

Gas smell prompts complaints in Rosedale, downtown

By Steve E. Swenson, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Friday, Sept. 12, 2008

A smell of gas Thursday night over a large area of Rosedale and downtown Bakersfield appeared to be refinery gas, Bakersfield firefighters reported.

Workers were trying to determine which refinery might be the source of the gas, Battalion Chief Bill Ballard said.

Calls began shortly before 8 p.m. and continued for at least an hour.

Kern County Environmental Health contacted the three refineries - the San Joaquin Refinery and two operated by Big West and Flying J - but all said they knew of no gas-burning operations, Ballard said.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District was going to send crews out to determine which, if any, refinery was responsible.

The smell was described as an irritating odor, but not a more serious hazard, Ballard said. No one went to a hospital with complaints, he said.

Pinpointing where the smell was coming from was difficult because of light breezes that started, stopped and swirled, he said.

The smells were reported in the general area around Costco as well as throughout the downtown area, he said.

Sickening odor could be from refinery

By Stacey Shepard, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Saturday, Sept. 13, 2008

The Big West of California refinery may have been the source of a strong petroleum odor in northwest Bakersfield that sickened several middle school students Friday morning, county environmental officials said.

About 10 students at Freedom Middle School complained of headache, nausea or both, and a few later went home sick, after an intensifying "natural gas" smell wafted through the campus, said Rosedale Union School District Superintendent Jamie Henderson.

The odor was first reported Thursday evening, when local authorities received more than a dozen calls between 6 and 9 p.m. from of odor in the area southeast of Rosedale Highway and Highway 99.

While asking businesses in the vicinity to check for releases Thursday night, county environmental officials said Big West of California discovered gas being vented from a leaking storage tank valve.

However, Environmental Health Director Matt Constantine said he hasn't ruled out other sources for the smell.

Big West officials could not be reached to confirm the information late Friday.

"It's not fair yet to say they were the cause of it," Constantine said. "There are other potential sources we need to look into."

A second refinery, San Joaquin Refining Co., and a gas company also operate in the area, Constantine said.

The odor was described as smelling like natural gas or petroleum.

Two other northwest schools also noticed the odor Friday morning but no other illnesses were reported.

A faint smell was picked up at Almondale Elementary, also in the Rosedale district, but didn't impact activities, Henderson said.

Discovery Elementary did keep students inside during a morning recess period because of the odor, according to Fruitvale School District officials.

The smell passed within about 20 minutes and Discovery students were scheduled to go outside during lunch. Discovery is about a mile north of the Big West refinery, just east of Coffee Road.

Local fire and environment agencies spent the day trying to track down the moving smell.

"It's kind of drifting around," said Kern County Fire spokesman Jerry Menendez. "They haven't been able to pinpoint where it's coming from."

Inspectors with the Kern County Environmental Health Services Department and the [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#) were also trying to trace the odor.

Constantine said his department will compare the location of complaints with wind speeds and direction during the episode to better pinpoint the source.

The episode comes as Big West is trying to get an expansion approved and a few months after it was criticized for its handling of an ammonia leak.

Refinery pressed for thousands more trees, millions in projects

By Stacey Shepard, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Sunday, Sept. 14, 2008

The Big West of California refinery expansion promises more gasoline and diesel, new jobs and a boost to the tax base.

But under new requirements, it could also mean 10,000 new trees and a multi-million dollar community fund for projects that reduce greenhouse gases.

The new mandates from county planners are based on recent responses to the project's environmental impact report.

In the report released in June, Big West was required to spend about \$13 to mitigate every new ton of carbon dioxide the expansion would produce. After the state Attorney General's office and two other groups said that wasn't enough, the county doubled the price to about \$25 per ton.

"We came to the conclusion we needed to increase greenhouse gas mitigation," said Lorelei Oviatt, a Kern County Planning Department division chief.

Under original designs, the expansion would produce an additional 700,000 tons of carbon dioxide annually.

About 300,000 tons of additional CO₂ would result from an alternate design called Alternative D that's gained support from some opposed to Big West's proposed use of a hazardous chemical.

The recent changes require Big West to:

- Plant 10,000 trees throughout the community.
- Establish a \$5 million fund for future projects that reduce carbon output at the refinery.
- Create a \$10 million fund for carbon reduction projects in Kern County, such as school bus engine replacements or providing solar power to schools. (The fund would total \$2 million under Alternative D).

The June report called for 1,000 tree plantings and \$1 million for community projects. The \$5 million fund for future refinery projects has not changed.

"Initially, it just wasn't enough," said Tom Frantz, a Shafter resident and president of the local environmental group Association for Irrigated Residents who urged the county to increase the

mitigation requirements. "For any new project anywhere in the state, we want to have full mitigation for greenhouse gases, whether it's a housing development or a refinery."

Pushing also came from the state Attorney General's office, which has pressed communities around the state to consider climate change when approving new growth and development.

Under the California Environmental Quality Act, project developers have long been required to alleviate significant impacts on such things as traffic, air quality and endangered species.

With passage of the state's Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006, planning agencies must now also consider a project's impact to global warming. However, planners have gotten little guidance on determining a project's impact.

The California Air Resources Board is drafting rules for greenhouse gases to meet the goal of reducing the state's output to 1990 levels by 2020.

In the absence of those rules, the Attorney General's office has been advocating full mitigation of any new sources of gases that contribute to warming.

Big West is one of the first major projects locally to fall under the new climate change requirement.

Company officials said they're satisfied with the additional mitigation requirements.

"When you talk about greenhouse gases it's so difficult to say what's fair because there's no formal guidance," said Bill Chadick, Big West's Health, Safety and Environmental director. "But we are comfortable with where we finished on those mitigations."

John Moorhouse, board president of the Tree Foundation of Kern, lauded the new tree plantings.

"That's a huge number," Moorhouse said of the 10,000, noting it's almost equal to 12,000 trees the foundation has planted since its founding in 1993.

Hospital joins asthma fight

Memorial will fly air quality flag every day

By Minerva Perez, Los Baños Enterprise

In the Merced Sun-Star, Friday, September 12, 2008

Memorial Hospital Los Baños is doing its part to help asthmatics and the general public identify which days are safe and which days are risky to be outside.

Memorial Hospital joined forces with the Merced/Mariposa County Asthma Coalition Tuesday to fight asthma by flying an air quality flag in front of the hospital's entrance.

"This partnership demonstrates yet again, that Memorial has a stake not only in the health and well-being of its patients but in the community of Los Baños as well," Connie Mull, co-chair of the asthma coalition, said during a flag raising ceremony.

The color-coded flag will be flying above the hospital every day as an indicator of outdoor air pollution. According to the asthma coalition, the color of the flag is based on the Air Quality Index created by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and is used by the [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#) to forecast local air quality.

A green flag means the air is good, healthy and outdoor exercise is encouraged for everyone. A yellow flag, like the one raised Tuesday, means the air is unhealthy for extremely sensitive individuals and outdoor exercise is discouraged for those people.

An orange flag means the air is unhealthy for sensitive individuals and anyone under the age of 18 and over 55 should limit outdoor activities.

And finally a red flag "means the air is unhealthy for everyone," Sharon Stevens, respiratory and physical therapist at Memorial Hospital, said.

Stevens estimates that about 5,000 adults and children in Los Baños suffer from asthma and most fall into the sensitive-orange category.

She said the hospital already educates its asthma patients on the dangers of air pollution, how to properly exercise without overexerting themselves and how to recognize asthma triggers.

"What we are trying to do is give asthmatics the tools to lead a good quality of life," she said.

The flag, which is also flown by 130 other institutions throughout Merced and Mariposa counties, is an added visual indicator of the danger the valley air may bring.

"We live in some of the most polluted areas of the country," Mull said. "Our community suffers disproportionately from asthma and exposure to the air pollution."

In the valley, 22 percent or one out of every five children has been diagnosed with asthma, it is the number one reason why children miss school, Mull said.

She said the asthma coalition is working with cities and counties to improve the air quality in the San Joaquin Valley before it gets any worse.

"When we had those fires and the air was at its worst, that was a purple day" Mull said. "We couldn't fly the purple flag because we don't have one, we thought it couldn't get worse than red."

Hanford Ethanol Plant Suit Settled

Valley Voice Newspaper, Monday, September 15, 2008

Hanford - The citizens group that filed a lawsuit against Great Valley Ethanol's proposal to build an ethanol plant in Hanford has dropped it after settlement talks. According to Edward Settle, president of Great Valley, the group, Association of Irrigated Residents (AIR), will file the paper indicating the suit is dropped after discussion talks between the two parties led to an agreement.

The plant has received all necessary permits after an EIR was processed with the city of Hanford and approved last spring. That's when the group filed its suit alleging the impact report did not demand enough mitigation of negative impacts from greenhouse gas emissions at the proposed 63 million gallon plant, nor about the truck traffic in and out of the plant that would raise nitrous oxide emissions in the area.

Both issues have been dealt with in the settlement, according to Settle.

With the suit out of the way, Settle says the company will go into the marketplace for its financing. He had no prediction of when the project could break ground. The company owns land in the Hanford industrial park.

"We still believe the future of ethanol is bright," says Settle, noting that by the end of next year, California will have at least 10% of its motor fuel from ethanol. "The amount of ethanol being blended is going up even if the amount of gasoline we use is going down."

Nevertheless, less corn-based ethanol continues to suffer under tough margins these days with the high price of corn - the main input, the low price of ethanol and the cost of natural gas used to process ethanol. However, all margins have been improving recently, say ethanol industry sources.

The tighter margins on making the renewable fuel, as well as public criticism of the process that uses corn, a food product to make fuel, has slowed the pace of new projects all over the country and in California. Great Valley has a proposed project in Wasco that has yet to receive its permitting from the city. That also faces a lawsuit from AIR and the Sierra Club. This week's settlement in Hanford has no effect on the Wasco project, says Settle.

A proposed plant in Famoso in Kern County with permits to move forward is on hold because of poor economics and the oldest biofuel plant in the state in Goshen has been mothballed for about a year, caught up in a legal dispute. A new plant in Pixley, Calgren Renewable Fuels, has started up, however.

Ethanol advocates have been disappointed with the GOP platform adopted in recent weeks opposing ethanol fuel mandates for corn-based ethanol. But Settle notes opinion polls that show a two-thirds backing by the public for more home-grown ethanol.

Terms of the settlement:

- If Great Valley is required to purchase offsets for criteria pollutants as a result of Air District permitting, preference will be given to offsets generated in the Hanford area or from Kings, Kern or Tulare Counties.
- If Great Valley purchases a yard locomotive, such yard locomotive will meet 2007 emission standards for NOx.
- Great Valley will establish a scholarship fund at College of the Sequoias for low-income students.
- The project will be served by trucks meeting 2007 or newer emissions standards. If sufficient trucks are not available to meet Great Valley's demands, there are provisions for additional mitigation in conjunction with the [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#).
- To the degree that Great Valley cannot meet certain Greenhouse Gas emission reduction goals, it will enhance its agreement with the California Attorney General with additional greenhouse gas reduction actions.

To the degree that certain currently-proposed Air District rules are not promulgated, Great Valley will provide additional funding for NOx emission reductions or will achieve the reductions in the proposed rule.

Kings Canyon, Sequoia wildfires growing

Tehipite fire is remote, but Hidden blaze poses risks to recreational areas in park.

By Tim Sheehan

Fresno Bee, Sunday, Sept. 14, 2008

A slow-growing fire burning for two months in Kings Canyon National Park is now estimated at more than 5,500 acres.

But a smaller fire in neighboring Sequoia National Park has rangers concerned because of its potential to grow fast and endanger developed areas.

The Tehipite fire, sparked by lightning in mid-July in Kings Canyon National Park, has spread into the John Muir Wilderness in the Sierra National Forest. Some 2,800 acres -- about half the fire's size -- is now in the national forest.

Officials with the National Park Service and the U.S. Forest Service said the remote, rugged terrain at elevations between 4,000 and 8,500 feet make it too dangerous for firefighters to attack on the ground.

Because the Tehipite fire poses no threat to life or property, firefighters have monitored it from the ground and with occasional helicopter flights, said Deb Schweizer, a fire information specialist for Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks.

In Sequoia National Park, firefighters on the ground and in the air are scrambling to contain a new fire ignited by lightning Wednesday.

The Hidden fire, named for Hidden Spring in the Kaweah River drainage, grew from about 4 acres Thursday to 15 acres Friday despite "aggressive efforts" by firefighters, said Alex Olow, a forestry technician with the park.

The fire is in a heavy mixed-conifer forest at an elevation of about 5,900 feet.

Nearly two dozen firefighters worked Friday to carve fire lines around the blaze, and four helicopters and three tanker airplanes bombarded the flames from above with water and fire-retardant chemicals.

Olow said the fire was about 25% contained Friday.

Rangers said the fire could grow rapidly and spread into developed recreation areas.

"It's in an area where we really don't want a fire to get established, so we're really hitting it hard," Schweizer said.

At least two other small fires were sparked Wednesday when thunderstorms swept over the national parks: the Muir fire in Sequoia was a half-acre Thursday but is completely surrounded by fire lines; and the Spur fire in Kings Canyon, which is in rocky terrain and of little concern to rangers, Schweizer said.

Rangers are monitoring the air at several mountain locations because a change in weather this weekend may keep smoke from Tehipite and other fires from dissipating. Schweizer said some mountain communities may experience smoky conditions.

Yosemite National Park to begin burns

The Madera Tribune

Saturday, September 13, 2008

Planned burns, which occur annually in Yosemite National Park, are expected to begin Tuesday, weather and air quality permitting. A fire named YV-15 will burn first, YV-4 is scheduled to begin burning the following week.

Total area burned will be about 80 acres. YV-4 is east of Bridalveil meadow and YV-15 is east of El Capitan picnic area. Both areas are north of the Merced River adjacent to Northside Drive. Both sections, comprised primarily of ponderosa pine and mixed conifers, have burned in the past.

According to park officials, smoky conditions may exist for the duration of the project, particularly in the morning, and continue for several days.

Smoke impacts to the Northside Drive and Yosemite Lodge area may also occur. Drivers are advised to use extreme caution and abide by posted speed limits. In addition, residents and visitors are advised to take precautions to minimize smoke impacts. People with respiratory problems are urged to use caution when exerting themselves in smoky areas.

Fire has a natural role in maintaining healthy ecosystems in Yosemite. Prescribed fire is designed to thin forests and reduce unnatural fuel loads in areas that are in close proximity to public and private structures as well as visitor use areas.

Prescribed fires help provide important community protection, as well as create diverse habitats for plants and animals. Fire helps recycle nutrients into the soil, which aids the sprouting and re-growth of plants, shrubs, and trees.

For more information, visit www.nps.gov or call Yosemite Fire Information office, 209-372-0480.

Supervisors to consider manure composting project

By James Burger
Bakersfield Californian, Saturday, Sept. 13, 2008

Kern County supervisors will consider approving Tuesday afternoon a 160-acre chicken and cow manure composting operation proposed by Grimmway Enterprises near Copus Road and Interstate 5.

The Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment has raised concerns about water run-off and air emissions from the project, said Kern County Planning Director Ted James.

His department will clarify the language in some conditions of approval next week, James said, but in general his staff believes the project will not unduly damage the environment.

Grimmway is proposing the plant, which would compost 45,000 tons of chicken manure and 100,000 tons of cow manure a year into fertilizer for its organic crops, as a replacement for a facility the company currently operates near Arvin.

A community group supported by the Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment, Committee for a Better Arvin, has protested the Arvin site but has also opposed Grimmway's plans for the facility on Copus Road.

"Moving the facility away from Arvin is the right thing to do," wrote Salvador Partida of Committee for a Better Arvin in a letter to the county. "Moving next door to Mettler without controlling odors, flies, air emissions and water pollution is not."

The commercial strip and small residential neighborhood of Mettler is on Highway 99 approximately four miles southeast of the proposed composting location.

In other action Tuesday, supervisors plan to:

- Consider a request to waive the \$13,667 cost to dispose of the 346 tons of rubble from the historic Tehachapi Train Depot that was delivered to the county's Tehachapi landfill.
- Review three appeals from individuals who were charged a \$1,500 fine for using illegal fireworks on July 4.

Florez and Gilmore - On the issues

By James Geluso
Bakersfield Californian, Sunday, Sept. 14, 2008

Q & A with 30th Assembly District candidates Fran Florez, a Democrat from Shafter, and Danny Gilmore, a Republican from Hanford.

HOW WILL YOU WORK TO REDUCE AIR POLLUTION IN THE VALLEY?

Florez: "It's going to take everyone working together." The state should help farmers comply financially with the burdens they're facing.

But the biggest source of pollution is cars and trucks, so the government should promote getting cars off the road - including by building the high-speed rail project.

Gilmore: "Not a big tax guy," supports tax breaks for hybrid vehicles. The state should work with business and agriculture, setting realistic goals.

Laws covering agriculture and air quality are broad and there's room for tweaking, although he's not sure exactly how. An improved water supply would help, because farmers are using diesel engines to pump ground water.

An existing program to help farmers replace engines with cleaner burning models should be supported.

SHOULD THE STATE ALLOW OFFSHORE DRILLING?

Florez: If it results in the oil being sold here at a good price, that's OK. "If we're going to get it from California, sell it in California."

Gilmore: "I am supportive of offshore drilling."

WHAT SHOULD THE STATE DO TO ENCOURAGE ALTERNATIVE ENERGY?

Florez: The state should promote solar and wind, and we need to look at - but not necessarily embrace - nuclear energy.

Gilmore: "We should do everything and anything." Favors nuclear power and would support a plant within the district. Also backs an expansion of wind power.

WHAT SHOULD THE STATE DO, AND HOW MUCH SHOULD IT SPEND, TO BRING MORE WATER TO THE CENTRAL VALLEY?

Florez: We need aboveground and underground storage. Supports the \$9.5 billion water bond proposal pushed by Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif. "We don't have water, we don't have anything."

Would support the peripheral canal if needed to get water to the Central Valley.

Gilmore: A lot of people are willing to help pay for the peripheral canal, and that should be built. Supports the water bond, as long as it guarantees storage.

WHAT SHOULD THE STATE DO, AND HOW MUCH SHOULD IT SPEND, FOR IMPROVED HEALTH CARE?

Florez: Favors universal health care, but doesn't see how it'd be paid for.

Gilmore: Does not favor universal health care. Supports additional income tax deductions for medical care and tax breaks to bring doctors to underserved areas.

HOW SHOULD THE STATE CHANGE ITS TAX STRUCTURE?

Florez: "Who's to say there isn't an overhaul needed, but how that'd look and who it would affect, I have no idea."

Doesn't support the governor's sales-tax proposal (raising the sales tax 1 percent for three years then lowering it) because it would fall too heavily on the poor.

Gilmore: The state would be the most-taxed if the governor's sales tax proposal passes: "It would be bad news, bad, bad news."

He could absorb it, but not someone living on \$1,000 a month.

"People don't have to stay here. They can leave, and they are leaving."

WHAT SHOULD THE LEGISLATURE DO DIFFERENTLY TO AVOID THE ANNUAL LATE BUDGET?

Florez: "They ought to be working on it every day." The leaders are working on it, but they should engage all members.

Has pledged to not accept pay if elected and the budget is late.

Gilmore: There should be a constitutional amendment to cap spending. Agrees legislators should not be paid if the budget is late.

HOW WILL YOU VOTE THIS FALL ON PROPOSITION 1, THE HIGH-SPEED RAIL BOND?

Florez: "It's a necessity for our state."

Gilmore: "I am in favor of high speed rail, but I don't think this is the time for high speed rail."

HOW ABOUT PROPOSITION 8, BANNING GAY MARRIAGE?

Florez: Voting yes.

Gilmore: Voting yes.

A new era?

By Seth Nidever

Hanford Sentinel, Saturday, Sept. 13, 2008

Hanford resident Pat Ford looks up at the prices on gas station billboards and laughs.

Then he rolls on, silently, without gas and at about 30 miles an hour.

Heads turn. People point. Some laugh.

That's because Ford's vehicle mixes the DNA of a tricycle, a golf cart and a sub-compact car.

It's called an "Xebra" -- a four-door, all-electric car made in China and sold by a Northern California company called Zap! based in Santa Rosa.

Ford's Zap car is neon blue, it's tiny compared to most local vehicles, it doesn't use a drop of gas and it gets a lot puzzled looks.

Ford lent me the car for a day so that I could write about it from firsthand experience.

The first thing to be said about the Zap Xebra is that it is small.

Very small. Smaller than a Fit, the baseline model Honda came out with in 2006.

At 6 feet 2-1/2 inches, I felt like I was steering with my knees.

Forget about cramming tall people in Porsche-size back seats.

Ford jokingly suggested that the car might be good for teenagers because it's "the perfect birth control device."

Ford had me slide the front seat way back, and it got slightly better, although my legs were still hitting the bottom of the steering wheel.

Then he showed me the controls.

There aren't many of them. A "gas" pedal. A footbrake. A handbrake.

"Ignition" is turning the key a few clicks. There is no initial engine sound.

For reverse/neutral/forward, there's a little switch on the dash that looks like a stereo knob.

Back up, and the Zap beeps like a dump truck. Accelerate, and there's a noticeable hum.

After Ford handed me the keys and drove away in one of his gas-powered vehicles, my reporter colleague Joe Johnson and I took the Zap for a spin around the block.

Joe floored the accelerator pedal, and we went from zero to ... Well, let's just say that if you're looking for power, this car isn't the answer.

I got it up to maybe 35 mph on Sixth Street, and it didn't seem like it would go much faster.

So freeways are off-limits.

Turning stability seemed pretty good, despite the three-wheel design with one in the front and two in the back.

It has a 40-mile range on one overnight 110-volt charge, according to Ford.

The price tag? \$11,500, according to Mike Brackett, the owner of Zap of Visalia.

That doesn't include air conditioning.

For an extra \$600, Brackett will throw in a portable unit that sits in between the two front seats.

According to Ford, the cost of the vehicle can be offset by clean air rebates from the state of California.

Ford said he sat down with his wife and figured out how much it was costing them to drive their Ford F-250 truck and Toyota FJ Cruiser around town.

They calculated that with the Zap, they would save about \$250 a month on gas.

"By and large, in the long run, I'm saving money," Ford said.

Ford said he factors into that low insurance and registration costs -- the Zap is considered a motorcycle by the state of California for licensing and registration owners, though operators don't have to have motorcycle training to operate it.

Ford isn't the only local resident -- so far, you can count them on one hand -- who found the temptation to buy a Zap too hard to resist.

Kris Lusk hums around in a Xebra painted like a ... Well, like a zebra.

She figured she and her husband were spending upwards of \$500 a month driving around in a Cadillac and a Ford F-250.

Now, she says, they spend \$50 a month on gas.

But for Lusk, it's as much about novelty as it is economics.

"It's worth it just to see people smile," Lusk said, smiling.

And they do.

As I buzzed over to the Hanford Mall in Ford's Xebra, feeling like a kid with a new three-wheeler, I got all kinds of rubbernecking. Some people honked. Nearly everybody I saw cracked a grin as they watched Zap go by.

"You wouldn't want to be in the witness protection program driving it around, I'll tell you that," Lusk said.

Both Zap owners listed more serious reasons for owning one.

Lusk said it makes her mad "to be giving money to people who don't like us" -- a reference to U.S. reliance on oil imported from the Middle East.

Ford, a longtime San Joaquin Valley resident, cited [air pollution](#).

He also expressed a feeling of owning part of the first wave of an electric car future -- albeit a scaled down, relatively primitive version of that future.

"It's the first Model-T of its era," Ford said.

Power Up

By Jennifer Wadsworth

Tracy Press, Friday, September 12, 2008

The Tracy Peaker Plant west of town could be expanded and its use ramped up, if GWF Energy LLC gets its way with regulators. Press file photo

Energy regulators this week began a yearlong review of plans to turn the Tracy Peaker Plant into a full-fledged 314-megawatt power plant — nearly double the size it is now — by recycling steam to power a new turbine.

The set-to-be-renamed 169-megawatt peaker west of Tracy will burn cleaner, but likely run much more often.

Since it first fired up in 2003, the plant has spewed a couple of tons a year of nitrogen oxide into the air.

After its transformation into a consummate power plant, at least 90 tons of the gas would disperse from the plant every year, based on what company officials said would be the number of hours the plant is likely to run.

Also this week, Peaker Plant owner GWF Energy LLC announced its intention to give \$100,000 to the Grand Theatre Center for the Arts' largest gallery, the North Gallery.

The city also noted in an effusive press release that the company stepped up as the main sponsor for this month's gala celebrating the first anniversary since the historic theater's reopening.

GWF spokesman Riley Jones said the timing was pure coincidence.

"The endowment has been something under consideration for quite a while now," he said. "We felt that (the theater) was an important landmark for Tracy and felt that it was something that was absolutely worthwhile and would continue to contribute to quality of life in Tracy for many, many, many years."

Quality of a different kind will be a key focus of the review that began Wednesday: Air quality.

Specifically, the state will set aside a year to determine, among other things, exactly how polluting an expanded power plant would be.

Fewer emissions per hour would get spewed into the air, Jones explained and the state energy commission confirmed. But the plant would likely power up more than it does now. So in the end, more particulates would scatter into the atmosphere.

How much is still unknown, because the number of hours annually the plant would operate is up in the air, Jones said.

"It all depends on demand," he said. "We can't say how much we'll need."

In late July, though, Jones said that, once it's changed to a twin-turbine plant, about 5,000 hours worth of power annually would be fed into the state grid, or about 16 hours of operation a day, six days a week.

"That's just a guesstimate," he said this week. "But yeah, we're still looking at that."

Permitted emissions — basically the maximum amount of gasses and burnt particles the plant is legally allowed to release into the air — would stay the same, said David Warner, who's in charge of permitting at the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control Board.

But actual emissions would go up because the operating hours will increase even though plant officials are already allowed to run it more if they want to, he said. It's just that after expansion, they'll have the capacity to as well.

Jones stressed, though, that the emissions per hour would be drastically cut.

The plant would emit 60 percent less nitrogen oxide, 50 percent less carbon dioxide and less greenhouse gas on an hourly basis.

The name Tracy Peaker Plant would also be changed to Tracy Combined Cycle Power Plant to reflect the addition of another turbine.

In 2002, the state granted the plant to run the plant up to 8,000 hours a year. A peaker plant, by definition, fires up only when the state grid demands more power.

Under the amendment filed on June 30 this year to expand, the plant would still be restricted to the 8,000-hours-a-year cap.

Since opening a little more than five years ago, the plant has run at most 370 hours in a year.

If the state grants the company's request to expand after the just-started review, the 16-plus-acre addition could be complete by 2012, according to the California Energy Commission. At full capacity, the plant could generate enough energy for roughly 300,000 homes, according to the California Independent System Operator, which runs the state's electrical grid.

Trying to derail West Side train plan

By Time Moran

Modesto Bee, Monday, September 15, 2008

Ron Swift is president of WS-PACE.org, a group that formed to oppose the 4,800-acre PCCP West Park LLC industrial park proposed on the West Side. The group claims 1,200 members and has worked to galvanize opposition to the project.

Valley Voices interviewed Swift, and the full interview is available on modbee.com. Here are some excerpts:

Q: What are the objections to the West Park proposal?

A: It started out as objecting to the train line that would bring cargo from the Port of Oakland over the Altamont Pass and down the West Side. The rail line passes right through Patterson. It's a one-way line that ends down near Los Banos, so every train that goes down the line through Patterson has to come back up the line. And because the Crows Landing site is just south of Patterson, all the trains come through here. That seemed to be the opening we thought we had.

When we learned that the project would expand beyond the original 1,527 acres of the former naval base at Crows Landing, that alarmed us. The additional 3,300 acres, to make the project 4,800 acres, approximately, we realized, was a project that would have great impacts on the West Side and the communities of Patterson, Crows Landing and Newman. When we heard of the projected 37,000 employees and the vehicular traffic and the air pollution and this sort of thing, this is what alarmed us. We are in favor of development of the original 1,527 acres, which to us is still a major project and still impacts on our area.

Q: What are WS-PACE.org's options if the environmental impact report does not satisfactorily address the group's issues?

A: I can tell you we are considering legal action. This is just a recent thing. If the environmental law is not followed, the only recourse is through the courts.

Q: You have argued that the inland port should be in San Joaquin County. Doesn't that push economic development and jobs out of Stanislaus County?

A: It would push the train facility off the West Side, the trains running down and the land on the Crows Landing property devoted to handling these cargo containers.

The Port of Oakland employs only a few more than 500 workers. We do not think that hauling of cargo containers for transport off trains onto trucks is going to take a large amount of employees. This is not going to add to the employment base. We think there are other types of businesses that will add more jobs, and probably jobs more suitable to the population here in Stanislaus County.

Moving the intermodal facility to western San Joaquin County makes a lot more sense. The train comes right over the Altamont and the facility could be located right there. The line would be much cheaper and wouldn't have 30 miles of train trip down here and back.

It's right next to freeways, right next to additional rail facilities. Therefore, we have always felt bringing the cargo down the West Side was an unnecessary cost.

Q: Developer Gerry Kamilos argues that the size of the project is necessary to be economically viable and provides regional rather than piecemeal planning. Is that a valid argument?

A: I'm no expert on industrial development and what he refers to as his making this an (economically) viable project. I do know that elsewhere he has developed projects, some of which are industrial projects, on a much smaller scale, and apparently they are viable, where he wouldn't have to develop a project that is 7½ square miles in size.

We hope that the original 1,527 acres can be developed and be an economic machine that helps Stanislaus County and its population.

PG&E Energy Play

By Eric Firpo

Tracy Press, Friday, September 12, 2008

The purchase by Pacific Gas and Electric Co. of a license for a proposed Altamont Hills power plant has one Tracy activist worried about air pollution and sparked widening protests from companies that complain the sale skirted open-bidding and other rules.

Bob Sarvey, owner of Sarvey's Shoes and a Tracy resident who's been deeply involved in air pollution issues, brought up the power plant at a City Council meeting about two weeks ago.

In June, the utility bought the license to the Tesla Generating Station from the private company owned by Florida Power and Light. The sale price is confidential, but PG&E has asked the California Public Utilities Commission to allow the company to "recover" \$49 million it expects to spend in equipment costs by January 2009.

The plant will ultimately generate 1,120 megawatts of electricity, but PG&E wants to build one tower first by 2012 to churn out 560 megawatts. The plant will lie in Alameda County about a third of a mile from the San Joaquin County border near Patterson Pass.

PG&E filed papers in July to have the utilities commission quickly OK its application because three other plants it was supposed to have up and running have fallen through, the company argues.

Since July, a brushfire of protest has swept over the case, with independent energy companies and others filing objections to the application just about every week since July.

Tracy filed a protest July 21.

In 2004, when the utilities commission originally approved the license, it required that the plant's owner sign a contract with Tracy for the city to provide treated water from its sewage plant for the power plant's cooling towers and adjoining landscaping.

PG&E has no agreement with the city, though, and in its protest Tracy asks the commission not to OK the application until an agreement between the city and the utility can be worked out.

Sarvey would rather the city not provide treated sewage water to the power plant, because dirty water only increases the amount of air pollution the plant will spew over the skies of Tracy.

Using recycled water, as it's called, rather than clean water will increase the amount of tiny pollution particles the plant would belch into the air over Tracy by 13 tons a year when both towers are built, according to estimates from 2004 by the Florida Power and Light Co.

"To me, that's a significant impact," Sarvey said.

Sarvey would rather the city not provide PG&E the means to add to air pollution over Tracy, but if it does, he thinks the city should sell the water instead of giving it away.

He asked the council to get involved in the decisions regarding the plant, rather than city department heads.

Councilman Steve Abercrombie said he was unaware of the power plant and the city's letter of protest until Sarvey brought it to his attention at the council meeting.

"My biggest concern is that we would do something that would damage the environment," the councilman said.

Meanwhile, municipal power companies in San Diego, Los Angeles and San Francisco have protested, as have private companies who are part of the Independent Energy Producers Association.

Sarvey is helping with the protest filed by Californians for Renewable Energy.

Opponents have dozens of arguments that PG&E attorneys are trying to counter, but much of it has to do with rules regarding all companies having a right to bid on an existing license.

Filings can be found on the utilities commission's Web site at <http://docs.cpuc.ca.gov/published/proceedings/A0807018.htm>.

The case is slowly making its way to the commission, but when a final decision will be made is unclear. Neither a commission spokesperson nor a PG&E spokesperson returned phone calls seeking comment by press time.

Palin asks Schwarzenegger to veto Calif. port fees

By Judy Lin

Capital Press, Friday, September 12, 2008

SACRAMENTO (AP) -- A day before she was announced as the Republican vice presidential candidate, Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin wrote a letter to Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger urging him to veto a bill that would impose a clean-air fee on cargo containers moving through California ports.

Palin's letter to Schwarzenegger, dated Aug. 28, said the fee would lead to higher costs on goods shipped to Alaska and warned that it could drive port business away from California. She said many communities in Alaska lack roads and depend entirely on shipment of goods by container.

"Shipping costs have increased significantly with the rising price of fuel and these higher costs are quickly passed onto Alaskans," the governor wrote. "This tax makes the situation worse."

The bill would create a fee of up to \$60 for each 40-foot cargo container moving through the ports of Los Angeles, Long Beach and Oakland. The Southern California port complex is the nation's largest and handles more than 40 percent of the nation's goods; Oakland is the fifth busiest.

The fee would raise an estimated \$400 million a year to pay for projects that reduce pollution. That would include developing cleaner truck and train engines or building railroad overpasses to avoid having vehicles idle for long periods of time waiting for trains to pass.

Supporters include the Sierra Club, Natural Resources Defense Council and other environmental groups, while retailers such as Wal-Mart Stores Inc. and Abercrombie & Fitch Co. are opposed.

Clean-air advocates say Palin has no business getting involved in a health issue affecting California residents.

"No matter what the hockey moms say, it's the mothers of children with asthma that the governor should listen to," said Lisa Warshaw, spokeswoman for the Coalition for Clean Air, sponsor of the bill.

Warshaw said the coalition is urging Schwarzenegger to sign the bill because it could help prevent the estimated 3,700 deaths in California each year attributed to pollution from port traffic and freight transportation.

The bill's author, Sen. Alan Lowenthal, said the Los Angeles-Long Beach port complex is the largest source of air pollution in the South Coast basin.

"Right now, we are the tailpipe of the nation," he said.

Citing recent voter-approved bonds dedicated to reducing port pollution, the Long Beach Democrat said it is only fair for the private sector to "pay their fair share."

His bill passed the Legislature in August. Schwarzenegger vetoed similar legislation in 2006, citing concerns that the measure lacked accountability and concerns that it could drive business away from the ports.

Complicating the issue is Schwarzenegger's pledge to veto any legislation sent to his desk until the Legislature sends him a budget. As of Friday, the state has gone a record 74 days without a spending plan, as lawmakers argue over how to deal with a \$15.2 billion deficit.

"The governor has not taken a position on this bill," Schwarzenegger spokeswoman Rachel Cameron said. "Once we have a responsible budget in place, he will consider the merits of the bill. The governor is always going to do what's best for the people of California."

Schwarzenegger has endorsed McCain and offered an enthusiastic response after Palin was announced as his running mate, praising the Alaska governor as an effective and courageous leader.

"Governor Palin has been a leader in tackling environmental issues, and she has worked with many states and governors to cooperate on those issues," said Ben Porritt, a McCain-Palin campaign spokesman.

He said it's common for governors to discuss issues affecting commerce and the environment.

It could not be determined immediately whether Palin has ever visited California. A message left with the governor's office in Alaska was not immediately returned.

Palin is scheduled to headline a GOP fundraiser later this month at the home of a California billionaire, where the asking price for a photograph with her and a seat at the head table is \$50,000. Ticket prices start at \$1,000, according to an invitation to the Sept. 25 fundraiser at the Silicon Valley home of software mogul Tom Siebel.

Lowenthal said he offered amendments to the port bill to address concerns Schwarzenegger had expressed. One would have cut the fee in half on containers that simply moved from one ship to another, but Lowenthal said the changes were not negotiated in time to meet a legislative deadline.

He said he would accept that change in a cleanup bill next session.

One of his co-authors, Sen. Sheila Kuehl, said that amendment should address Palin's concerns.

"The air is wonderful in Alaska and, frankly, they don't have roads that go many places, so they don't have the asthma or pollution problem we have in California," said Kuehl, a Democrat from Santa Monica. "It's clear to me she has no clue about the health problems we face because of the ports in Southern California."

Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, a Democrat, also expressed disappointment in Palin's opposition to the bill, which he said would help reduce diesel emissions around the port.

Palin attacks port fees proposal

By Kristopher Hanson

LA Daily News, Friday, September 12, 2008

GOP vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin has thrown her support behind an effort to kill a proposed shipping container fee in California, arguing that it would unduly harm consumers in her home state of Alaska.

In a letter to Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger dated Aug. 28, Palin says the proposed \$30 fee - designed to reduce growing freight congestion and pollution in the Golden State - would financially harm rural Alaskans.

"Many communities (here) lack road access and depend entirely on the shipment of goods by marine containers," Palin wrote. "Shipping costs have increased significantly with the rising price of fuel and these higher costs passed onto Alaskans. This tax makes the situation worse."

The bill, written by Democratic state Sen. Alan Lowenthal of Long Beach, seeks to levy a \$30 fee on each 20-foot-equivalent container moved through the ports of Los Angeles, Long Beach and Oakland.

Expected to raise \$500 million annually, SB 974 would be split evenly between infrastructure and air-quality projects.

Lowenthal said Friday that while the number of containers shipped from California to Alaska is "minuscule," he would consider amending the bill to exempt Alaska-bound containers from 50 percent of the fee.

"It could be argued that the sliver of goods transloaded in California and bound for Alaska aren't using California's infrastructure, and so should be exempt from that portion of the fee, but the handling of those goods are surely affecting our air quality," Lowenthal said.

Figures for the amount of direct California-Alaska cargo were unavailable Friday, but Alaska's largest interstate ocean carrier, Horizon Lines, offers no direct routes from California to Alaska.

While the carrier delivers frequent shipments from Tacoma, Wash., to points throughout Alaska's vast frontier, it remains unclear what percentage of that cargo originates in California and would be affected by the fee.

The majority of California's outbound shipments are destined for Hawaii, Asia and Australia, according to carriers governed by the Jones Act, which regulates America's domestic shipping routes.

Lowenthal said that he would be open to a compromise in which Alaskan businesses would pay only a \$15 fee - for air quality mitigation.

Earlier this year, Schwarzenegger indicated he would sign the bill in an effort to help rebuild California's overburdened freight rail systems and fund investment in cleaner technologies.

California suffers from the worst air quality in the nation.

But in August, when the state Legislature reached an impasse during budget negotiations, the governor said he would not consider any new bills until the budget situation was resolved.

Analysts believe a \$30 fee would drive up costs minimally on consumers, adding perhaps 10 cents to the price of a pair of sneakers.

A 2007 economic study commissioned by the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles estimated the value of goods inside a 40-foot container averages \$50,000.

Palin, picked as Sen. John McCain's running mate the day after the letter was signed, is the latest politician to weigh in on the controversial SB 974.

The Hawaii Legislature and governor are urging a veto of the bill, and opponents successfully killed a similar container fee in Washington the same year.

Other opponents include shippers, retailers, farmers and elected officials in Hawaii and Alaska.

Supporters include conservation groups, the American Lung Association, the Coalition for Clean Air, the Long Beach City Council and numerous industry and labor groups that stand to benefit from improved freight systems.

A no-loser cleanup

Court ruling means the worst diesel pollution will drop almost immediately.

LA Daily News, Monday, September 15, 2008

In less than three weeks, Southern California residents will start to enjoy the benefits of the biggest cleanup of the region's biggest source of diesel pollution. In this program, there will be no losers.

American Trucking Association officials wouldn't agree, of course, since they lost big last week when a federal judge tossed out their lawsuit aimed at blocking the Clean Trucks program at the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles. But their real problem is mostly attitude.

They are accustomed to few regulations, and are afraid the ports' new ban on dirty diesels might catch on elsewhere. Let's hope it does.

Association officials have said they're all in favor of cleaner air, but in fact they could have come up with a plan of their own and didn't. The ports did.

It goes into effect Oct. 1, after which time owners of the oldest and dirtiest trucks will be told to keep them off port property. That first step in the Clean Trucks program will, starting Day One, cut diesel pollution by almost half. Then, year by year, the rules tighten until 2012, when only trucks that meet current clean-air standards will be allowed, thereby cutting particulate emissions by a total of 80 percent.

The whole world of shipping will be watching. Ships, trucks, trains and dockside equipment make the ports of Long and Beach L.A. the region's biggest source of diesel particulates and sulfur oxides by far, and the same is true of ports everywhere. The trucking association notwithstanding, this should end everywhere.

Truck owners and drivers also can benefit from the program, and not just from the cleaner air. The ports are offering subsidies of up to 80percent for the purchase of clean new container-hauling trucks.

Long Beach's version of the program takes an old polluter off the road for every new one it subsidizes. L.A., however, is offering \$20,000 subsidies to attract big hauling companies that already own clean trucks, which allows displaced polluters to do their dirty business elsewhere in the area.

There are other differences between the L.A. and Long Beach models. The L.A. port won't allow independent owner-operators to be part of its program. Long Beach will allow both independents and employed drivers.

One way or another, Clean Trucks can be made to work, and when it does it will prove an important point. Tolerating obsolete equipment that loads the air with dangerous emissions is a false economy. Clean technology is efficient technology.

The ports' program in the long term will be a great lesson as well as a great benefit, even for the trucking association.

Port trains are going green

From wire reports

LA Daily News, Friday, September 12, 2008

LOS ANGELES - A company that provides freight rail service at the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles has replaced its fleet of 22 locomotives with more environmentally friendly engines, the company announced today.

In addition to consuming less fuel, the new locomotives have cut particulate emissions by 70 percent and nitrogen oxide emissions by 46 percent, compared to the older engines, said Andrew Fox, president of Pacific Harbor Line.

They also meet or exceed federal guidelines to reduce air pollutants, according to PHL.

Six of the new locomotives use low-emission diesels built by National Railway Equipment that can go into "sleep mode" until needed.

PHL, an affiliate of Anacostia & Pacific, began operations 10 years ago providing railroad switching services to the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, the company said.

Freight containers delivered to the ports are hooked up to the locomotives, which run along 18 miles of track in the ports to deliver goods to terminals.

Railroads move about one-half of the international container freight in the Los Angeles region, Fox said, yet contribute only a tiny percentage of the particulate emissions generated by trucks.

The \$30 million cost to replace the locomotives was shared by PHL, the ports and California's Carl Moyer Program, which is administered by the South Coast Air Quality Management District, Fox said.

Bay Area smog violations increase under new rules

Contra Costa Times, Sacramento Bee other papers, Friday, September 12, 2008

SAN FRANCISCO — The San Francisco Bay Area may be forced to take additional steps to cut air pollution as it struggles to meet a new federal smog standard.

The nine counties that comprise the region have violated the new standard on 11 days so far this year. The Bay Area Air Quality Management District says wildfires in June contributed to the air violations on two days.

Under the old standard last year, the Bay Area was only in violation on one day.

The federal Environmental Protection Agency is not expected to rule on whether the Bay Area has failed the standard for another two years.

But regions that fail to meet the standard must take more measures to clean the air, including finding ways get people to drive less.

Bay Area struggles to meet new smog standard

By Denis Cuff

Tri-Valley Herald, Friday, September 12, 2008

Bay Area air has violated a stricter new federal health standard for smog on 11 days this year, suggesting the region is headed toward a failing grade in meeting the nation's new yardstick for clean air.

As a result, clean air regulators predict, the nine-county region will be forced to come up with new and expanded ways to cut air pollution — including the tough task of getting people to drive less.

"It's looking like our area likely will be classified as 'in nonattainment,'" said Jack Broadbent, chief executive officer of the Bay Area Air Quality Management District. "It looks like we're going to have to redouble our efforts to reduce ozone (smog) in the Bay Area."

The region is not alone in struggling to measure up. Other air districts in Northern and Southern California report having more days of poor air quality this year under the new standard for ozone, the corrosive irritant in smog that makes lungs ache, triggers asthma attacks and stunts children's lung development.

Under the old standard, the Bay Area's nine counties recorded one day of unhealthy ozone during 2007, and they averaged four days of unhealthy air per year in the last decade.

But in the first season of the new standard, the Bay Area — known for some of the cleanest air for urban regions — has had 11 days when smog topped the new limit, and the season isn't over until Oct. 2, an eight-hour average. The old limit was 84 ppb.

Regions that flunk the ozone standard are required to develop plans with more clean-up measures.

And if they fail to produce a plan that is sufficient, areas can face delays in or loss of federal highway funding, as occurred briefly in the Bay Area in 2001.

The new standard doesn't mean the air suddenly got dirtier, but that pollution is harmful at lower levels than previously thought.

Jenny Bard of the American Lung Association of California said the high number of unhealthy air days this summer shows the need to do more to curb pollution to protect the public health.

"Ozone is dangerous," said Bard, the group's regional air quality director. "The new standard is a much better indicator of how healthy the air is."

Smog concentrations can vary year to year with differing heat, the trigger for converting a variety of gas pollutants into ozone.

This was not an exceptionally hot year, and it was not nearly as hot as in 2006 when a killer heat wave produced thicker smog than this year, air district officials say.

However, unusually abundant wildfires in June worsened smog, belching enough gases to contribute to ozone violations on two days in the Bay Area, air officials said.

"The best way to describe the smog season is it's essentially in character with a bad summer," Broadbent said.

But, he added, most of the ozone violations this year stemmed from the usual suspects — cars, trucks, factories, oil refineries, lawn mowers and other activities that spew tons of gases converted by sunlight into ozone.

The federal Environmental Protection Agency has not said yet exactly when it will formally rule whether regions meet the new smog standard, but it could be two years off, officials say.

Air basins flunk if any measuring station in the region fails to meet a complicated formula, based on the fourth-highest annual ozone readings during three consecutive years at any one place.

Lisa Fasano, a district spokeswoman, said the district will look at several pollution-reduction measures, some aimed at reducing use of motor vehicles, the source of half the smog in the region. To do that, the region is looking at ways to reduce the distance between people's homes and jobs, she said.

The air district, allied with the region's transportation commission, has just begun formal planning for a new regional new clean air plan.

Broadbent said he sees the need for the region to do more to disseminate unhealthy air advisories on Spare the Air Days so the public will cut back on driving, and schools and sports programs would limit exercise.

Members of the public already can sign up to get e-mail and text messages of bad air days.

Bard suggested the Bay Area may wish to emulate a program in smoggy Southern California communities, where schools raise yellow, orange or red flags on bad air days to announce the severity of the health advisories.

Nitrogen emerges as the latest climate-change threat

By Robert S. Boyd

Modesto Bee, Monday, September 15, 2008

WASHINGTON — Scientists are raising alarms about yet another threat to Earth's climate and human well-being. This time it's nitrogen, a common element essential to all life.

For years, people have been bombarded with warnings about the harmful effects of carbon - especially in the form of carbon dioxide (CO₂), a greenhouse gas widely blamed for global warming.

Now, it's becoming clear that human activities, such as driving cars and raising crops, also are boosting nitrogen to dangerous levels - polluting air and water and damaging human health.

An expanding flock of international scientists is concentrating on the nitrogen threat. There's a reactive nitrogen conference somewhere in the world almost every month.

"The public has learned a lot about carbon and its contribution to global change," said James Galloway, an authority on nitrogen at the University of Virginia. "However, they know less about nitrogen and its numerous impacts on environmental issues, including global change."

"It's crucial for people to become aware of the nitrogen problem," said Cheryl Palm, an expert on tropical agriculture at Columbia University.

Pure nitrogen is a colorless, odorless gas and the largest single component of Earth's atmosphere. Every breath you take is almost 80 percent nitrogen.

However, about 1 percent of the stuff is so-called "reactive nitrogen." It combines with other elements, such as oxygen and hydrogen, to form hundreds of thousands of chemical compounds - some beneficial, some harmful.

Many of these compounds are valuable in industry and agriculture. They preserve foods and wine, enhance oil production, make plastics and explosives, and fill automobile airbags. They form the building blocks of life: DNA, genes and proteins. Their biggest use is in synthetic fertilizers.

"We estimate that nitrogen fertilizers are currently responsible for feeding 48 percent of the world's population," Galloway said.

On the other hand, reactive nitrogen has many negative effects. Its compounds create smog, cause cancer and respiratory disease, and befoul rivers, lakes and coastal waters. They create "dead zones" in the ocean, corrode roads and bridges, weaken the ozone shield and add another greenhouse gas to the already overburdened atmosphere.

"The challenge is to maximize the beneficial uses of reactive nitrogen while minimizing adverse environmental impacts," said a scientific advisory committee to the Environmental Protection Agency in draft report on the problem.

"While there is tremendous benefit from food production, there is also tremendous damage to the health of both ecosystems and people due to the introduction of reactive nitrogen," the report said.

Scientists call the need to balance the good and the bad aspects of reactive nitrogen the "nitrogen paradox."

"The paradox is nitrogen is vital to human survival, yet its use negatively impacts both people and ecosystems," Galloway said.

Some areas of the world, such as Africa, suffer from too little nitrogen, leading to poor crops and spreading deserts. But developed countries such as the U.S. have excess.

"It is a daunting task to improve nitrogen management because of the need to address two opposite extremes: too little nitrogen in some places and too much in others," said a December 2007 report from a United Nations environmental unit.

Experts say the most pressing need is to increase the availability of nitrogen fertilizer in poor countries and reduce its inefficient and wasteful use in U.S. factories and farms.

"Too much nitrogen is carried off of farmers' fields by rain and irrigation, spewed out of automobiles and factories into the air, and leached from septic tanks and sewage treatment facilities into rivers and groundwater," said Eric Davidson, a nitrogen expert at the Woods Hole Research Center in Massachusetts.

Meanwhile, the output of reactive nitrogen is accelerating at an alarming rate.

"Human activity has doubled the rate of formation of reactive nitrogen over natural rates on the land surfaces of the Earth," said Alan Townsend, director of the North American Nitrogen Center at the University of Colorado in Boulder. "The change is recent and rapid, making accelerated nitrogen cycling one of the most immediate and consequential facets of global change."

Some environmental scientists worry that raising alarms about the danger of nitrogen - at the same time as carbon dioxide - may overwhelm government agencies and private citizens.

"It has taken some of the public and the government quite some time to be aware of the CO₂ problem," Palm said. "Adding another 'element' to their concerns could cause confusion."

"Maybe this is complicated and overwhelming," Davidson said, "but it's also a reality that must be met head-on."

On the Web:

North American Nitrogen Center: <http://ibl.colorado.edu/NANC.html>

Woods Hole Research Center: <http://www.whrc.org/index.htm>

Federal inquiry could delay clean-trucks program at ports of L.A. and Long Beach

The Federal Maritime Commission releases a nine-page request for information that could push back the program's planned Oct. 1 start date.

By Ronald D. White and Louis Sahagun
L.A. Times, Saturday, September 13, 2008

The Federal Maritime Commission on Friday raised several questions about the Los Angeles-Long Beach port complex's landmark clean-trucks program that appear likely to delay the plan's Oct. 1 start.

The two ports, which make up the nation's busiest container cargo operation, received a voluminous set of questions about their plans to ban pre-1989 trucks in favor of newer, cleaner models. The agency could go to federal court to block implementation if it doesn't like the answers.

At issue is the first effort by a major U.S. seaport to reduce diesel truck emissions by banning the oldest trucks that move cargo to and from the docks. The Port of Los Angeles program would require the creation of trucking companies or concessions to hire drivers who now operate as independent owner operators.

Long Beach's program wouldn't require an employee mandate.

The commission's queries on key points of those plans sets off a process of response and assessment that could delay a decision on the pollution-reduction program until November or later.

Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and Geraldine Knatz, executive director of the Port of Los Angeles, tried to put the best face possible on the new obstacle.

"We are confident that we are on our way to removing thousands of dirty trucks from our neighborhoods and roadways, reducing port truck diesel emissions by 80% in just four years," Villaraigosa said. Knatz described port officials as "intent on starting this program on Oct. 1 -- no one should underestimate our determination to move this critical initiative forward."

The commission's nine-page letter contained more than 100 requests for information and documents. Many dealt with the effect of the ports' plan in comparison to a California Air Resources Board effort to rein in pollution at ports statewide.

The maritime agency's letter surfaced days after a federal judge refused a temporary injunction requested by the American Trucking Assn. to block parts of the plan.

In addition, a coalition of port terminal operators urged that the clean-trucks plan be delayed for up to three months to allow them more time to get ready.

The letter was marked by a rare and strongly worded dissent by Commissioner Joseph E. Brennan.

"The commission is making a monumental mistake in delaying, yet again, the overall environmental plan that the cities of Los Angeles and Long Beach have developed to address serious health concerns and needed port expansion in the region," Brennan wrote.

David Pettit, senior attorney for the Natural Resources Defense Council, said the commission's questions "make it very clear that the entire clean-trucks program . . . is in play."

Others applauded the commission's move.

"We hope that the ports will in a timely manner supply the information the [commission] requests, and that this will help the clean-truck program proceed next month minus the onerous concession plans," said American Trucking Assn. Chief Executive Bill Graves.

Judge throws out Yellowstone snowmobile plan

By Jesse J. Holland

Contra Costa Times, Monday, September 15, 2008

WASHINGTON—A federal judge on Monday threw out plans to allow more than 500 snowmobiles a day into Yellowstone National Park, saying that many snowmobiles would increase air pollution, disturb wildlife and cause too much noise in the nation's first national park.

The National Park Service's Winter Use Plan would have allowed 540 snowmobiles to go through in Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks and the John D. Rockefeller Jr. Memorial Parkway every day, starting this winter.

"According to NPS's own data, the (plan) will increase air pollution, exceed the use levels recommended by NPS biologists to protect wildlife, and cause major adverse impacts to the natural soundscape in Yellowstone," U.S. District Judge Emmet Sullivan said in an order Monday.

Conservationists sued the National Parks Service to stop the plan, saying snowmobiling in the park causes noise and air pollution. They want snowmobiling eliminated in the park, or at least reduced.

Park officials said they averaged about 290 snowmobiles a day in 2006, the most recent number available. Conservationists argued that allowing 540 snowmobiles, a cap higher than that average, would not help solve the park's problems.

"This ruling will restore the quiet and the clean air in Yellowstone for everyone to enjoy," said Amy McNamara, director of the Greater Yellowstone Coalition national parks program.

Added Kristen Brengel, director of the Wilderness Society: "The park deserves to be protected from noise, harm to wildlife and poor air quality."

The judge said letting in the proposed number of snowmobiles "elevates use over conservation of park resources and values." The National Park Service "fails to articulate why the plan's 'major adverse impacts' are 'necessary and appropriate to fulfill the purposes of the park,'" Sullivan said in his order.

The National Park Service must redo the plan, Sullivan said.

Parks spokesman Al Nash said the agency will review Sullivan's decision.

The next winter season begins on Dec. 15. "Our goal is to review this and to see how we move forward for this coming winter," Nash said.

In the late 1990s, as many as 1,400 snowmobiles a day visited Yellowstone, contributing noise and air pollution that critics in Congress and elsewhere said was inappropriate for the country's first national park.

U.S.-bound flight from New Zealand to showcase ways to save time and fuel

The flight headed for San Francisco will use new technologies and procedures through a Federal Aviation Administration initiative.

By Peter Pae

L.A. Times, Friday, September 12, 2008

AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND -- A major initiative to help cut airline flight times, burn less fuel and reduce harmful carbon emissions is to be presented today by the Federal Aviation Administration at San Francisco International Airport.

Amid the roar of jet engines, acting FAA Administrator Robert Sturgell will speak upon the arrival of an Air New Zealand flight from Auckland that will use a host of new technologies and procedures designed to save time and fuel.

FAA and airline officials hope the normally 12-hour, 6,500-mile flight will be shorter in duration and cut fuel use by hundreds of pounds compared with similar flights. It would mark the first of several tests that -- if successful -- could change the way airlines fly locally, nationally and overseas.

"This is going to be a big one for business," Sturgell said Thursday. "As a former airline pilot myself, I can tell you this will change how things work from gate to gate."

With oil prices still hovering at more than \$100 a barrel, the FAA initiative is likely to attract significant attention from airlines, particularly from U.S. carriers looking at billions of dollars in losses this year because of high fuel expenses.

For passengers, the initiative could mean less waiting on the tarmac before takeoff and after landing, shorter flights and perhaps fewer flight delays, FAA officials said.

But Joe Brancatelli, editor of business travel website Joesentme.com, questioned whether the initiative would help curtail airlines' practice of packing flights into certain hours of the day, which he believes is a major factor in flight delays and wasted airline fuel.

"It's like stuffing 6 pounds of sugar in a 5-pound bag and then complaining when the bag breaks," he said. Spreading flights throughout the day is "not sexy like the FAA initiative, but it's solving this boring practical stuff that will save more fuel."

The Air New Zealand flight, a regularly scheduled service with hundreds of passengers, is being

conducted in partnership with FAA and New Zealand aviation officials.

The FAA is working with Air New Zealand because the airline has been at the forefront of finding new ways of making flights more environmentally friendly and fuel efficient.

Aside from some frequent fliers, most passengers are unlikely to notice much of a difference.

The plane's approach into San Francisco is also expected to be smoother and quieter because the plane will descend gradually in a straight line, as though it was on cruise control, compared with how most planes have to throttle the jet engines up and down to follow the typical step-down landing pattern.

The FAA hopes to implement the so-called tailored approach at Los Angeles International Airport next year.

Sturgell said today's flight was likely to be for the most part "transparent to the passengers, but the pilots, the air-traffic controllers and the industry are going to sit up and take notice."

The initiative with Air New Zealand began as a way to reduce carbon emissions, which scientists believe contribute to global warming and weather changes. But it evolved into a more complicated and expanded move to save fuel and time, airline and New Zealand aviation officials said.

For the FAA, the flight will incorporate many of the procedures that it has been developing under a plan to modernize the nation's air transportation system, using satellite and other new technologies to make flying more efficient.

The procedures include working with air-traffic controllers so that a plane can get from the gate to the runway as quickly and smoothly as possible. And during the flight, the pilot and air-traffic controllers in New Zealand and in the U.S. are expected to collaborate regularly on setting the most direct, fuel-efficient route, taking up-to-date wind and weather conditions into consideration. Flights currently follow a specific route planned prior to takeoff, often based on weather reports that might be outdated by the time the plane leaves the gate.

FAA officials said a separate initiative was underway with Europe and an airline there, with plans to conduct a similar flight over the Atlantic.

If all goes well with the Air New Zealand flight today, Sturgell said, "it saves time, gas and money."

[Hanford Sentinel, Commentary, Sunday, Sept. 14, 2008:](#)

Another View

By Catherine G. Burke, Special to the LA Times

Today, everyone wants to get out of the foreign oil money pit. We talk about reducing the use of petroleum through conservation, building cars with better mileage or developing alternative fuels that will not pollute or at least produce less pollution.

That's good, but the cost of oil and emissions are not the only problems with automobiles. We have congestion; accidents with injuries and deaths, and courts tied up with the resultant lawsuits; acres of land devoted to roads and parking; high costs to buy, insure and maintain a car; and lack of mobility for people who are unable or unwilling to drive.

In the near future, 70 million of us will enter retirement, and inevitably some of us will lose the ability to drive a car, whether from physical disability, poverty or denial of insurance. We will need something better than the auto -- and better is here, now.

It's a "podcar," also called "personal rapid transit" -- a system of vehicles that provide on-demand, private, nonstop travel. These vehicles can carry people or light freight. They ride on small, overhead guideways -- like a monorail or people mover -- above existing roads and are powered entirely by electricity. Picture the car as an elevated, driverless taxi. It's under computer control, so there would be no accidents, thereby saving lives and lowering insurance costs.

Podcars operate on demand, waiting at off-line stations; they can be summoned if one is not available when you arrive at the station. Each vehicle can hold four people, yet the system can be cost-effective even with a single rider for each trip.

The capital cost is low, about \$25 million to \$40 million a mile for the first systems, which include guideways, vehicles and stations, compared with \$100 million to \$300 million a mile for light-rail or subway systems. Because it operates over existing streets and sidewalks, there are few costs for rights of way or taking of private property. It is also inexpensive to operate and thus can be available 24/7 and still make an operating profit, depending on pricing policies.

Detractors say it can't be done: That to be cost-effective, public transit must mass large groups of people together to travel to the same place; that a podcar system would be too complex and expensive; that an elevated guideway would be ugly.

The naysayers haven't done their homework. A podcar system called ULTra is being built at London's Heathrow airport. Vectus, a Korean podcar, is being tested in Uppsala, Sweden. One or both of these systems might be used in the Masdar eco-city in the United Arab Emirates that is being planned as the world's first auto-free, carbon-free new town.

This indicates that the entities buying the systems believe they are cost-effective even in the more costly early stages of development. Visual intrusion is in the eye of the beholder, but the small scale of podcar guideways makes them unobtrusive over city streets and sidewalks. Existing wires and street lighting could be run through the guideway, reducing visual clutter.

Although the ultimate goal would be a network connected to serve most of the urbanized population of an area such as Los Angeles, the first small podcar networks could enhance existing rail and bus systems by providing an easy and convenient way for passengers to get to their destination when they leave the larger system. The existing rail system in L.A., for example, might be better patronized if passengers had a podcar system connecting Union Station with the rest of downtown. Another system could link the railway, hotels, airport parking and car rentals with the airport.

Such connections could be created rapidly as guideways are built in factories and then bolted onto pre-staged footings. A city block can be completed in a day and an entire network completed in a few weeks or months, not years, as with rails.

Private developers, shopping malls, universities and industrial complexes also could build internal networks and connect them to the public network.

Current public transit can serve only people who live near stations or bus lines and who want to travel where and when the system operates. That's why most people prefer a car that's available 24/7, if we can drive and can afford the gas.

There have been no significant service innovations in public transit in more than 100 years. Podcars offer a new kind of service, providing the convenience of an auto without the negatives for the individual -- costly to purchase plus high costs for gasoline, insurance, maintenance and parking. For society, podcars would reduce the use of petroleum as well as pollution, congestion, accidents, injuries and deaths.

With governments in Europe and South Korea supporting this development, the U.S. needs to get onboard and begin test runs on the podcar designs being created in this country.

Burke is an associate professor at the University of Southern California's School of Policy, Planning and Development.

[Commentary found in Capital Press, Friday, September 12, 2008](#)

Regulate CO2 under right agency

By John Hart

The Environmental Protection Agency recently called for public comments on whether and how the agency should regulate greenhouse gas emissions under the Clean Air Act. This is the first step in a process that could have sweeping negative consequences for America's farmers and ranchers.

What's the problem? Simply put, the Clean Air Act is not the means for regulating CO2 or greenhouse gases. It is a rigid and inflexible law, and its use would bring about regulation under two EPA programs. This is the kind of regulatory burden farmers cannot afford.

Climate change specialists with Farm Bureau say the proposed rules are aimed at automobile greenhouse gas emissions, but the unintended consequences could result in many family farms being brought under that regulatory umbrella. The threshold for these programs is 250 tons per year of a pollutant being emitted. It is this 250-ton burden that will hit America's family farms hardest. A significant number of ag operations emit 250 tons of CO2 per year and would therefore fall under these programs. Currently, there are no agricultural facilities regulated under either program.

An even larger issue facing agriculture is the possible regulation of emissions from methane and nitrous oxides. Both are greenhouse gases that are more potent than CO2. Methane comes from livestock and is 21 times more potent than CO2. Nitrous oxide is used as a fertilizer and is 310 times more potent.

The Clean Air Act is aimed at very serious and very scarce air pollutants from sources such as large chemical plants. It is not designed to regulate a dairy farm in Wisconsin or a cattle ranch in Texas.

The EPA request for public comment is in response to an April 2007 Supreme Court decision, *Massachusetts v. EPA*, which found that greenhouse gas emissions could be regulated if EPA determines a cause or contribution to air pollution that endangers public health or welfare.

The Agriculture Department has come out against the proposed rules. In its objections, USDA said dairy farms with 25 cows, beef operations with more than 50 head of cattle, swine operations with more than 200 hogs and farms with more than 500 acres of corn, all could be brought into the regulatory fold if the rules were approved.

USDA predicted dire results for farmers if the proposed changes are implemented, such as higher input costs and regulatory burdens. Consumers will likely feel the pinch as well, due to higher food prices and reduced domestic food supplies.

The White House and EPA have also come out against regulating greenhouse gasses under the Clean Air Act. This should bode well for Farm Bureau and others working to ensure this scheme never sees the light of day. But it is still critical for farmers to speak up and submit comments to EPA urging that greenhouse gases not be regulated under the Clean Air Act.

As President Bush said in a Rose Garden speech earlier this year, there is "a right way and a wrong way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions." Placing greenhouse gases under the Clean Air Act is clearly the wrong way. Doing so would not only greatly harm the U.S. economy, but also would fail to provide an effective response to the problem of climate change.

[Editorial in Merced Sun-Star, Friday, September 12, 2008:](#)

Our View: Pick scientist for air board

Too many seats are vacant; governor has candidates, now he should make a selection.

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.

Those candidates are Dr. Henry Jay Forman, professor in the School of Natural Science at UC Merced, and Dr. David Grantz, director of the University of California, Kearney Agricultural Center in Fresno.

Forman is widely published in scientific journals and has a Ph.D. in biochemistry from Columbia University. Grantz is also a plant physiologist and air quality specialist at UC Riverside. He has a Ph.D. from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

The air board does have scientists on staff, but its deliberations and decisions would be enhanced with two science-oriented board members who speak the language of science, Melissa Kelly-Ortega of the Merced/Mariposa County Asthma Coalition told the Sun-Star's editorial board this week.

The idea was to introduce scientific and medical perspectives to a board dominated by elected city and county officials 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 only three city representatives, rotated among all the Valley's cities.

The problem is that the League of California Cities, which had been selecting city representatives, backed out when legal issues arose over its participation.

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. Another city council member 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.

But there's no reason at all for waiting any longer to fill the air board seat reserved for a scientist. There are two good choices from the Valley. The governor should pick one.

[Letter to Merced Sun-Star, Monday, September 15, 2008:](#)

Letter: Reasons for Wal-Mart

Editor: Wal-Mart promotes jobs, stimulates the economy and is touted as a "superior environmental performer" by the U.S. EPA's Smart Way Transportation Partnership, a designation reserved for partners who are among the nation's most elite, cleanest, and greenest fleets. Why would any member of the community not be proud to have a Wal-Mart Distribution Center in their community?

Statistics in a July 2008 report of the State of California Employment Development Department reflect unemployment in Merced County as the second highest in the state at 12.1 percent. And according to the Aug. 23 issue of The New York Times, "Merced has one of the highest foreclosure rates in the country." These are not statistics that business owners and member of the community want to see continue. Wal-Mart can play an integral part in reducing this unemployment and the overbuilt housing market. Upwards of 1,000 new jobs will be created in the first year. Six hundred of those will be full time, and once Wal-Mart is fully operational, that number will grow to 900. The employees will make an average wage of \$16.50 per hour. The positive impact on jobs does not stop at Wal-Mart's door. During the past three years, Merced County Suppliers, which support 11,000 jobs, is also directly related to Wal-Mart's participation in the community.

These same Merced County Suppliers have realized more than \$168 million in revenue because of Wal-Mart purchases. This figure will grow substantially once the distribution center begins operation through ongoing operations and immediately during the construction process, which will create 600 construction jobs.

Wal-Mart will provide generously to our community through jobs, revenue and reducing our housing inventory. Many may ask at what price? Is Wal-Mart asking for tax credits or fee reductions from the city of Merced for the building of the distribution center? The answer is no; Wal-Mart is not.

If you support the promotion of jobs in our community, stimulating the economy, reducing Merced's housing inventory and reducing greenhouse gases and air pollution, then you must definitely vote yes to a Wal-Mart distribution center in our community.

David H. Long, Ballico

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses how Sarah Palin, could possibly ask Schwarzenegger to extend fees at ports to help in the reduction of air pollution. For more information on this and other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Sarah Palin habría pedido a Schwarzenegger exentar tarifas contra la contaminación en puertos

Manuel Ocaño

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Friday, September 12, 2008

La aspirante vicepresidencial republicana, Sarah Palin habría solicitado al gobernador, Arnold Schwarzenegger que California se abstuviera de cobrar una tarifa que impone a cada barco que llega a sus puertos con la intención de formar un fondo que financie medidas contra la contaminación en las propias terminales marítimas.

Palin dijo que ese cobro afectaría la economía y ahuyentaría a inversionistas de los puertos, y de California.

La gobernadora de Alaska envió su carta a Schwarzenegger un día antes de que el senador John McCain la eligiera como compañera de fórmula electoral.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses organizations are against Schwarzenegger's referendum.](#)

Organizaciones se oponen a referendo contra Schwarzenegger

Manuel Ocaño

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Thursday, September 11, 2008

La Liga de Ciudades del estado de California y varias cámaras de comercio defendieron al gobernador, Arnold Schwarzenegger ante una propuesta del sindicato de celadores para llevar la gubernatura a referendo.

La liga destacó en un comunicado que aunque los gobiernos locales no están de acuerdo con todas las políticas del gobernador, reconocen aciertos a Schwarzenegger en infraestructura, cambio climático y financiamiento de gobierno.

Agregó que el gobernador puede tener fallas, pero indudablemente ha tratado de resolver la cuestión financiera de California.

La asociación de celadores acusó esta semana al gobernador de fallar en sus promesas de campaña.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses 84% possibilities of cancer caused by air pollution from diesel.](#)

84 % de posibilidades de cáncer por contaminación del aire causadas por el diesel

Manuel Ocaño
Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Monday, September 10, 2008

Hasta un 84 por ciento de los casos de cáncer atribuibles a la contaminación del aire se deben al consumo del diesel, de acuerdo con un estudio que elaboró durante varios años y presentó ahora la Administración Distrital de Calidad del Aire en el área e Los Ángeles.

El estudio dice que el mayor riesgo se concentró en dos zonas. La contaminación que causa cáncer bajó en ocho por ciento en toda la región en general, pero aumentó en 17 % el Los Ángeles, Long Beach y Riverside.

El análisis es parte de argumentos de autoridades para exigir a unos 17 mil camioneros mejorar su rendimiento de combustible.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses California's Senate approves higher car registration fees and to create funds against air pollution.](#)

Aprueban elevar tarifas a registros vehiculares y crear fondo contra la contaminación

Manuel Ocaño
Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Tuesday, September 9, 2008

Una de las leyes que aprobó el Senado de California y sobre las que deberá decidir el gobernador, Arnold Schwarzenegger este mes autoriza a aumentar en promedio dos dólares por registro anual de vehículos, pero en algunos casos permitiría elevar hasta seis dólares dicha tarifa.

La propuesta, del asambleísta, Juan Arámbula, de Fresno, busca formar un fondo que permita pagar medidas para combatir la contaminación del aire.

Si el gobernador refrenda la ley, también autorizaría al Valle de San Joaquín a financiar planes para reducir recorridos vehiculares.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses toxins worry neighbors. Authorities have been asked to inform them about the dangers to those exposed to toxic fumes and other materials.](#)

Tóxicos preocupan a los vecinos

Pedirán a las autoridades se les informe del peligro al que están expuestos

Claudia Núñez

La Opinión, Sunday, September 14, 2008

La preocupación se ha sumado al ambiente de tristeza que inunda la comunidad aledaña a la zona donde sucedió el trágico accidente ferroviario y es que, según los vecinos del lugar, nadie les ha informado que tipo de químicos o materiales peligrosos transitan por esta área residencial.

Rony Villanueva, portavoz del Departamento de Bomberos del Condado de Los Ángeles le dijo a La Opinión que no hablarían de los químicos transportados por el ferrocarril de carga pues, apuntó, "sería como abrir una caja de Pandora". Sin embargo, ya por la tarde otra portavoz de ese mismo departamento aclaró que "no hay peligro alguno de contaminación, el material era sólo diesel", dijo.

Pese a las aclaraciones, vecinos del lugar entrevistados indicaron que pedirán a sus representantes locales que se les informe del peligro al que están expuestos.

"Sabemos cómo protegernos en caso de un accidente pero nadie nos ha dicho cómo sobrevivir a una situación así", dijo Sonia, una residente Chatsworth que pidió que no se publicara su apellido porque su esposo trabaja en el Ayuntamiento de Los Ángeles.

Manuel Hernández, empleado de una empresa local de madera, también se quejó que no haber sido informado de la clase de químicos.

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

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

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

"Por ley las compañías están obligadas a informar a las autoridades qué tipo de material transportan, pero no a los vecinos que rodean las vías ferroviarias y esto es algo que debe cambiar", declaró Michael Ehline, abogado especialista en accidentes ferroviarios del condado de Los Ángeles.

Ehline, descalificó las aseveraciones del departamento de bomberos en el sentido de que el diesel que transportaba el tren de la Union Pacific no representaba un peligro para la comunidad.

"Nadie ha clarificado si hubo un derrame de diesel a la superficie tras el accidente y de haber sucedido esto, estamos hablando de un serio peligro porque pudo haberse filtrado y contaminar la zona", apuntó.

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

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

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

Los condados de San Bernardino y Los Ángeles, con cerca de 2.5 millones de personas viviendo en los alrededores de las vías del tren, registraron el volumen más alto de derrames tóxicos en todo el estado. Según entrevistas recabadas por La Opinión, son raras las ocasiones en que clínicas o escuelas ubicadas cerca de las vías del tren, reciben información acerca de qué tipo

de cargamentos transportan los vagones. La Administración Federal de Transporte Ferroviario (FRA), aún no ha lanzado un comunicado oficial sobre si hubo o no fisura en los tanques tras el accidente.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses Chrysler saves with hybrid vehicles.](#)

Chrysler ahora con híbridos

EFE

La Opinión, Friday, September 12, 2008

El vicepresidente del consejo de administración de Chrysler, Jim Press, afirmó que el fabricante estadounidense está trabajando en el desarrollo de vehículos híbridos y eléctricos aunque no reveló cuando llegarían a los concesionarios.

Según Press, Chrysler está contemplando "de forma seria" la producción de autos eléctricos gracias a que la tecnología de las baterías, el componente más crítico en la producción comercial, "está avanzando".

Chrysler ha sido el fabricante de EE.UU. más lento en llegar al creciente mercado de vehículos híbridos -que utiliza una combinación de motores eléctricos y de combustión- y eléctricos, alimentando su imagen de marca con vehículos de gran potencia pero elevado consumo.

Para contrarrestar esa imagen, el fabricante dijo hoy que los nuevos modelos de monovolúmen Chrysler Town & Country y Dodge Grand Caravan equipados con un motor de cuatro litros y seis cilindros ofrecen el consumo más reducido de todo el segmento.

Larry Lyons, vicepresidente de Chrysler para Autos y Monovolúmenes, dijo que "con un mejorado motor de cuatro litros y seis cilindros y la primera transmisión de seis velocidades en monovolúmenes, no otro monovolúmen tiene mejor economía de consumo".

Press dijo que en el 2010, el Grupo Chrysler -formado por las marcas Chrysler, Dodge y Jepp- tiene previsto presentar siete nuevos modelos entre ellos un nuevo auto de tamaño medio.

El ejecutivo de Chrysler -que anteriormente trabajó para Toyota- también dijo que para el 2010 los fabricantes estadounidenses serán competitivos frente a sus rivales asiáticos tras la profunda reestructuración que el sector está sufriendo.

Chrysler ha perdido casi una cuarta parte de sus ventas en Estados Unidos en lo que va de año, lo que ha reducido su cuota de mercado a poco más del seis por ciento.