

County approves green vehicle requirement

By Shaun Bishop – MediaNews

Tri-Valley Herald, Wednesday, Sept. 10, 2008

If it doesn't get at least 30 miles per gallon, San Mateo County doesn't want it in its fleet.

The county's Board of Supervisors approved a new "green" vehicles policy Tuesday that requires departments to purchase high-mileage cars and trucks in an effort to reduce the gas bill and cut down greenhouse gas emissions.

If a department wants to buy a car, truck or other vehicle that gets less than 30 miles to the gallon, it will need a special waiver from the county manager's office, said Walter Martone, deputy director for administration in the public works department.

"It won't be as easy for a department to say, 'I want this make and model.' They'll have to justify why," Martone said.

Don't expect to see sheriff's deputies driving around Toyota Priuses with lights and a siren right away. Martone said the Ford Crown Victorias the department uses now as patrol cars provide space for computers and other equipment that smaller hybrid cars don't and could qualify for exemptions.

But Martone said the sheriff's brass will be encouraged to buy more fuel-efficient cars for administrative tasks.

Other vehicles used for parks maintenance or road work don't yet have a low-mileage alternative and will likely need exemptions, he said.

Of the 70 to 80 vehicles added to the county's fleet of about 800 last year, only 32 percent were considered fuel-efficient, according to county staff. Officials plan to pay between \$6,000

House votes to end access for Mexican trucks

By JIM ABRAMS, Associated Press Writer

Modesto Bee, Contra Costa Times, S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Wednesday, Sept. 10, 2008

WASHINGTON — Dismissing a White House veto threat, the House voted Tuesday to end a pilot program giving Mexican trucks access to U.S. highways.

The Bush administration stressed that the United States is obligated, under the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement, to open up American roads to Mexican truckers, and that terminating the year-old demonstration project would have repercussions for American trucks allowed into Mexico. Passage of the House bill, it said "would pose significant and immediate risks to U.S. interests."

But the pilot project, which permits up to 500 trucks from 100 Mexican companies access to U.S. roads, is opposed by trucking, consumer and environmental groups who say it would eliminate American jobs and that Mexican trucks are subject to less stringent safety regulations. They say Mexico lacks adequate drug testing and hours-of service standards and that the program could contribute to smuggling or insurance fraud.

"I'm outraged that the Bush administration for political purposes would jeopardize the safety of the traveling public in the United States," said Rep. Peter DeFazio, D-Ore., chairman of the House Transportation subcommittee on highways.

The 395-18 House vote was well above the two-thirds needed to override a presidential veto. The bill would end the authority of the administration to go forward with the program without congressional approval. The Senate Appropriations Committee has attached similar language to

a transportation spending bill, although that bill is unlikely to be enacted before President Bush leaves office.

Congress last December passed legislation banning funding to "establish" a program to allow U.S.-certified Mexican trucks to carry loads across the border, but the Transportation Department said that bill did not apply to a program that had already started. Several groups, including the Teamsters, Sierra Club and Public Citizen, have gone to federal court to challenge that interpretation.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, on the other hand, sent House members a letter urging opposition to the bill, saying the cross-border program "is a long overdue step toward reducing congestion and air pollution at the U.S.-Mexico border while promoting growth and jobs."

The administration last month said it intended to continue the pilot program for two more years.

Mexico unveils Web site to reduce auto emissions

The Associated Press

Washington Post, Modesto Bee, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Tuesday, Sept. 9, 2008

MEXICO CITY -- Mexico's government is giving car buyers a Web site where they can check on just how environmentally friendly their new vehicle might be.

National Environment Institute president Adrian Fernandez announced the site on Tuesday, saying it is meant to help reduce greenhouse gases and smog by giving potential buyers pollution and mileage figures for each model. Cars cause 70 percent of the smog in Mexico's biggest cities.

The dirtiest car on Mexico's showrooms apparently is a Rolls Royce Phantom, which coughs out 574 grams of carbon dioxide per kilometer. That easily beats the next-biggest polluter on the list, a Mercedes Benz ML 63 AMG, with 391 grams, and is more than double what any Hummer on Mexican list produces.

The cleanest car is a Honda Civic hybrid at 100 grams.

Fernandez said the government is negotiating with California to monitor cars sold there for use in Mexico, and it hopes to reach similar agreements with other states. Some 2 million U.S. cars have entered Mexico in the last two years. Many are older vehicles that don't meet U.S. emissions standards.

Air Pollution Harms Patients After Heart Attack

By Steven Reinberg, HealthDay Reporter

Washington Post Tuesday, September 9, 2008

(HealthDay News) -- Tiny particles in air pollution can harm people with coronary artery disease by crippling the ability of the heart to conduct electrical signals, Harvard University researchers report.

Pollution from cars and trucks and industrial plants has been shown to trigger heart attacks, but exactly how it does that hasn't been well-known, researchers say.

"We found that elevation in fine particles from non-traffic as well as traffic sources and black carbon, a marker for traffic, predicted depression ST-segment levels," said lead researcher Dr. Diane R. Gold, an associate professor of medicine and environmental health. "Effects were greatest within the first month after hospitalization and for patients with heart attack during hospitalization or with diabetes."

The report is published in the Sept. 9 online edition of Circulation.

For the study, Gold's team collected data on 48 patients from the Boston area with coronary artery disease. The researchers monitored the patients for 24 hours using portable electrocardiograph machines looking for changes in the electrical conductivity of the heart called ST-segment depression. This dysrhythmia can indicate inadequate blood flow to the heart or inflammation of the heart muscle.

All patients had been hospitalized for heart attack, unstable angina or worsening symptoms of coronary artery disease. Forty percent had suffered heart attacks, and 25 percent had diabetes.

Gold's group also looked at the average 24-hour levels for all pollutants in Boston. They found that these levels were below accepted or proposed National Air Quality Standard thresholds.

The researchers found that increased levels of a pollutant called PM 2.5 and black carbon, which is found in traffic exhaust, was associated with an increase in ST-segment depression.

In addition, sulfur dioxide, which is the product of combustion, but not from cars, was also associated with an increase in ST-segment depression. Increases in ST-segment depression were particularly higher in patients recovering from a heart attack compared with other patients, the researchers reported.

"If the air pollution-associated ST-segment changes represent either myocardial inflammation or risk of ischemia, then it is possible that reduction in regional traffic and non-traffic associated air pollution may reduce heart attack or risk for either ischemia, arrhythmia or heart failure in patients with coronary artery disease in the period after hospitalization," Gold said.

For patients who have just been discharged from hospital after a heart attack, guidelines from the American Heart Association and the American College of Cardiology suggest that patients should avoid heavy traffic because of the stress of driving, Gold said.

To slow global warming, install white roofs

Such roofs and reflective pavement in the world's 100 largest cities would have a massive cooling effect, according to data released at California's annual Climate Change Research Conference.

By Margot Roosevelt, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer
LA Times Wed., September 10, 2008

Builders have known for decades that white roofs reflect the sun's rays and lower the cost of air conditioning. But now scientists say they have quantified a new benefit: slowing global warming.

If the 100 biggest cities in the world installed white roofs and changed their pavement to more reflective materials -- say, concrete instead of asphalt-based material -- the global cooling effect would be massive, according to data released Tuesday at California's annual Climate Change Research Conference in Sacramento.

Since 2005, the Golden State has required that flat commercial structures have white roofs. Next year, new and retrofitted residential and commercial buildings, with both flat and sloped roofs, will have to install heat-reflecting roofing, as part of an energy-efficient building code.

But the state has yet to pass any rules to encourage cooler pavement on its roads, which are largely coated with heat-absorbing asphalt, a cheap byproduct of oil refining.

According to Hashem Akbari, a physicist with the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, a 1,000-square-foot roof -- the average size on an American home -- offsets 10 metric tons of planet-heating carbon dioxide emissions in the atmosphere if dark-colored shingles or coatings are replaced with white material.

Globally, roofs account for 25% of the surface of most cities, and pavement accounts for about 35%. If all were switched to reflective material in 100 major urban areas, it would offset 44 metric gigatons of greenhouse gases, which have been trapping heat in the atmosphere and altering the

climate on a potentially dangerous scale.

That is more than all the countries on Earth emit in a single year. And, with global climate negotiators focused on limiting a rapid increase in emissions, installing cool roofs and pavements would offset more than 10 years of emissions growth, even without slashing industrial pollution.

Akbari's paper, "Global Cooling: Increasing Worldwide Urban Albedos to Offset CO₂," to be published in the journal *Climatic Change*, was written with his colleague Surabi Menon and UC Berkeley physicist Arthur Rosenfeld, a member of the California Energy Commission. All three have been associated with the laboratory's Heat Island Group, which has published extensive research on how roofs and pavement raise urban temperatures.

Akbari and Rosenfeld said they will mount an effort to persuade the United Nations to organize major cities to alter their roofing and pavement.

"I call it win-win-win," Akbari said. "First, a cooler environment not only saves energy but improves comfort. Second, cooling a city by a few degrees dramatically reduces smog. And the third win is offsetting global warming."

Building slowdown helps clear up Phoenix air

USA Today, Wednesday, September 10, 2008

PHOENIX (AP) — Air quality officials say fewer construction industry trucks and workers kicking up dust may be one of the reasons the Phoenix area recorded fewer bad air days in the past two years.

Two years ago, monitors in and around Maricopa County registered unhealthy readings for particulate pollution on 27 occasions. But since then, air pollution levels have exceeded the federal health standard far less often — only 11 times in 2007 and eight times so far this year.

The slowdown in the construction industry is likely a significant reason for the lower numbers, officials say.

"I think it has to be a factor, but I don't know that it's the only factor," Holly Ward, a spokeswoman for Maricopa County's Air Quality Department, said.

Tougher enforcement from the Environmental Protection Agency and increased awareness may also be helping the situation.

When the Phoenix region failed to meet a Dec. 31, 2006, deadline to clean the air, the EPA put it on a Five Percent Plan, a stringent mandate to reduce particulate levels each year by 5% until local air monitors record no more than three violations of the federal health standard over a three-year period.

Failure to meet the standards could lead to the loss of several billion dollars in federal road building funds.

The plan includes more than 50 particulate-reducing efforts, including strict monitoring of construction sites along with restrictions on the use of leaf blowers and off-highway vehicles.

Maricopa County also has stepped up its enforcement efforts in the past three years, levying more than \$12.3 million in fines on violators since January 2006.

Weather patterns may also be a factor in scrubbing the air.

"Strong monsoons during the past two summers may have helped cut down on dust violations," said Mark Shaffer, an Arizona Department of Environmental Quality spokesman.

Though weather and other factors may be helping, officials add Maricopa County has a long way to go before the feds declare the air clean above Phoenix.

[Editorial in the Fresno Bee, Wednesday, September 10, 2008](#)

Air board seat needs filling

Governing board was supposed to grow to 15; it's still stuck at 11.

An uphill fight to expand the board of the Valley air district ended successfully last October, when Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signed legislation to add four new members. At least, we thought it ended successfully.

Now, 11 months later, the governor has made only one of two appointments he's required to make to the board of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Another bill that sorts out how two more representatives of Valley cities are chosen for the board has stalled because of the governor's vow to sign no bills until there's a budget deal.

In April, the governor appointed Dr. John Telles, a Fresno cardiologist, filling the spot reserved for a doctor under the bill he signed last year. But the post reserved for a scientist with expertise in air quality issues has gone unfilled, even though at least two highly qualified candidates have submitted their names for consideration.

A major thrust of SB 719 was to introduce scientific and medical perspectives to a board dominated by elected supervisors from the eight counties that make up the district.

The addition of two more city representatives, for a total of five, was also meant to bring more balance to a board heavily weighted in favor of rural interests.

The original board makeup included three city representatives, rotated among all the Valley's cities. That meant that, for long periods, major cities such as Fresno, Bakersfield and Stockton could be without representation.

The problem is that the League of California Cities, which had undertaken the chore of selecting city representatives, backed out of that role when legal threats over its processes arose.

To address the need, state Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, offered SB 1548, which would establish a selection committee of city council members from around the air district to pick the two new city representatives. It's an effective solution. But the bill awaits the governor's signature, held hostage by the budget crisis in Sacramento.

As things now stand, there are only two city representatives on the air board, Chris Vierra of Ceres and Henry T. Perea of Fresno. Arvin City Council Member Raji Brar left the board when she resigned her council seat recently.

Thus, a governing board that was supposed to grow from 11 to 15 -- and be more representative of Valley residents -- is still stuck at 11, and without the crucial input of two representatives from the Valley's largest cities and a qualified scientist.

One of the consequences of Schwarzenegger's ill-advised vow to stall all legislation may be further delay in signing SB 1548. That's too bad. But there's no reason at all for waiting any longer to fill the air board seat reserved for a scientist. We've already waited long enough.