warning to people living in the communities east of Highway 49 from Mykleoaks Road south to the Highway 140 junction and in communities west of Highway 140 from Mariposa north to Briceburg.

Nearly 2,000 firefighters, coming from as far as San Diego, were fighting the blaze Sunday.

The fire started Friday, apparently sparked by a target shooter, fire investigators said. It spread along the steep Merced River valley and exploded across 16,000 acres Saturday.

"It was a firestorm," said lifetime Midpines resident Eric McClard, 26, as he recalled his escape from his home after being ordered to evacuate within 30 minutes Saturday afternoon.

Neighbors told him Sunday that his home had been destroyed, though he hadn't confirmed that with state fire officials.

His mother, Kelly McClard, said she knew they were in danger when the sky turned black with smoke and flames crested the nearest hill.

"We had to use our headlights, because the smoke was so thick," she said. "It seemed like night, and then we got halfway down the street, and it was a beautiful day again."

Chris Moyle, a 23-year-old state firefighter stationed in Los Banos, said he and his fellow firefighters had faced "extreme fire behavior" as they worked to protect a home in the Midpines area through Saturday night and Sunday morning.

"Fire whirls, sheeting, high temperatures, steep terrain -- the fire was making a big run," he said Sunday afternoon as he waited at the Mariposa County Fairgrounds to eat and perhaps catch some sleep after a 36-hour shift.

A haze of smoke hung over Mariposa on Sunday. To the north, a line of rising smoke that marked the fire's southern edge could be seen stretching from Mount Bullion in the west to Highway 140 in the east.

Ashes drifted like snowflakes across Mariposa, and falling ash was reported as far away as Clovis on Sunday. State authorities warned motorists to avoid driving on Highway 140 between Mariposa and Yosemite Sunday night because of low visibility and heavy fire vehicle traffic.

A Red Cross evacuation center at Mariposa Elementary School served 40 to 50 people, with 16 people staying the night Saturday, said Jim Rydingsword, Mariposa County director of human services.

At the evacuation center on Sunday, Cheryle Sigafoos, 60, sat and wondered whether the Midpines home she and her husband had just finished building in April had survived.

"Happily, Bill and I have done a very good job of clearing the property," the native Australian said. Their 2,500-gallon water tank on the property, and the fact that their home is made of concrete, also gave her hope.

But Sigafoos worried for her neighbors' homes and possessions, as well as their horses. In the short time given residents to evacuate, not all the animals could be put in trailers. Some neighbors set their horses free to escape danger on their own, she said.

"I got my personal papers that are important to us, a handful of shoes, some clothes and some photographs," Sigafos said. "We're alive, and everything else is replaceable."

In Mariposa, residents worried that the fast-moving fire might sweep down on their tiny community of 1,800.

"I just know they don't have it contained yet, and the wind's picking up," said Dorrie Pereira, 27, a waitress at Sal's Mexican Restaurant.

The staff at John C. Fremont Hospital in Mariposa made plans Sunday to move 29 patients to hospitals in the Valley if officials gave the evacuation order.

"We can see the smoke and sometimes the flames from outside our emergency room," said Maureen Spacke, director of nursing.

Twenty-six of the patients, ranging in age from 80s to 101, are in the hospital's long-term care unit, and the other three are in the acute-care section.

"Some of the patients know what's happening," Spacke said. "The staff has been doing a good job of keeping them calm. Many say, 'What's new? What do you have to tell us?' Some of them are enjoying the excitement of it all."

Buses and ambulances would move the patients, Spacke said.

Officials also were considering an alternative to evacuation: Firefighters would surround the hospital and defend it from advancing flames, Spacke said.

"A lot of people are concerned about it," she said. "But evacuating has its dangers, too, especially with the elderly. They become confused. We're in a pickle, but the staff is doing really well. We're working toward a good outcome."

Julie Hagzeda, day manager at The Mariposa Lodge on Highway 49, said she also is worried about the fire's spread. But the influx of firefighters and evacuees into the town had filled the motel's rooms -- the last reserved for the motel's owners, who had just been evacuated from their home, she said.

To protect firefighters battling flames beneath power lines, electricity was cut to a wide area, including the national park, fire officials said.

It remained unclear Sunday afternoon when Pacific Gas & Electric Co. might restore power to Yosemite Valley.

The utility was bringing two mobile generators to the area from Sacramento on Sunday and said they should provide power to about 560 mostly residential customers north of Mariposa by this afternoon, Guidi said.

An additional 471 residential and commercial customers are in the area, and some -- but not all -- also could see their power restored today, Guidi said. He said he didn't know whether public places in Yosemite Valley were included.

When PG&E crews can repair the downed transmission line into Yosemite is uncertain, Guidi said: "It depends on the path of the fire and when it's safe to get in there. I was told it could be a couple of days."

Julie Chavez, a Yosemite park ranger, said power still was flowing to the visitors center, grocery stores, restaurants and hotel lobbies, but not to hotel rooms.

"We're still running on the generators and we don't have any update on when the power is going to be coming on," she said. She said she doesn't know how long the generators can continue to operate.

Smoke from the fire reduced visibility in the park throughout the day. "This valley is a mile wide, and you can barely see across the valley," Chavez said.

Still, visitors continued to enter the park Sunday, though Chavez did not have any numbers. On a typical summer day, about 18,000 visitors come into the park, she said.

Some campers were leaving because of the fire, but Chavez said it was not a mass exodus. "There is more space available than we usually have this time of season because of the smoke."

Fire near California's Yosemite threatens 2,000 homes

By Anupreeta Das

Washington Post, Sunday, July 27, 2008

SAN FRANCISCO (Reuters) - An out-of-control wildfire near one of the entrances to Yosemite National Park charred more than 18,000 acres, destroyed eight houses and has put about 2,000 homes at risk, fire officials said on Sunday.

Firefighters were able to control about 16 percent of the blaze, dubbed the "Telegraph Fire," which began Friday afternoon, said Wayne Barringer, an information officer at the California Department for Forestry and Fire Prevention.

Seven outbuildings, including barns and sheds, were also destroyed, but there have been no reported injuries, said another officer, Daniel Berlant.

The fire has not seen any "major movement" in the past 12 hours, but remains "very active" on the south flank toward Mariposa, a town of about 1,800 inhabitants, and on the east flank toward Yosemite, according to the department's Web site.

"It's tolerable today, but yesterday afternoon, there was a lot of ash falling down" in Mariposa, Barringer said.

"The fire's going in all directions," said Berlant. "There are reports of flame lengths over 100 feet."

About 195 homes in the towns of Midpines and Coulterville were under mandatory evacuation orders, officials said.

Midpines is a tiny community of about 600 people along one of the main highways to Yosemite, the storied 1,200-square-mile park in central California that gets nearly 4 million visitors a year.

The fire is not affecting the park itself, but power supply to Yosemite Valley, an area that includes popular sightseeing spots like El Capitan, has been cut off, said Julie Chavez, a Yosemite media relations officer.

"We're running on generators," she said, adding that all four entrances to the park and major roads remain open. But "air quality and visibility have been impeded," Chavez said.

Berlant said the fire was caused by a spark from a person shooting at targets and was fueled by dry timber that has not burned for 100 years. "There's a lot of fuel for the fire burn," he said.

There are about 2,000 firefighters battling the blaze, along with 200 fire engines, 12 air tankers and 12 helicopters. A big challenge to controlling the fire is steep, rugged terrain that makes access difficult, Berlant said.

Districts Face Order to Replace Older Buses

By Rick Elkins

Valley Voice Newspaper, Monday, July 28, 2008

Visalia - Local school districts scrambling to find dollars to pay for buses have applied for Proposition 1B funds to purchase new buses, while at the same time keeping an eye on the State Air Resources Board that could force them to purchase even more buses, or retrofit old buses to meet new emission standards.

The proposed diesel-soot regulations from the Air Board would require schools to buy new buses — they average about \$165,000 each — or retrofit older ones at \$20,000 or more per bus.

“We're lobbying to get that changed,” said Robert Groeber, assistant superintendent business services of the Visalia Unified School District of the air board's proposal. The original ARB diesel rule excluded school buses; the latest version of the rule includes them. The air board is expected to make a final decision in October in Fresno.

The Visalia District has 24 buses that fall into the category of needing replacement or retrofitting, with 15 buses older than 1986. Another 10-12 buses are 1987-1996 models. The proposed ARB rule would require any buses older than 1977 to be replaced and those 1978-2006 to be retrofitted or replaced.

Diesel soot causes about 2,900 premature deaths a year in California, about 3,600 hospital admissions and some 240,000 asthma attacks and respiratory symptoms, according to the ARB. In 1998, California identified diesel exhaust particulate matter (PM) as a toxic air contaminant based on its potential to cause cancer, premature death and other health problems. Diesel engines also contribute to California's fine particulate matter (PM2.5) air quality problems.

Those most vulnerable are children whose lungs are still developing and the elderly who may have other serious health problems.

“About half our fleet is relatively new and half run on Compressed Natural Gas and don't have to be retrofitted,” said Groeber.

In the Tulare City Schools District, four buses have already been retrofitted and it just applied for a grant to retrofit 11 more, said Richard Weaver, head mechanic for the district. The district has 19 buses.

In the Tulare High School District, 20 of its 27 buses would need to be replaced or retrofitted, said District Transportation Supervisor Robert Zamarripa.

All three districts have applied for funds to purchase new buses, but Luis Castellanoz, assistant superintendent for Tulare City School District, said most of the money will go to replace older buses (1977 and older) and the chances it will receive any of the funds are slim.

“It looked good for funding when we applied,” he said of its application to buy two new buses, “but not so now.” He said the district has already been told it will not be included in the first round of funding.

Visalia Unified applied to replace 24 buses — all that it has that are eligible for replacement. The grant will pay \$140,000 per bus, with the districts matching that with \$25,000 per bus. Groeber

said the district should know where it stands by September and for the money it doesn't get, it would then apply for retrofit funding.

"With the Proposition 1B funds, we estimate the program will replace over 1,100 high-polluting buses, including the last of the pre-1977 buses, with new, clean models, and retrofit up to 3,500 existing diesel buses with ARB-verified pollution control equipment. Some of these low-emitting new buses may be on the road by the end of the year, while every one of the new and retrofitted buses will be in service transporting California's school children no later than June 30, 2011," said the ARB. Retrofitting of buses must be completed by 2017, but any bus older than 1977 must be off the road by 1011, the ARB rule proposed.

Roughly \$190 million is available statewide and \$39 million in the Central Valley to replace or retrofit buses.

All schools must use what is called "Green Diesel" to run its diesel buses. Green diesel, also known as low sulfur diesel, runs cleaner and produces less soot, but even buses that run on that must be retrofitted.

"It is much more expensive," said Castellanoz of the green diesel. "We did smog checks and it (the difference) was substantial. Those retrofit systems do work," he said. "You can tell the difference and smell the difference."

Adding to the dilemma the districts face is that all new buses have to come with seatbelts. Not only does that make the buses more expensive – about \$20,000 more – but the buses with seatbelts seat fewer students. On average, a district will need four buses to replace three of the older buses.

In Visalia, which purchases on average two new buses a year, the district would have to purchase 17 over the next two years, and more with seatbelts. "To replace 35 buses, we need 40. The reality is you have to have more buses and drivers to move the same number of kids," said Groeber.

The cost to retrofit a bus is approximately \$18,000 and to replace an engine it is \$30,000, said Groeber.

"We would rather replace than retrofit," he added. Castellanoz agreed.

Exercising in bad air? What you should know

By Stacey Shepard, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Saturday, July 26, 2008

At 73, Charles Litzinger bikes 20 miles roundtrip every day to swim at the Cal State Bakersfield pool.

He knows Bakersfield is prone to severe air pollution - especially in summer months - but it rarely deters his pursuit of a workout.

"I guess I think the exercise is better for me than the bad air," the retired history professor said.

Like Litzinger, many local athletes shrug off concern about the area's poor air quality.

"I think my body's used to it," said Tomas Garza Jr., who's been running four miles a day to train for this year's Volkslauf race.

However, recent research by the California Air Resources Board has found that dirty air can affect healthy individuals who exercise outdoors.

“Exercise is a good thing but when air pollution is high and you’re outdoors, you’ll get a higher dose of pollution,” said Barbara Weller, a pulmonary pathologist and toxicologist who participated in the ARB research.

In reviewing recent studies on air pollution and exercise, Weller and her colleagues found that exercise during bad air pollution episodes may temporarily decrease lung function, exacerbate asthma and even cause DNA damage.

Because people breathe more air through their mouth during exercise, oxygen bypasses the nasal filtration system and more pollution gets lodged deep in the lungs. That’s compounded by the fact that people breathe in 10 to 20 times more air when exercising, which increases the amount of pollution entering their lungs.

The studies also showed that people who exercise near heavy traffic are at increased risk of suffering health impacts because of exposure to tailpipe emissions and road dust.

No one’s calling for people to stop their outdoor workout altogether because of air pollution. In fact, the ARB research showed that exercise can actually help purge the lungs of contaminants. But Weller and fellow researchers have identified ways individuals can better protect themselves:

Exercise in the morning.

Air pollution is caused when emissions from vehicles, factories and other sources cook in sunlight and heat. Therefore, air quality is at its worst later in the day.

Avoid areas with heavy traffic.

To reduce exposure to traffic pollution, consider a new route. Driving, cycling or walking on or along a road with many vehicles increases exposure to harmful pollutants even on days when air quality is good. Consider moving your workout to a nearby park or the bike path.

Look at the daily air quality index. Air quality information is available on the Californian’s weather page and local television weathercasts. Real time air quality information is also available at airnow.gov and valleyair.org.

Commission welcomes business park

Written by John Saiz

Patterson Irrigator, Friday, July 25, 2008

The Patterson Planning Commission greeted a new business park proposal near Sperry Avenue and Baldwin Road with open arms at its Thursday meeting.

The four commissioners in attendance voted unanimously to approve the plan.

“I’m glad to see further job creation,” commissioner Elias Funez said.

The applicants, Westside Property Management and F. & D. Schali, have proposed turning 121 acres of mostly vacant land into 34 buildings that would cater to a variety of industrial tenants.

The final OK still needs to come from the Patterson City Council, which is expected to review the matter at its Aug. 19 meeting.

Westridge is next to the Keystone Pacific Business Park, which houses a 675,000-square-foot distribution center for Kohl’s and an 800,000-square-foot center for Longs Drug Stores among other businesses.

If the new project reaches fruition, it would provide about 1.3 million square feet of industrial space in buildings from 13,500 to 75,000 square feet apiece.

“It’s nice to see some buildings that aren’t 600,000 square feet,” commissioner Pat Dooley said.

Developers said they have not secured any tenants, but they expect marketing will be much easier with a city-developer agreement in hand.

“This is one step forward for shovel-ready dirt,” developer Joe Hollowell said.

Westridge is part of the 817-acre West Patterson Business Park Master Plan, which lays the groundwork for industrial development west of Baldwin Avenue on the north and south sides of Sperry Avenue. The master plan means much of the required environmental work for development is already completed, including traffic and [air quality](#) studies.

Developers had to wait for agricultural preserve contracts to expire before moving their plans forward, said Kenny Buehner, one of the property owners.

Summer heat, fires make bad air worse

Written by R.D. O'Bryan | Health Matters
Patterson Irrigator, Friday, July 25, 2008

I was reading some contributions on the site E-poems.org a while ago, and I remember this one in particular. In part, the poet writes:

“Up in the blue / you are breathing the air / of Frequent Flyers / swirling molecules / microbial cyclones / volatile cologne / bacteria / each receptive alveole / penetrated and vacated / by parts of strangers.”

While the poem quickly evolves into a love poem after this, it is clear the poet went to great length in using the imagery of air to communicate things that can be deeply absorbed within.

For the poet, it was romantic love. For the rest of us, a casual look out our windows reveals something a bit more insidious. Indeed, these past few weeks, many of us have been miserable in what we've been absorbing.

As a native of the Los Angeles area, I know all too well the woes of poor air quality. Geographically, L.A. is a half-bowl open to the ocean, with the steep rim formed by the formidable San Gabriel mountains. With the constant ocean winds blowing inland, the city's smog has nowhere to go.

The Central Valley is also a bowl. The four mountain ranges around the Central Valley all form a long, deep depression. While the Valley has a much larger area and a lighter population density, the bowl effect is in place nonetheless.

The valley air is already filled with many types of agricultural particles, and new industry and the pollution created by thousands of people commuting between Bakersfield and L.A. and between the Bay Area and Sacramento have created an environment similar to Los Angeles.

The heat of summer and the many fires blazing across our state have made things even worse.

Inhaling such air can lead to or aggravate myriad health problems. Those with chronic lung conditions - asthma, emphysema, bronchitis - are most susceptible. Poor air quality also can trigger migraine headaches and send allergy sufferers running for their nasal sprays and antihistamine pills. The key to avoiding such scenarios is to limit exposure to the outside air and avoid physical exertion.

It is also extremely beneficial to know the exact particle and ozone level status of your area. Many newspapers print daily air quality forecasts. AirNow.gov is also an excellent online resource that gives updated air quality information for the whole country.

Of course, if you suffer from a particular lung or allergy condition, you should consult your health care provider ahead of time to come up with a medical plan that works best for you.

Richard O'Bryan is a nationally board certified and licensed physician assistant and a licensed paramedic who practices at the Patterson First Care clinic.

Achievements

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Saturday, July 26, 2008

The following were winners of the Tulare County Association of Governments' sixth annual "Make A Difference in Air Quality" contests:

Essay: Grand prize, Athena Niayesh, fifth-grader at Veva Blunt Elementary School, Visalia; grades K-3, Jessica Botello, first-grader at Royal Oaks Elementary School, Visalia; grades 4-6, David Michelson, fifth-grader at Veva Blunt Elementary School, Visalia; grades 7-8, Verence Botello, seventh-grader at Green Acres Middle School, Visalia; grades 9-12, Daniel Lovik, 10th-grader at Mt. Whitney High School, Visalia.

Poster: Grand prize, Jemimah Ostrea, 11th-grader at Orosi High School.; grades K-3, Justin Docanto, first-grader at Oak Valley Elementary School, Tulare; grades 4-6, Kennedy Hammond, fifth-grader at Royal Oaks Elementary School, Visalia; grades 7-8, Daisy Lopez, eighth-grader at Farmersville Junior High School; grades 9-12, Liselda Carreon, 12th-grader at Orosi High School.

Double the Powers

By Jennifer Wadsworth

Tracy Press, Friday, July 25, 2008

The Tracy Peaker Plant might soon become a misnomer, as owners of the 170-megawatt plant last week filed an application with state regulators to nearly double the amount of power it can generate — and the way it generates it.

GWF Energy LLC, the company that owns the plant, has asked the California Energy Commission for permission to increase its capacity to 314 megawatts by using heat already generated to make steam that would power two new turbines.

That's enough energy for roughly 300,000 homes, according to the California Independent System Operator, which runs the state's electrical grid.

Should the state approve plans as submitted, owners of the plant would re-name it the Tracy Combined Cycle Power Plant to reflect that it runs on two types of turbines: a set fueled by steam and the original pair by natural gas.

"It's going to make the plant more efficient," company spokesman Riley Jones said. "It means you're going to capture the heat (created by existing turbines) that's now going into the atmosphere and use that heat to make steam, to run a steam turbine."

Since its 2003 opening, the natural gas-fired plant runs only when the state grid needs more power during peak use, which is typically between noon and 6 p.m. The state originally licensed it to run up to 8,000 hours a year, though it ran little more than 200 in all of 2007. The most it's ever run in a year was 370 hours in 2003.

The 8,000-hour cap would stay the same if the state approves the permit amendment. But as a combined-cycle plant, about 5,000 hours annually would be fed into the state grid, or about 16 hours a day, six days a week.

About 3,000 more hours are permitted than the company is likely to use. The extra hours allows for a worst-case scenario, Jones said, citing the rolling blackouts in 2000 as an example of such a situation.

"We have no idea what the future holds," he said. "We don't know what the demand will be for sure, or what emergency lies around the corner. It's always nice to have a cushion that allows for more energy when it's needed."

Plans to change from a peaker to a consummate power plant have met little to no opposition, Jones said.

Whether that's because enough people have yet to hear about the permit revision or because, as Jones said, the change would make the plant more efficient and less polluting, remains to be seen.

Workshops will be held later this year for the public to comment on the proposed expansion.

Five years ago, the company tried to assuage public concern about the plant's air pollution by, among other things, buying a natural gas-fueled school bus for Tracy Unified School District, replacing gas with electric lawn mowers and installing catalytic converters on local school buses to curb emissions.

The company also awards scholarships to two local high schoolers every year and donates \$50,000 annually to local charities. The Tracy Community Charitable Foundation, a nonprofit arm of GWF Energy, also gave \$100,000 to Tracy Interfaith Ministries in May this year.

Bob Sarvey, a vocal critic of the plan back in 2003, said this week that he'll refrain from commenting until he looks at the permit application more closely.

Riley said Sarvey has gone to him already with "some concerns."

The state could take anywhere from 18 months to two years to OK the permit, and once approved, construction would likely take two years to finish, which means the expansion would finish around 2012.

The revamped plant will take up a bit more than 16 acres within the company's 40-acre parcel off West Schulte Road, according to the company. Now it sits on 13 acres, though the request put in to the energy commission last week would allow build-out on up to 38 acres of the company's land.

The converted plant would connect to an existing 115,000-volt Pacific Gas & Electric Co. transmission line and the utility giant's natural gas pipeline, which both run under adjacent city land, part of which locals dub the antenna farm.

Enlarging the plant's capacity by building another turbine would add 16 new full-time jobs, the company said.

On national lists, Sacramento gets kudos and jeers

By Blair Anthony Robertson

Modesto Bee, Sunday, July 27, 2008

It is the best of cities, it is the worst of cities.

Runner's World magazine says Sacramento is runner friendly, and Golf Magazine proclaimed it the 19th best golf city. But if you run or hit the links here, consider this before you inhale: Sacramento is one of the eight worst cities for ozone and the 50th most unpleasant for allergy sufferers.

Heck, when it comes to those endless magazine "best of" lists, Sacramento is good, really good, bad and absolutely so-so.

Time declared the California capital the most diverse city in the nation. Men's Health says we're 19th happiest, but the magazine also suggested we're buying it on the installment plan – we're fourth worst for debt.

Forbes says Sacramento is among the best places for singles. Yet America Online calls us one of the worst for dating.

It's enough to make you pull your hair out.

Wait! Don't do that here. Sacramento ranks as one of the worst cities for regrowing hair.

The question of all these published rankings arose recently when Sacramento appeared near the top of two prominent magazines' lists. Outside included Sacramento in its "Best Towns 2008" list, and Kiplinger

Personal Finance ranked Sacramento eighth in its "10 best cities of 2008."

Maybe they heard Men's Health listed Sacramento near the top in doughnut shops per capita, or that USA Today ranked the city No. 9 for greatest percentage of sunny days.

"It's been a couple of good months for us," said Mike Testa, vice president of communications for the Sacramento Convention & Visitors Bureau.

In fact, many of these lists are no accident. Testa and others in the business of promoting Sacramento play an active role in pitching and positioning the city.

Months before the August issue of Outside hit the stands, the magazine contacted Testa and mentioned the coming list. Testa quickly put together a highlight packet.

"It's a big deal for us. Their circulation is over 600,000," Testa said. "Any time we can get that kind of third-party endorsement from a publication that size, it's good things for Sacramento."

Like many cities, Sacramento sends convention and visitors officials to trade shows, where they mingle with travel writers. The latest was a few months ago in San Francisco that generated major stories on

Sacramento in two Bay Area newspapers and a flattering piece in AAA's Via magazine that declared Sacramento "a great walking town."

"All of these things are résumé builders," Testa added. "One publication does it, and then others say, 'Hmm, I wonder what we're missing in Sacramento.' "

Some of the lists are flattering, some insulting and many just weird. The one about slow hair growth is no joke. Rogaine measured barbershops per capita, regrowth centers and sales of regrowth products to declare Sacramento 10th worst.

That left Neal Young, owner of Neal's Hairpieces for Men in Citrus Heights, scratching his toupee-covered head. "I've never heard of such a thing," he said.

The most prolific list-maker out there is Men's Health, which has a circulation of 1.8 million. Often, its lists make news. In 2004, it called Detroit the nation's fattest city, prompting the mayor to propose a tax on fast food restaurant sales – pundits dubbed it the "fat tax."

"That's exactly the type of thing we hope to accomplish. We want to motivate change," said Matt Marion, the magazine's deputy editor.

He says Men's Health began making lists in 2004 on everything from best cities for dogs to towns having the most and least sex. They were an immediate hit.

"People like to see how they're stacking up. It's a classic human emotion," Marion said. "By and large, Sacramento seems to fall about middle of the pack in a lot of cases, which isn't so bad."

In fact, Sacramento is extraordinarily ordinary, which is why the city has long been used as a test market for new products.

"If they can make it fly in Sacramento, they can make it fly anywhere," said Bob Beyn, president of Sacramento's Seraphein Beyn Advertising.

While getting in a popular magazine is often good news for Sacramento, in Davis such things are considered a mixed blessing.

Next to its university, Davis is best known for its bicycle-friendly streets, earning top marks in Bicycling magazine and the highest rating by the League of American Bicyclists.

It's also a city that clearly doesn't want to get any bigger.

Unlike Sacramento, Davis doesn't push to get on any "best of" lists, though it did make Outside magazine's "Great Places to Live" list in 2005.

"The listing is nice," said Bob Bowen, public relations manager for the city. "We don't go out searching for it. It kind of comes to us. If you don't want a lot of growth, then why would you put the word out that you're a great place to live?"

Exercise along roadways can damage lungs

By Maddalena Jackson

Modesto Bee, Saturday, July 26, 2008

The fires are all but gone and the Sacramento Valley is finally enjoying a streak of clear skies and fresher air.

There's a new warning, however, for residents returning to outdoor activities: exercise well away from roads and freeways.

Pollutants from diesel exhaust are present in higher concentrations near roadways, and recent studies found people exerting themselves nearby can suffer severe, short-term lung damage.

California Air Resources Board scientist Susan Gilbreath this week outlined new findings that elevate the concern over what is a familiar story for area residents: Particulates, elemental carbon and nitrogen dioxide routinely assault the lungs of people in the region. What's now known to make matters worse is the threat of roadside air pollution to humans.

One study, conducted in metropolitan London, examined mildly to moderately asthmatic adults as they walked in a local park and along a heavily traveled roadway. Walking along the road for two hours, inundated with diesel exhaust, resulted in decreased lung function – three times greater than that observed after two hours in a park. Signs of inflammation were evident after the road walk – but mostly absent after exercise in the park.

"(Symptoms include) coughing, chest tightness, trouble breathing and also usually burning eyes and congested noses," said Bradley Chipps, a Sacramento pediatric pulmonologist and allergist.

Sacramento Valley residents may be doing themselves and the environment a favor by exercising outdoors and commuting on foot or bicycle, but it may be at a cost to their health. Decreased lung function means less oxygen to vital organs – a study of heart attack survivors exposed to diesel exhaust showed a threefold reduction of oxygen to the heart.

The air board's Gilbreath also described a study, originally funded by the ARB, which found children playing in a high-ozone environment were three times more likely to develop asthma.

Gilbreath suggested that residents alter exercise routes to avoid congested roadways. Chipps added that exercising in the morning, before the daily commute hours, is the best way to avoid noxious pollutants.

Or, area residents can seek out alternatives.

"Swimming is good – it's the least asthmagenic exercise that we know of. Or you can do a spinning or aerobics or some kind of class indoors," Chipps said.

Long-term benefits of exercise are alluring, but evading short-term consequences can be arduous.

"Regular activity has been shown to increase respiratory clearance, which should improve removal of inhaled particles from the lungs," Gilbreath said. The immune system improves with exercise, and "people who exercise use fewer sick days, have better cardiac and respiratory health, and live longer."

At an ARB meeting last week, a recurring concern was intensity of the exposure along roadways.

The London study found significant health impacts at a supposedly healthy concentration of particulates – 28 micrograms per cubic meter. The EPA standard for good air is higher – 35 micrograms per cubic meter, noted John Telles, an ARB member from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

"Our current standard is, maybe, not good enough," he said.

State bid to limit emissions hits court snag

Bob Egelko, Chronicle Staff Writer
S.F. Chronicle, Saturday, July 26, 2008

SAN FRANCISCO -- California's effort to limit vehicle emissions of gases that contribute to global warming hit a snag Friday when a federal appeals court ruled that the state and environmental groups acted too early when they sued the Bush administration in January for blocking the law.

The Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco dismissed a lawsuit filed by California, 15 other states and five environmental groups over the Environmental Protection Agency's refusal to let the state enforce its limits on greenhouse gas fumes from new cars and trucks.

The court said the Jan. 2 suit was premature because the EPA, which had announced its intention to deny the state's request in a letter to Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger on Dec. 19 hadn't yet acted formally.

The agency eventually took that step March 6 when EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson entered his decision in the Federal Register. California and its allies then filed a new suit in a federal appeals court in Washington, D.C. That suit is still pending and is unaffected by Friday's order.

The dismissal slows action on the case, however, and virtually eliminates the possibility of a ruling before President Bush leaves office in January. It also shifts jurisdiction to an appeals court that ruled in 2005 that the EPA had no authority to regulate greenhouse gases under the federal Clean Air Act. The U.S. Supreme Court overturned that ruling in April 2007.

"This is merely a procedural setback, but it's dragged this litigation out longer," said Daniel Galpern, an attorney who represents Friends of the Earth, the Center for Biological Diversity and other environmental groups that joined California in both suits. "When you're dealing with climate change, attempts by California and other states to enforce their laws, delay is regrettable."

Ellen Peter, lawyer for the state Air Resources Board, said the court in the nation's capital might rule on the suit by mid-2009 unless the EPA changes course under a new president. She noted that both Democrat Barack Obama and Republican John McCain have said the agency should have let California enforce its law.

"California is committed to moving in every avenue we can, the court, Congress and administrative agencies," Peter said. "We definitely need to get these reductions from autos."

EPA spokesman Jonathan Shradar said the agency was pleased by the ruling. "We are still confident that the administrator's final decision will stand the test of any litigation," he said.

California's law, passed in 2002, established limits on auto emissions of carbon dioxide and other gases that scientists consider to be among the major causes of global warming. Starting with the 2009 models, automakers would be required to cut emissions in half by 2016.

Although there's little chance now that the law will take effect in time for next year's cars, Peter said information released by companies that sued to overturn the law showed that they are on course to meet the 2009 model requirements on their own. One reason, she said, is that they expect to sell more small vehicles and fewer large ones.

The state needed EPA approval to enforce its law because of a provision of the Clean Air Act. That law allows California, because of its smog problems, to enact air-quality rules more stringent than the national standard if the state gets a waiver from the EPA.

The EPA's denial of a waiver affected as many as 19 other states that have adopted California's standards or indicated their intention to do so, including the 15 that joined the state's lawsuit.

The agency had approved about 50 waiver applications without refusal since the law took effect more than 30 years ago. But Johnson, a Bush appointee, rejected California's request and said a national approach was better than state-by-state regulation.

He noted that Bush had recently signed legislation requiring makers of cars and trucks to increase fuel economy to an average of 35 mpg by 2020. He also said the state didn't qualify for a waiver because greenhouse gases are not unique to California.

In response to Johnson's decision, the state and environmental groups said the EPA has regularly granted waivers to California to address air pollution problems that were not unique to the state. They also said

California faces more severe effects from climate change than other states, including a melting snowpack, increases in wildfires and worsening smog.

In addition, California officials said, the new national fuel-economy standards are far weaker than the state law and would reduce greenhouse gas emissions by only half as much.

Navy fears Calif. shipping rule will affect range

By Samantha Young, Associated Press Writer
S.F. Chronicle, Saturday, July 26, 2008

Sacramento, CA (AP) --The 36,000-square mile Point Mugu Sea Range off the Southern California coast is an oceanic no man's land, an ideal spot in international waters for the U.S. and its allies to test equipment and train forces.

The expanse of the Pacific about 60 miles northwest of Los Angeles is where the Navy honed its skill in firing precision-guided missiles, including the Tomahawk cruise missile.

The Navy now fears those ideal testing grounds could be irreparably compromised with a law passed Thursday by California air regulators. They have ordered cargo ships to use cleaner-burning — but more expensive — fuel within 24 nautical miles of the coast.

At issue is the sea lane used by cargo ships entering and exiting the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach.

The lane now runs along the coast from Los Angeles to an area northwest of Santa Barbara, a 183-mile voyage that takes ships between the coast and the eastern boundary of the Navy's testing range.

With the new air regulation, shipping companies looking to save money by burning less of the cleaner fuel could take a more direct path between the ports and international waters. That would put them on course for the Navy's training ground.

The trip would lengthen by about 42 miles the distance to get ships on the main channel to Asia, but it would allow the ships to get into international waters faster. At that point, they could switch to the cheaper — and more polluting — bunker fuel.

The Navy dispatched a spokesman to last week's air board meeting in the state capital, who said freight traffic in their range would force the military to restrict its training and testing schedule.

"When you start layering on potential regulation in the channel with no regulation on the other side, our concern is that the economic decision may very well be, 'OK we'll go the extra ... miles and it's the Navy's problem at that point,'" said Randal Friedman, California government affairs officer for the Navy's southwest region.

On Thursday, the California Air Resources Board adopted the nation's toughest emission rules for ocean-going ships coming in and out of the state's 16 ports.

Beginning in July 2009, cargo ships, tankers and cruise vessels must use a more expensive, cleaner fuel to power their main engines and boilers within 24 nautical miles of California's coastline.

The regulation bans ships from using bunker fuel, a heavy crude oil that has the consistency of asphalt and must be heated aboard ships.

The state also is evaluating a possible requirement ordering ships to slow down in the Santa Barbara Channel, the normal thoroughfare for large vessels into the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach. Reducing speed lessens emissions.

California regulators downplayed the Navy's concerns but pledged to perform an environmental analysis. The Navy said overall nitrogen oxide emissions could increase by as much as 5 tons a day if enough ships opt to leave California waters more quickly and ply through the Navy testing ground.

"The Navy has been extremely vigilant about protecting the ability to do testing in that area," Air Resources Board Chairwoman Mary Nichols said. "I know it's been a long-standing concern, and we respect that."

Shippers say it's too early to know whether they would take the detour, but acknowledge it could be an attractive solution.

"Is it possible? Absolutely," said T.L. Garrett, vice president of the Pacific Merchant Shipping Association. "Those are international waters. If a vessel decides to transit international waters, it is beyond any state to deny them access."

Friedman said the Navy had been contacted by Maersk Line, a Denmark-based shipping company with more than 500 vessels, about the possibility of going through the range.

Maersk spokeswoman Mary Ann Kotlarich said the company already was using cleaner fuels and had voluntarily lowered the speed of its ships in and out of the Los Angeles area ports, which handle about 40 percent of the nation's cargo.

She could not say why the company would be interested in traveling through the Navy's range.

Mike Zampa, a spokesman for worldwide shipping company APL — which does the majority of its business through the Port of Los Angeles — said it was too soon to say how it might react to the California regulation.

The sea range is the Department of Defense's largest and most extensively instrumented over-water range. More than 17,000 operations are conducted each year on the range by the U.S. and allies that include Britain, Japan and Australia.

The military performs warfare maneuvers with submarines, ships and aircraft to prepare for overseas deployments. It fires missiles from ships to targets on shore and from shore to the ocean, according to the Navy's southwest region.

"It's really a one-of-a-kind asset," Friedman said of the sea range. "You have the ability to track a missile all the way through the air to inland ranges. You can go as far as Utah. You just don't have anything like that elsewhere."

The California emission rule is just the latest clash between the military and environmental regulators over the testing range.

In the 1990s, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency proposed a rule to steer ships to the military range as a way to reduce ship pollution. At the time, the Navy estimated a large vessel would cross its 100-mile sea range every two hours. The agency concluded that reducing ship speed was more effective than rerouting the channel.

Trade, military and air quality collide off Calif.

USA TODAY, Monday, July 28, 2008

SACRAMENTO (AP) — The vast Point Mugu Sea Range off Southern California is an oceanic no man's land, an ideal spot in international waters for the U.S. and its allies to test equipment and train forces.

The 36,000-square-mile expanse about 60 miles northwest of Los Angeles is where the Navy honed its skill in firing precision-guided missiles, including the Tomahawk cruise missile. But the Navy now fears those testing grounds could be irreparably compromised with a regulation approved this week by California air regulators.

State officials have ordered cargo ships to use cleaner-burning but more expensive fuel within 24 nautical miles of the coast, something the military fears could entice them to cut through its training ground.

At issue is the sea lane used by cargo ships entering and exiting the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach.

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The trip would lengthen the distance to get ships on the main channel to Asia by about 42 miles, but the ships would reach international waters faster. At that point, they could switch to cheaper — and more polluting — bunker fuel.

Freight traffic in that range would force the military to restrict its training and testing schedule, said Randal Friedman, California government affairs officer for the Navy's southwest region.

The California Air Resources Board downplayed the Navy's concerns to the rules it passed Thursday — the nation's toughest such regulations — but pledged to perform an environmental analysis. The Navy said overall nitrogen oxide emissions could increase by as much as 5 tons a day if enough ships opt to use the Navy testing ground.

Shippers say it's too early to know whether they would take the detour but acknowledge it could be attractive. The new fuel regulation goes into effect July 1, 2009.

"Is it possible? Absolutely," said T.L. Garrett, vice president of the Pacific Merchant Shipping Association. "Those are international waters. If a vessel decides to transit international waters, it is beyond any state to deny them access."

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State proposes field burning restrictions **Environmental group pushes for immediate ban on practice**

By Mitch Lies

Capital Press, Friday, July 25, 2008

The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality is proposing lawmakers in 2009 restart phasing down field burning in the Willamette Valley.

DEQ Air Quality Division administrator Andy Ginsburg said the department has drafted a legislative concept that essentially continues the phase-down the state discontinued in 1998. The concept doesn't specify the speed of the phase-down or whether allowable burn acreage would zero out or plateau at a reduced number. Those details still need to be ironed out, Ginsburg said.

He said the department drafted the concept under the direction of Gov. Ted Kulongoski.

Oregon growers currently are allowed to open burn 65,000 acres a year under a law the Legislature passed in 1991. Under the law, the state scaled down allowable burn acreage annually through 1998.

Roger Beyer, executive secretary of the Oregon Seed Council, said restarting the phase-down would significantly harm some operations.

"There are no viable economic alternatives to burning," Beyer said. "If there were, the DEQ could reverse field burning without any statute changes."

Beyer said the lawmakers should keep in place the existing field burning program at least until the state has a chance to complete a recently funded study looking into alternative uses of annual ryegrass straw.

Annual ryegrass seed producers burn the majority of the 50,000 acres Willamette Valley growers burn in an average year.

Acreage burned is less than 10 percent of the state's total grass seed production and is only about one-fifth of the acreage that Willamette Valley growers once annually torched.

Dan Galpern of the Eugene-based Western Environmental Law Center, said he is encouraged the state is proposing to phase down field burning, but said a gradual reduction isn't enough to protect public health in areas of heavy smoke presence.

"While a phase-down may provide adequate protection at the end of that period, the fact of the matter is, Willamette Valley residents need that protection now," Galpern said. "We favor an immediate ban on field burning."

Galpern called on the Environmental Quality Commission to exercise its statutory authority to ban field burning under the premise smoke from field burning represents an emergency health concern.

The commission last summer determined that given current evidence, it could not determine that field burning smoke was contributing to an emergency health concern.

Beyer said no new evidence has emerged since then.

"The only thing that has changed since then is there is funding for a study looking for viable alternatives to field burning," he said. "That needs time to work."

Among key elements of the legislative concept submitted to the governor's office earlier this month:

- The Oregon Environmental Quality Commission would have the ability to allow burning above established limits during the phase-down if alternative residue management practices aren't available.
- The phase-down schedule will be based on the department's best guess as to when alternative residue management techniques will become available.
- The commission would have the ability to increase allowable burn acreage in the case of disease or insect outbreaks.
- Burn permit fees would increase to allow the program to remain self-sufficient as the number of acres burned declines.

The bill marks the second time in recent years lawmakers will be asked to phase down or ban field burning. Lawmakers in 2007 rejected a bill that would have banned field burning. That bill failed to clear a House committee after generating extensive news coverage.

Air Pollution Worsens After Controls Kick In Beijing Limits Driving as Games Near

By Maureen Fan

Washington Post, Saturday, July 26, 2008

BEIJING, July 25 -- Beijing's air pollution index rose steadily this week at the same time the city has tried to cut traffic volume in half. Readings Thursday and Friday were over 100 and considered unhealthy for children, seniors and those with allergies or asthma.

The climb from a reading of 55 on Sunday to 110 on Friday -- despite six days of forcing Beijing motorists to drive on alternate days -- underscored the formidable challenge authorities face in trying to clear the air before athletes begin competing in the Aug. 8-24 Olympic Games.

Already, one marathon world-record holder has refused to compete in Beijing because of health and pollution concerns, and International Olympic Committee officials have said endurance events might have to be postponed because of the city's unrelenting smog.

"For the first four days since July 20th, they were good days. For the last two days, they were not," said Du Shaozhong, deputy general director of the Beijing Municipal Environmental Protection Bureau.

"In the last few days there have not been significant rainfalls or winds," Du said. "And the weather conditions in the last few days were not conducive to the diffusion of airborne pollutants."

While uncontrollable factors such as the weather have worked against the city, many problems are entirely man-made. The largest contributing factor to Beijing's air pollution is vehicle emissions, Du has said in the past. Thanks to growing public demand and friendly government policies toward car manufacturers, Beijing adds more than 1,000 cars to its streets every day.

Despite the new figures, Du argued that the capital's air quality was actually better compared with the same period last year because the concentrations of major pollutants -- such as sulfur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide -- were reportedly down 20 percent.

Beijing does not make public data on two of the most dangerous pollutants that can harm the respiratory system -- ozone and fine particulate matter. The latter has been found to enter the bloodstream and cause heart attacks and strokes in sensitive individuals.

In a last-minute push to help clear the skies, the government imposed a series of Olympic-related restrictions that kicked in Sunday.

In addition to mandating alternate-day driving based on odd and even license plate numbers -- which is supposed to remove 45 percent of the city's 3.3 million cars from the streets -- Beijing opened Olympic traffic lanes, stopped all but essential truck traffic, staggered work hours, added 2,000 buses, beefed up subway service and halted all construction work involving earth, stone and concrete.

Since Sunday, the city's air pollution index readings have been 55, 65, 67, 89, 113 and 110. Last Aug. 8, a year before next month's opening ceremony, Beijing's air pollution index was 88.

Public resists Beijing efforts to clear the air

By Calum MacLeod, USA TODAY

Monday, July 28, 2008

BEIJING — Wang Hao knows that the air in Beijing still needs to get a lot cleaner before the Olympics start in fewer than two weeks.

Yet he won't apologize for paying \$12,000 for a second car. The purchase allows him to avoid the city's tough anti-smog restrictions, which ban half of the city's vehicles from the roads on alternate days until the Games are over.

"Of course taking the subway is more environmentally friendly," says Wang, a car salesman. "But it's not convenient."

With the Aug. 8 opening ceremony looming, such stories help explain why a thick gray cloud of pollution stubbornly sits over Beijing. Uncooperative weather, lingering factory smoke and an undetermined number of rule-benders such as Wang threaten to embarrass the government and cause health problems for Olympic athletes.

More than 1 million cars are off the streets daily since the vehicle ban went into effect last week. But on Sunday, temperatures of about 90 degrees, with high humidity and low winds, resulted in visibility as low as half a mile in some parts of Beijing.

Some Olympic delegations, including the U.S. Olympic Committee, are making protective masks available to their athletes.

Beijing environmental spokesman Du Shaozhong said pollution levels are 20% lower than a year ago, and he vowed Saturday to "completely guarantee the air quality during the Olympics."

The Communist government has accomplished stunning feats of planning and execution during the pre-Olympic run-up. It has knocked down neighborhoods to construct venues and even attempted to change the weather via cloud seeding. The needs of commuters have proved difficult to suppress, though.

Beijing's two-month traffic plan restricts cars to alternate days based on whether license plates end in odd or even numbers.

Jiang Hai's Ford and Volkswagen both had license plates that ended in even numbers. To ensure he had wheels, he got a new, odd-numbered license plate for the Ford.

"I understand the car restriction, and I support it, but I need to drive every day for my business," the telecom equipment salesman said.

Zhang Jianyu, a local representative of the Environmental Defense Fund, remains hopeful the public is steadily buying into the anti-smog measures.

"The government can only provide the infrastructure: buses and subways and the regulations. But without public cooperation, these things are not going to work," he said.

C.S. Kiang, an environmental expert at Peking University, said given China's non-stop economic development "there's not enough time to solve" the pollution problem before the Games.

Report: Beijing to consider emergency measures if air quality doesn't improve

USA TODAY, Monday, July 28, 2008

BEIJING (AP) — Beijing could pull more cars from the roads and shut down additional factories as part of contingency measures if air quality worsens during the Olympic Games, state media reported Monday.

The city remained shrouded in a heavy haze in recent days, among the worst seen in Beijing this past month, despite a series of drastic pollution controls put in force July 20 that included pulling half the city's 3.3 million vehicles off the roads, closing some factories in the capital and surrounding provinces, and halting most construction.

The city's chronic air pollution has been a huge source of concern for Olympic organizers. The games, which will bring 10,500 athletes and hundreds of thousands of spectators to Beijing, open on Aug. 8, less than two weeks away.

Beijing authorities could announce special measures soon, the official English-language China Daily reported.

"We will implement an emergency plan ... 48 hours in advance ... if the air quality deteriorates during the Aug. 8-24 Games," Li Xin, a senior engineer with the Beijing Environmental Protection Bureau, was quoted as saying.

Li did not give specifics. The newspaper quoted another environmentalist, Zhu Tong, as suggesting up to 90% of the cars could be taken off the road if needed.

Beijing's air pollution index in the last four days has failed to meet the national standard for "good" air quality, rising above 100, which means the air was "unhealthy for sensitive groups."

Visibility throughout the city was reduced to several hundred yards (less than one kilometer), with high-rises reduced to ghostly outlines. A day earlier, during the opening ceremony of the Athletes' Village, the housing complex was invisible from the nearby main Olympic Green.

Soaring temperatures of about 90 degrees Fahrenheit (32 degrees Celsius), 70% humidity and little wind, have helped create a soupy mix of harmful chemicals, particulate matter and water vapor.

On Monday, Du Shaozhong, deputy director of the Beijing Environmental Protection Bureau, defended anti-pollution efforts, saying the low visibility doesn't necessarily mean the air quality is bad.

"If it looks foggy, it has something to do with the climate as well as pollution. ... From what we've done and the measures we are taking, we can guarantee the air would be good during the games. The IOC has given their judgment that the air quality will be up to par," Du told a news conference.

Environmental group Greenpeace issued a report Monday giving Beijing a mixed assessment of environmental efforts undertaken for the games.

"We recognize the long-term initiatives made by Beijing's government in improving air quality," such as adding subway lines, enacting stricter auto emissions, and retrofitting coal-burning factories with clear technology, Greenpeace campaign director Lo Sze Ping told a news conference.

However, Beijing also missed opportunities to use the games as a platform to promote more ambitious environmental protection measures, he said.

"Despite these efforts, Beijing's air quality today is probably not yet up to what the world will be expecting from an Olympic host city," Lo said.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses that it is worst to exercise outdoors in areas with high levels of air pollution than not to exercise at all. For more information on this and other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

El ejercicio en áreas con aire contaminado es peor que no hacer ejercicio

Manuel Ocaño

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Monday, July 28, 2008

La Oficina de Recursos del Aire de California presentó un nuevo estudio donde asegura que hacer ejercicio físico en exteriores, en horas y zonas con aire contaminado es más perjudicial para la salud que no hacer ejercicio del todo.

Las personas que hace caminatas cerca de tránsito de vehículos con diesel tienen una reducción en su capacidad pulmonar; usar bicicleta en esas condiciones afecta incluso el ADN, y el ciclismo cerca de camiones que usan diesel afecta también el pulso.

El estudio aprovecha la proximidad de los Juegos Olímpicos de Beijing y pide que los estadounidenses tengan mejor conciencia de su ambiente al hacer ejercicio físico para cuidar su salud.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses California pushes for cleaner ports. The stat has adopted stricter regulations.](#)

California lucha por limpiar sus puertos

Estado adoptó estrictas regulaciones

Univision Online, Monday, July 28, 2008

De sobrevivir posibles embestidas legales por parte de transportistas internacionales, las regulaciones ambientalistas en los puertos de California serán las más estrictas del mundo y de acuerdo a los reguladores del estado, mejorarán la calidad de vida de un gran número de residentes, según un reporte.

Normas tendrían un impacto nacional

El diario *Los Angeles Times* reportó que las reglas aprobadas el jueves requerirán que a partir del 2009, todas las naves que operen a 24 millas náuticas de las costas californianas deberán de usar un combustible diesel de bajo contenido de sulfuro en vez del llamado combustible búnker, una sustancia resinosa que es más barata y fácil de conseguir, pero más contaminante.

El diario estimó que unas 2 mil naves se verían afectadas, entre ellas contenedores, tanques petroleros y cruceros.

Pero el impacto de las regulaciones no se limitaría al estado, pues 43 por ciento de las importaciones marinas entran al país por los puertos de Los Ángeles y Long Beach, reportó el *Times*.

Debido a que los vientos en California típicamente soplan de oeste a este, las emisiones de las naves marítimas representan cerca de un quinto de las partículas cancerígenas de hollín y la mitad de los óxidos de sulfuro que contaminan tierra adentro.

Los reguladores citados por el diario afirmaron que en California, las nuevas regulaciones:

Salvarían 3,600 vidas en los primeros seis años;
reducirían las enfermedades respiratorias y cardiovasculares;
bajarían en 80 por ciento el riesgo de contraer cáncer por polución marina;
le ahorrarían al estado al menos \$6 mil millones anuales en gastos médicos;
le costarían a la industria transportista de \$140 a 360 millones al año.

Pero los transportistas se oponen fuertemente a estas regulaciones, argumentando que el estado no cuenta con la jurisdicción necesaria para regular más allá de las tres millas que

abarcan sus aguas estatales.

El año pasado, la Asociación de Comerciantes Transportistas del Pacífico logró que una corte fallara a su favor, frustrando un plan estatal para disminuir la polución mediante la regulación de máquinas, recordó el *Times*.

Aún no está claro si la asociación tratará de hacer lo mismo con las nuevas regulaciones, pero su presidente, John McLaurin, le dijo al diario que las nuevas regulaciones "simplemente hacen un refrito y representan argumentos viejos que ya han fallado" en las cortes.

De entrar en efecto a partir del 1° de julio de 2009, las multas por violar las regulaciones serían significativamente más altas que los \$30 mil dólares extras en combustible que cada buque de carga tendría que gastar.

Las naves operando con combustible por encima de los límites de sulfuro serían multadas con \$45,500 por cada visita, con un máximo de \$227,500 para la quinta visita.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses China wants to win the gold with their environment. There are more than 2 million cars out of circulation and industry pollutants have come to a halt.](#)

China quiere ganar oro en medio ambiente

Por TINI TRAN/AP

La Opinión, Sunday, July 27, 2008

BEIJING, China (AP) _ Dos millones de vehículos fuera de circulación. Industrias contaminantes paralizadas. Todas las obras de construcción suspendidas.

Las medidas son radicales, pero el problema lo es aún más: la gruesa capa de smog que ahoga a la ciudad cuando falta poco menos de un mes para los Juegos Olímpicos.

El mayor esfuerzo anti-contaminación realizado hasta ahora podría tener un gran efecto, según los científicos. Pero advierten también que vientos cambiantes podrían traer la contaminación desde otras regiones.

En Beijing, el gran desafío es limpiar el medio ambiente. La inminencia de las olimpiadas ha resaltado los problemas ambientales, y si el país más grande del mundo tiene éxito, el mayor legado podría no ser su colección de medallas, sino un mejor futuro ambiental.

Pero en un país que busca sacar a millones de sus habitantes de la pobreza, el desarrollo económico tiene prioridad.

Junto con fortalecer las medidas de protección ambiental, China vive un auge de la construcción que ha transformado la capital y las autoridades buscan equilibrio entre desarrollo y protección ambiental.

El esfuerzo se centra en las dos semanas que durarán los Juegos, cuando habrá en la ciudad 10,500 atletas y 500 mil visitantes.

La contaminación es evidente en la capital de 17 millones de personas, con una nube gris permanente tan densa que a veces las amplias avenidas y edificios de altura son apenas visibles.

China ganó la sede de los Juegos en gran medida al prometer unas "Olimpiadas Verdes" con una gran limpieza de la capital, y en los últimos ocho años ha gastado unos 20 mil millones de dólares en tratamiento de basura, limpieza de aguas, mejoramiento del transporte y otras medidas.

La red del tren subterráneo se duplica, los nuevos automóviles no contaminantes tienen eficiencia igual o mayor que en Europa o Estados Unidos, decenas de fábricas han reducido su contaminación. Vehículos a gas han reemplazado otros antiguos.

El principal estadio olímpico tiene un original sistema de reciclaje del agua de lluvia y de energía solar.

"Las medidas que estamos tomando no son sólo por los juegos sino también por el futuro de la ciudad", dijo Du Shaozhong, subdirector de la Oficina de Protección Ambiental de Beijing.

Las iniciativas a menudo chocan con los esfuerzos por el crecimiento económico: cada año unos 400 mil nuevos automóviles ingresan a la ciudad. En mayo hubo una grave crisis de contaminación.

Ahora se anuncian medidas temporales por los juegos:

" Paralización de 3 mil obras de construcción.

" Prohibición de circular día por medio a la mitad de los 3.3 millones de vehículos.

" Paralizar la fabricación de cemento y obligar a otra a reducir emisiones.

Similares medidas se ordenaron en provincias vecinas.

[Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register commentary, Saturday, July 26, 2008:](#)

Summer smoke is in the air

Summer fun in the sun is here. Well anyway, it is supposed to be time for summer fun in the sun, but over the past couple of weeks it has felt like summer fun in the smoke.

Some of you are probably wondering, what has happened to the sun? The answer is the California wildfire season is in full gear.

As you probably are aware, California is experiencing one of its worse fire seasons on record. The season is just beginning, but already our firefighters have been engaged in it for over a month.

The Sequoia National Forest and Giant Sequoia National Monument have had two major fires since May. As of today, the biggest fire in the forest has been the Piute Fire (located on the southern district of the forest) near Kernville in Kern County. Currently the Piute Fire has burned more than 37,000 acres and is fully contained. The fire was burning in steep mountainous terrain in the southern part of the Sierra Nevada. The fire was active at times, but over the July 12 weekend a number of thunderstorms occurred over the fire which helped in our firefighting effort to manage this massive incident.

Still burning

The rest of the state though continues to burn. There are 18 national forests (and one management unit) in the state of California, with 11 of these forests encompassing the Sierra Nevada range. At least 11 national forests have a major fire burning and some have fires that are burning near communities.

The total number of resources allocated to these firefighting efforts is astonishing. Resources are coming from all over the country, and personnel and equipment are coming from the federal, state, or local jurisdictions.

We also are getting assistance from the National Guard in many respects, and other countries. Numbers and types of equipment/personnel are constantly shifting as resources are deployed, shifted between incidents, or are pulled from fires for mandatory rest periods.

As of Monday, July 21 there are:

- Active wildfires: 33 individual fires comprising 14 incidents (30 are on Forest Service land)
- Acreage burned since the June 20, lightning event: 978,180

- Wildfires resulting from the June 20, lightning event: 2,093 (most are in federal responsibility areas)
- Wildfires contained since the June 20, lightning event: 2,060
- Personnel committed: 15,131

Looking at what is coming over the next couple of months, it feels like it is going to be a long and dry summer. Already, the Forest Service has identified in California that because of limited resources that are not assigned to current fires, we will refrain from implementing any prescribed burns or wildland fire use fires until the fire preparedness level is reduced. What this means is until probably fall any fire that starts will be extinguished immediately, or resources allocated to suppress the fire when available.

In managing fire, many times people look at firefighting resources as the only avenue available to manage a fire that burns near a home or a community. If you live near brushland or shrubland or forestland though, have you thought about how you can protect your home from a wildland fire? There are things you can do and should do that will help when that next wildland fire occurs.

Fire safe councils

Information about how you can protect your home is available through a number of resources, including your local fire safe councils.

What is a fire safe council?

Well, a fire safe council is a group of people who are engaged with firefighting entities at the federal, state and local level to improve landscape conditions near homes and communities and reduce the threat of that next wildland fire. On the Sequoia National Forest and Giant Sequoia National Monument we have been involved in helping communities (and people) in reducing hazardous fuels in or around their communities that adjoin your public lands. We provide technical and financial assistance (grants) to the fire safe councils that are in and around the forest/monument.

The mission of Fire Safe Council is to preserve and enhance California's manmade and natural resources by providing leadership and support that mobilizes all Californians to protect their homes, communities and environment from wildfires.

Since the formation of Fire Safe Council in April 1993, the council has united its diverse membership to speak with one voice about fire safety. The council has distributed fire prevention education materials to industry leaders and their constituents, evaluated legislation pertaining to fire safety and empowered grassroots organizations to spearhead fire safety programs.

The Forest Service has supported Fire Safe Council from the beginning. We provide support to Fire Safe Council by assisting in the review of community wildfire protection plans, planning and coordinating chipping days (where brush or shrubs or small groups of vegetation are removed and chipped into small pieces), or by providing financial assistance through the State Clearinghouse Grant Program.

The Sequoia National Forest and Giant Sequoia National Monument along with our partners at the federal, state, and local area, along with fire safe councils will continue to work together to reduce the fire threat when it occurs.

We all realize we live in an environment in California of not if, but when that next fire starts that we can't get to in time. Fire season is just beginning, lets all play a part in reducing that hazard along the way.

Tina Terrell is forest supervisor of the Sequoia National Forest, which includes the Giant Sequoia National Monument.

[N.Y. Times commentary, Sunday, July 27, 2008:](#)

ECONOMIC VIEW

A Modest Proposal: Eco-Friendly Stimulus

By ALAN S. BLINDER

ECONOMISTS and members of Congress are now on the prowl for new ways to stimulate spending in our dreary economy. Here's my humble suggestion: "Cash for Clunkers," the best stimulus idea you've never heard of.

Cash for Clunkers is a generic name for a variety of programs under which the government buys up some of the oldest, most polluting vehicles and scraps them. If done successfully, it holds the promise of performing a remarkable public policy trifecta — stimulating the economy, improving the environment and reducing income inequality all at the same time. Here's how.

A CLEANER ENVIRONMENT The oldest cars, especially those in poor condition, pollute far more per mile driven than newer cars with better emission controls. A California study estimated that cars 13 years old and older accounted for 25 percent of the miles driven but 75 percent of all pollution from cars. So we can reduce pollution by pulling some of these wrecks off the road. Several pilot programs have found that doing so is a cost-effective way to reduce emissions.

MORE EQUAL INCOME DISTRIBUTION It won't surprise you to learn that the well-to-do own relatively few clunkers. Most are owned, instead, by low-income people. So if the government bought some of these vehicles at above-market prices, it would transfer a little purchasing power to the poor.

AN EFFECTIVE ECONOMIC STIMULUS With almost all the income tax rebates paid out, and the economy weakening, Cash for Clunkers would be a timely stimulus in 2009. As was made clear during the Congressional debate last winter, prompt spending is critical to an effective stimulus program. And the quickest, surest way to get more consumer spending is to put more cash into the hands of people who live hand-to-mouth.

Here's an example of how a Cash for Clunkers program might work. The government would post buying prices, perhaps set at a 20 percent premium over something like Kelley Blue Book prices, for cars and trucks above a certain age (say, 15 years) and below a certain maximum value (perhaps \$5,000). A special premium might even be offered for the worst gas guzzlers and the worst polluters. An income ceiling for sellers might also be imposed — say, family income below \$60,000 a year — to make sure the money goes to lower-income households.

The numbers in this example are purely illustrative. By raising the 20 percent premium, lowering the 15-year minimum age, or raising the \$5,000 maximum price or the \$60,000 income ceiling, you make the program broader and costlier — and create a bigger stimulus. By moving any of these in the opposite direction, you make the program narrower, cheaper and smaller.

People who sell their clunkers would receive government checks, perhaps paid to them at the motor vehicle bureau office where they turn in their old vehicles. They would be free to spend this money as they see fit, whether on a new car or truck or some other form of transportation — or anything else. To ensure that the program really pulls clunkers off the roads, only vehicles that had been registered and driven for, say, the past year would be eligible.

The government can either sell the cars it buys to licensed recyclers for scrap, or refit them with new emissions controls and resell them. But the government must not ship the cars to poor countries, where they would continue to belch pollutants.

Cash for Clunkers is not the pipe dream of some academic scribblers. Local variants are either now in operation or have been tested in California, Colorado, Delaware, Illinois, Texas, Virginia and several Canadian provinces. So there is no need for a "proof of concept." Rather, a national Cash for Clunkers program could learn from all this experience in building a better system.

THE big need to date has been money, which is why the scope of Cash for Clunkers programs has been limited. And that, of course, is where the need for stimulus comes in. We now want intelligent ways for the federal government to spend money.

Here's a high-end cost calculation for a national program. Suppose we took two million cars off the road a year, at an average purchase price of \$3,500 (the top price in the Texas program today). Including all the administrative costs of running the program, that would probably cost about \$8 billion. Compared with other nationwide income-transfer or environmental policies, that's a pretty small bill. For stimulus purposes, it would, of course, be better to run the program on a larger scale, if possible. There are over 250 million cars and light trucks on American roads, and some 30 percent are 15 years old or older. That's at least 75 million clunkers. At five million cars a year — an ambitious target, to be sure — the program would cost less than \$20 billion, still cheap compared with the \$168 billion stimulus enacted in February.

And what would all this money buy? First, less pollution. The Texas program estimated that clunkers spew 10 to 30 times as much pollution as newer cars. Second, the subsidy value (the 20 percent premium in my example) is a direct income transfer to the owners of clunkers, who are mostly low-income people. Third, these folks would almost certainly spend the cash they receive — not just the subsidy, but the entire payment, giving the economy a much-needed boost.

Oh, and I left out a fourth possible goal. By pulling millions of old cars off the road, Cash for Clunkers would stimulate the demand for new cars as people trade up. It need hardly be pointed out that our ailing auto industry, like our ailing economy, could use a shot in the arm right now. Scrapping two million or more clunkers a year should help.

With today's concerns over stimulus, inequality and greenhouse gases, as well as an aging vehicle fleet, Cash for Clunkers is an idea whose time may finally have come. Write your congressman.

Alan S. Blinder is a professor of economics and public affairs at Princeton and former vice chairman of the Federal Reserve. He has advised many Democratic politicians.

[Bakersfield Californian, Editorial, Sunday, July 27, 2008:](#)

Expenditure plan for sales tax rate increase

Last Updated: Monday, Jul 28 2008 9:17 AM

Following is the Kern County Taxpayers Association's 20-year expenditure plan for a proposed one-cent increase in the county's sales tax rate:

Roads (\$2 billion)

- \$500 million Matching funds for the Thomas Roads Improvement Program.
- \$500 million Funding dedicated to congestion mitigation and [air quality](#).
- \$500 million Funding for local roads, distributed to the cities and county, based on population.
- \$500 million Annual distributions, based on population, to all cities and the county devoted to maintenance of local roads.

Public Safety (\$675 million)

- \$500 million Ongoing funding of Kern County Gang Violence Strategic Plan (Prevention, Intervention and Suppression) over 20 years.
- \$40 million Match for \$100 million AB 900 state grant to construct 790 beds in the new building at Lerdo Jail.
- \$100 million New fire facilities and equipment.
- \$35 million Sheriff substations and equipment.

Health Care (\$325 million)

- Funds could also be used to invite U.C. Merced to establish a medical school in Bakersfield / Kern County.
- Establish a level one trauma center at KMC.
- Establish a pediatric department at KMC.
- Health and wellness issues.

[Letter to the Modesto Bee, Monday, July 28, 2008:](#)

Trains help keep our air clean

<http://www.modbee.com/local/story/172379.html> Two days ago I saw a beautiful scene: A 100-car cargo train traveling along Ninth Street. They could have been hauling produce or other items from farmers, or lumber, steel, furniture, canned goods, car parts or even automobiles. But they were all things that 18-wheelers usually transport. If a train pulls 100 cars, it is the equivalent of taking 100 trucks off our freeways and streets from Patterson to Oakland and even to other seaports. The railways are here to be used. No gasoline and less diesel, meaning less smog.
JOE GARCIA, Modesto