

Air regulators honor students

Stockton Record, Tuesday, April 21, 2009

STOCKTON - Three San Joaquin County elementary school classes were honored by air quality regulators last week for their efforts to encourage their families, friends and neighbors to clean the air.

County winners of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's Kids for Clean Air contest were Adrian Nickols' fourth-grade class at Cleveland Elementary School; Shirley Kreunegel's fourth-grade class at George McParland Elementary School; and Erica Haley's fifth-grade class at Victor Elementary School.

Each student in the winning classes receives an iPod Shuffle, and their teachers receive \$250 resource grants, the district said. More than 1,700 students participated in the contest, for which they gathered pledges to live a clean-air lifestyle.

Farmers keen on eco-friendly practices

BY COURTENAY EDELHART, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Monday, April 20, 2009

Kern County Supervisor Ray Watson, left, and Vince Fong, an aide to U.S. Rep. Kevin McCarthy, check out the solar panels at Paramount Farms in 2007. It is the largest privately owned solar project in the country. As Earth Day approaches, a new survey found a strong majority of U.S. farmers and ranchers are moving toward sustainable agricultural practices.

Nearly 70 percent say they are incorporating eco-friendly methods into agricultural operations, according to a recent survey paid for by Rabobank N.A., and released Monday.

"Sustainability is an increasing priority among consumers as well as for many areas of industry and commerce, and this survey shows that U.S. farmers and ranchers share that view," said John Ryan, president and CEO of Rabo AgriFinance, in a statement.

Three out of every four U.S. farmers are aware of sustainable practices, and most have used direct seeding, minimized the use of chemicals or employed crop rotation, according to the survey.

As green technologies have come down in price, and fuel prices have increased, more farmers and ranchers are seeing that green practices make economic sense, said Marcy Coburn, spokeswoman for the Ecological Farming Association, a national coalition based in Watsonville, Calif.

"Ten years ago it was cheaper to just pay for the gas than to, say, install solar panels," she said. "But with oil prices up and water being rationed in some parts of the state, on top of the incentives from PG&E and government encouraging energy efficiency, it's really kind of a no-brainer."

Plenty of local ag businesses are already on board.

Paramount Farms' nut processing plant in Los Hills two years ago installed 76 banks of solar panels spanning 4.5 acres. That makes it the largest privately owned solar project in the country.

Don Davis of Alina Farms just west of McFarland installed Fan-Jet microsprinklers on a third of his farm in 2007. The system targets almond trees individually rather than flooding an entire grove. The same year he also put in electronic soil probes that precisely measure soil moisture, another method of controlling wasted water.

And he's grinding wood from winter prunings and returning it to the soil as mulch rather than burning it, as most growers do.

Such practices make both economic and ecological sense, but prices will have to come down a lot more for them to be widely adopted, Davis said.

"Otherwise, it's just charity. People doing it because they believe in the cause and have given up on making any money," he said.

There remain a lot of growers who would like to do more, but they hold back because they can't afford to, said Davis, who also serves as vice president of the Kern County Farm Bureau.

Record heat sizzles; snowmelt may cause streams to swell

By Mark Grossi, The Fresno Bee
in the Merced sun-Star, Tuesday, April 21, 2009

Merced's high temperature of 94 surpassed a 59-year-old record Monday, and near-record heat is expected to continue -- at least for another day or two.

Fresno's high temperature tied a record Sunday, prompting weather officials to warn the public about streams rising with snowmelt from the mountains.

"Streams and rivers will be running cold and fast," said meteorologist Daniel Harty of the National Weather Service in Hanford.

"It may look inviting, but it is very dangerous." The high temperature Sunday in Fresno was 93 degrees, tying the city's April 19 record, which was set in 1950.

That was also the year that Merced set a record for April 20 at 93 degrees, surpassing it by one degree Monday.

The high today is forecast at 93 degrees and 90 Wednesday for Merced -- a few degrees short of records each day but well above the mid-70s averages for this time of year.

That means temperatures are rising in the high Sierra, perhaps to the mid-60s above 8,000 feet. So snowmelt will pick up a little, officials said.

The San Joaquin Valley heated up quickly during the last week, Harty said. Merced's high temperature has climbed more than 22 degrees since last Tuesday.

But the mercury is expected to drop into the 70s by Friday, the Weather Service said.

The Valley is under a high-pressure system that keeps cool breezes out. The system should break down by the end of the week.

But today and Wednesday, the weather pattern will hold pollution in the Valley, probably triggering ozone violations. The Valley, which led the nation in federal violations last year, had its first bad ozone day of the year Saturday.

CSUB to host carbon talk

The Bakersfield, Monday, April, 20,2009

An emerging technology to capture carbon emissions and store them in underground rock formations as a way to combat global warming will be the topic of a seminar held at Cal State Bakersfield on Wednesday.

Geoffrey D. Thyne, a research scientist at the University of Wyoming's Enhanced Oil Recovery Institute, will give a talk on the economic, scientific and engineering challenges of carbon sequestration starting at 4 p.m. in Science Building III, room 108.

The talk will address the environmental and financial aspects of this new technology, as well as how it can benefit from enhanced oil recovery techniques already used by the petroleum industry.

The event is free and open to the public.

Neighbors fume over LAX plan to redesign runways

By Alan Levin
USA Today, Tuesday, April 21, 2009

Los Angeles International Airport is by far the nation's worst commercial airport for dangerous near-collisions between aircraft on the ground, but attempts to fix the problem have run into powerful political opposition.

The solution at the airport with four parallel runways nestled against the Pacific Ocean is straightforward, according to federal aviation regulators and reports by safety experts. They say runways on the north side of the airport should be moved farther apart.

That plan has infuriated the airport's neighbors, who cite concerns over pollution, noise and decimation of businesses.

As accidents at airports have become a larger share of commercial plane crashes, federal regulators are increasingly pushing for safer airport designs that minimize chances of ground collisions and crashes off the ends of runways.

But, as the clash in Los Angeles exemplifies, it's not always easy for airports to get approval for changes, even when they are designed to make critical safety improvements. Similar attempts at safety enhancements have run into trouble at dozens of airports across the country.

"It has played out over any number of airports and it represents a real challenge," says Jane Garvey, former chief of the Federal Aviation Administration who also served as head of Boston's Logan International Airport.

"Airport directors have to balance the very real issues around safety with community concerns," Garvey says.

Activists in the neighborhoods north of the airport — who for decades have had an uneasy relationship with the nation's fifth-busiest airfield — say they do not accept the arguments that the current airport design needs fixing.

"The airport has held several meetings with the public to try to convince everyone that there is a safety problem on the north side of the airport," says Denny Schneider, president of the Alliance for a Regional Solution to Airport Congestion. "They failed."

Clashes at other airports

Similar debates are playing out at other airports.

In a report last month, the Transportation Department's Inspector General found that 11 of the nation's 30 largest airports lacked adequate safety areas at the ends of runways, but face significant challenges getting approval to fix the problems.

At Chicago's Midway Airport, surrounded by dense commercial and residential neighborhoods, federal and local authorities rejected adding runway safety areas because the costs of relocating nearby businesses was too high, the Inspector General's report said.

The safety zones designed to stop runaway jets were installed at Midway after a 6-year-old boy died when a jet skidded off a snowy runway and struck a passing car on Dec. 8, 2005.

Los Angeles' two northern runways also lack adequate safety areas. An even bigger concern is the risk of two speeding jets striking each other on the ground.

According to safety experts and the FAA, that risk was on full display on Aug. 16, 2007. A WestJet Boeing 737 landed on Runway 24 Right, the airport's northernmost landing strip. Before heading to the terminals, the jet had to cross Runway 24 Left, which lies only 700 feet away.

Because of a mix-up between pilots and air-traffic controllers, the WestJet pilots began to cross the other runway just as a Northwest Airlines Airbus A320 accelerated for takeoff. The WestJet pilots slammed on the brakes and stopped just short of the runway as the Northwest jet raced by only 37 feet away, investigators with the National Transportation Safety Board found.

From 2000 through 2007, Los Angeles had 16 near-collisions on runways that the FAA classified as the most serious, the most of any airport. Chicago's O'Hare International was second during the period with nine.

The airport sought five separate studies in 2007 and each one found that the existing layout of the two runways on the north side of the airport create a safety hazard.

'Over my dead body'

None of the arguments makes much sense to Schneider, who lives in the adjacent Westchester neighborhood. Graced by cool sea breezes, the area is a sought-after place to live.

But residents here harbor decades of resentment over airport noise and expansion that has razed thousands of homes and, in their view, left promises unkept at restoring local businesses.

When the city in December 2004 approved a project to upgrade the airport, including the north runways, the proposal was hit by lawsuits. Schneider called it an attempt at airport expansion, not a safety enhancement.

Local political figures promised to shut it down. Bill Rosendahl, the city councilman representing the area, vowed the north runway would be moved "over my dead body."

Led by Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, who had run for office opposing the airport's plan, a compromise was reached in late 2005. A new study would be conducted on the north runways by NASA and a blue-ribbon panel of academic experts. The results are due later this year.

Rosendahl calls earlier studies raising safety concerns "irresponsible." But he vows to allow changes if the latest review finds improvements necessary.

"Is this a critical part of safety? If the answer is yes, we will move forward," Rosendahl says.

Heat records to break this week

By Tanya Rose

Contra Costa Times, Tuesday, April 21, 2009

CONCORD — Forecasters see more record-breaking heat in the Bay Area today — 95 degrees in Concord and Livermore and 88 degrees in San Francisco, the warmest it will have been on this date since 1986.

Concord hasn't seen these temperatures since the early 1990s, said Brian Tentinger of the National Weather Service.

"I'm coping by staying indoors with AC," said Michelle Benning, while on her lunch break outside at the Citrus Marketplace on Oak Grove Road in Walnut Creek.

Temperatures in Oakland climbed to 88 degrees Monday, and in San Jose, highs were expected to hit 94 degrees — the hottest temperature recorded since in the area 1906. And that's after a hotter-than-usual weekend.

Dave Newton of Danville spent the Saturday and Sunday in Big Basin Redwoods State Park where the weather was sunny but breezy. Then things heated up on the way home.

"We pulled in around 4 p.m. (Sunday) and here we are wearing long pants and everyone else is wearing shorts," he said. "We stopped at a 7-Eleven in San Ramon and everyone was coming out with Slurpees and ice cream. I wouldn't be surprised if they ran out."

The Weather Service on Monday warned people who were sensitive to the heat to take precautions and drink plenty of water. The same applies today.

The SPCA is also reminding pet owners not to leave animals in cars. Even with the windows open, the inside of a car can reach more than 120 degrees in fewer than five minutes, which can cause pets to suffer seizures, brain damage and death.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District has issued the first Spare the Air advisory this year warning people of poor air quality. The air district is urging people to drive less and reduce energy use.

Temperatures are expected to begin cooling on Wednesday and will drop even more by the end of the week, Tentinger said. The cooling onshore airflow will bring with it a 30-percent chance of rain Friday and into the weekend, he said.

Weather: Snow for Great Lakes; More heat for West

By Bob Swanson

USA Today, Tuesday, April 21, 2009

Clouds and rain will prevail in the Great Lakes and Northeast, while record warmth persists for parts of the West.

Northeast stays unsettled— Separate areas of low pressure will slowly move through the Great Lakes and Northeast today, resulting in cloudy, cool and at times windy conditions around the region. This late-season storm will dump additional snowfall across western parts of Michigan's Upper Peninsula as well as much of northern Wisconsin. Winter storm warnings and winter weather advisories are in effect for the region, as an additional 5 inches of snow will be possible for some locations today.

Heaviest rainfall is expected along the Maine Coast, where more than 2 inches of rainfall will be possible. Widespread rain showers are expected across the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic and Ohio Valley. A cold front should sweep east of the Appalachians into parts of the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast this afternoon into this evening. Isolated severe storms with large hail will be possible along and ahead of the front.

Western warmth— After two days of record highs across parts of the West, even more records are expected to fall as many places in California, Oregon and Montana soar to 30 degrees above average this afternoon. Triple-digit heat could reach Northern California, with highs climbing into the 90s across southern Oregon and even 80s possible for eastern Washington through northern Montana. Poor air quality will be an issue once again in many areas, with code orange air quality forecast for Phoenix, Bakersfield, Fresno, San Diego, San Francisco, and other locations.

This heat will spread into the Plains and Midwest on Wednesday and Thursday. By the weekend, the pattern will shift, with below-average temperatures expected for much of the West and above-average warmth stretching from the Southwest through the Northeast.

Fire weather— Red flag fire warnings extend through much of Florida today. Fire threat will remain high across Florida on Wednesday, with critical fire weather conditions developing in the Southwest by Thursday.

DuPont, Lucite plant in W.Va. to pay \$2M penalty

By Associated Press

In the S.F. Chronicle, N.Y. Times and other papers, Monday, April 20, 2009

Charleston, W.Va. (AP) -- State and federal authorities announced Monday that DuPont and Lucite International have agreed to pay \$2 million to settle air pollution violations at a West Virginia plant.

The violations stem from sulfur dioxide releases from a sulfuric acid unit owned by Lucite but operated by DuPont at its Belle plant in Kanawha County. The announcement said Lucite voluntarily agreed to close the unit by next April.

DuPont spokesman Dan Turner said the company disagreed with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's interpretation of standards applied to the unit, but the company decided to work with regulators to resolve the dispute.

DuPont doesn't anticipate any layoffs when the unit is closed, Turner said.

The emissions come from the burning of sulfuric acid sludge. Part of the emissions are recovered, but some is released into the atmosphere. In addition the sulfur dioxide emissions, the unit releases sulfuric acid mist, nitrogen dioxide and carbon monoxide, the Environmental Protection Agency said in a news release.

Sulfuric acid is used to process ore, produce fertilizer, refine oil, process wastewater and chemical synthesis.

"Sulfur dioxide emissions can be harmful to children, the elderly, and people with heart and lung conditions," said Catherine McCabe, with EPA's Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance.

Closing the unit will reduce air emissions from the plant by more than 1,000 tons a year, she said.

EPA, the Justice Department and the state Department of Environmental Protection said the violations stem from modifications the companies made to the unit in 1996 without obtaining pre-construction permits or installing air pollution controls. The Clean Air Act requires permits for modifications that could result in significant increases in air pollution.

Turner said the unit started operating before new emission standards and review programs were implemented. The unit was routinely inspected and maintained and did not increase the amount of emissions from the plant, he said.

The agreement was to be filed with the U.S. District Court in Charleston. Interested parties have 30 days to comment on the agreement before it's finalized.

The agreement requires the companies to pay \$1 million to the EPA and \$1 million to the state Department of Environmental Protection.

Court sides with EPA in power plant case

By Susan Montoya Bryan, Associated Press Writer

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Tuesday, April 21, 2009

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M.—A federal appeals court has sided with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, denying requests by environmentalists and the Arizona Public Service Co. to review a plan that limits certain emissions from a coal-fired power plant in northwestern New Mexico.

The utility, which operates the 2,040-megawatt Four Corners Power Plant, argued that the federal implementation plan finalized by EPA in 2007 was too restrictive. Environmentalists complained the plan did not take into account the region's air quality and that greater restrictions were needed to limit emissions.

The 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Denver issued a 31-page ruling last week that found the EPA followed proper procedures in establishing the implementation plan.

"The EPA identified a regulatory need and enacted a source-specific federal plan to fill this gap. The EPA has neither relied on factors which Congress did not intend it to consider nor failed to consider any important aspect of the problem," the ruling states.

The court also vacated a regulation requiring that the plant adhere to dust control measures. Both EPA and Arizona Public Service had asked the court to remand the issue so EPA could take another look at the regulation.

Environmentalists have long been concerned about air quality in the Four Corners region, which is also home to the coal-fired San Juan Generating Station.

Mike Eisenfeld of the San Juan County Citizens Alliance said the Four Corners Power Plant is among the worst polluters when it comes to nitrogen oxide, which the federal plan limits along with sulfur dioxide, total particulate matter and opacity.

"I think it was a legal interpretation we're going to have to live with, but ultimately there should be a big question about a plant like Four Corners that was initially built in the 1960s and really has outlived its life," Eisenfeld said Monday.

Steven Gotfried, a spokesman for APS, said the utility works hard to ensure the plant meets environmental standards. He added that APS was pleased with the ruling and plans to work with EPA.

The ruling stems from lawsuits filed by environmentalists and the utility, which sought flexibility in the administration of dust and opacity emission limits.

EPA uses opacity as an indicator of the amount of pollutants leaving a smokestack. The more particles that pass through a stack, the more light will be blocked, resulting in a higher opacity percentage.

Arizona Public Service had argued that it couldn't achieve the required 20 percent opacity, even when equipment was operating properly. However, the court said EPA provided a reasoned basis for the limit, saying it was necessary to ensure the plant is properly operated and maintained.

"We're going to do what we have to do," Gotfried said of meeting the requirement. "We have a long history of meeting or exceeding all applicable environmental regulations and we plan on doing so in the future."

Eisenfeld said he's hopeful the court's stance on opacity will result in fewer emissions at the plant.

[Modesto Bee Editorial, Tuesday, April 21, 2009](#)

Time for county growth plan is now

For more than two years, the mayors of Stanislaus County's nine cities have met regularly to talk about their shared concerns, such as sewer treatment, fire service and attracting employers.

Initially, a key goal was to draft a countywide growth management strategy, but that was sidetracked, in large part because the cities thought they needed outside expertise and didn't have the money to pay for it. In September 2007, the five county supervisors turned down a proposal to provide \$100,000 toward the growth plan.

Tonight the Board of Supervisors will consider a similar proposal to provide \$100,000 toward the development of a countywide growth management strategy. This time, the contribution would come from an account earmarked as a community development fund, whose purposes include strategic planning for unincorporated areas.

There are good reasons to proceed with development of a regional growth strategy -- in order to identify where growth should and should not occur and where roads and other expensive infrastructure will be needed.

There's virtually no growth occurring now, which makes it an ideal time to plan. Developers are not beating down the doors of elected officials -- or tossing big dollars into their campaigns.

Stanislaus leaders participated only reluctantly in the recent valleywide Blueprint process, so there's a certain hypocrisy in their renewed interest in regional planning. The distinction between the two plans is that the locals are driving this discussion, rather than being directed or guided by outsiders.

Bottom line, long-term planning remains essential, no matter whether our county grows at the rapid rate forecast a few years ago or at a slower pace, which we would prefer.

Thoughtful planning decisions now can help protect farmland, reduce air pollution by reducing traffic and allow communities to make prudent investments in infrastructure.

The supervisors can help jump-start this planning process with this \$100,000 contribution. The cities need to put in their fair share, and they all should try to do it on a reasonable budget. The discussion, of course, must include ample opportunities for public input.

With this effort, we hope the mayors' planning process can be successfully revived and completed, leading to better decisions for 30 years or more.

[Letter to the Valley Times, Tuesday, April 21, 2009:](#)

Our world climate, our oceans and the air we breathe are quickly changing for the worse due to carbon pollution that is exponentially sickening our planet. When will the madness end?

We have the power and technology to forever reverse the damage done and improve our world going forward, but we must first make bold and brave steps in the right direction.

Capping carbon pollution will ignite the transition to clean energy, end our dependence on dirty fossil fuels and put America on a path toward economic recovery.

We must do the right thing — for us, for our children, for our grandchildren, and all future generations to come.

Geno Orphanopoulos, Pleasanton

[L.A. Times column, Tuesday, April 21, 2009:](#)

The EPA is choking democracy

The agency's sweeping new power to battle global warming is another example of the weakening of democratic controls.

By Jonah Goldberg

One of the most important events of our lifetimes may have just transpired. A federal agency has decided that it has the power to regulate everything, including the air you breathe.

Nominally, the Environmental Protection Agency's announcement last Friday only applies to new-car emissions. But pretty much everyone agrees that the ruling opens the door to regulating, well, everything.

According to the EPA, greenhouse gases include carbon dioxide -- the gas you exhale -- as well as methane, nitrous oxide, hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons and sulfur hexafluoride. It is literally impossible to imagine a significant economic or human activity that does not involve the production of one of these gases. Don't think just of the gas and electricity bills. Cow flatulence is a serious concern of the EPA's already. What next? Perhaps an EPA mandarin will pick up a copy of "The Greenpeace Guide to Environmentally Friendly Sex" and go after the root causes of global warming.

Whether or not global warming is a crisis that warrants immediate, drastic action (I don't think it does), and whether or not such wholesale measures would be an economic calamity (they would be), the EPA's decision should be disturbing to people who believe in democratic, constitutional government.

Two years ago, the Supreme Court -- the least democratic branch of our formal government -- decided in *Massachusetts vs. EPA* that the agency could regulate greenhouse gases under the Clean Air Act. With this judicial green light, the EPA has launched its power grab over all that burns, breathes, burps, flies, drives and passes gas.

Yes, the head of the EPA reports to the president, which gives some patina of democratic accountability. Except the EPA is supposed to be politically autonomous, doing what it thinks best according to what President Obama calls "sound science." So the government bureaucracy is on its way to strong-arming the economy in ways Congress never imagined when it passed the Clean Air Act in 1970. Or the president has suddenly gained sweeping new powers over American life, in ways never imagined by Congress or the founders, and despite the fact that these new powers were never put before the voters.

This is not a sudden development. Vast swaths of the state have been on autopilot for years, effectively immune to democratic influence. The Federal Reserve, particularly of late, has been acting like the fourth branch of government. Fed Chairman Ben Bernanke, without congressional, presidential or court approval, has been committing trillions of dollars to fix the financial crisis. That may be warranted; only time will tell. But there's still something troubling about an institution so immune to democratic control.

In 2002, Congress created the Public Company Accounting Oversight Board. It covers its expenses by taxing all publicly traded corporations. It alone determines the amount to tax, without approval of the White House or, more important, Congress, which, according to the Constitution, has the sole authority to levy taxes: "All bills for raising revenue shall originate in the House of Representatives" (Article 1, Section 7). In 1999, the Federal Communications Commission raised the so-called Gore tax on long-distance phone calls by 73% without seeking congressional approval. Lord knows what the EPA could collect by extorting "climate criminals."

In fairness, the Obama administration and congressional Democrats reportedly don't want to cede authority to the EPA. Rather, they want to use the threat of an EPA takeover -- and its presumably draconian impositions on business -- to force reluctant moderate Democratic and Republican members of Congress to sign on to the president's cap-and-trade scheme (itself an enormous energy tax).

California's Barbara Boxer, who chairs the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, has said as much: "EPA, through its scientists, has given us a warning that global warming pollution is a clear, present and future danger to America's families. If Congress does not act to pass legislation, then I will call on the EPA to take all steps authorized by law to protect our families."

Translation: Either you vote our way or we'll render voting meaningless.

Other Democrats are delighted by the EPA decision because it allows them to have their preferred policy -- carbon regulation -- without actually having to vote for it.

Either way, it doesn't sound like these folks take their oaths of office very seriously.

[N.Y. Times column, Monday, April 20, 2009:](#)

Use Energy, Get Rich and Save the Planet

By John Tierney

When the first Earth Day took place in 1970, American environmentalists had good reason to feel guilty. The nation's affluence and advanced technology seemed so obviously bad for the planet that they were featured in a famous equation developed by the ecologist Paul Ehrlich and the physicist John P. Holdren, who is now President Obama's science adviser.

Their equation was $I=PAT$, which means that environmental impact is equal to population multiplied by affluence multiplied by technology. Protecting the planet seemed to require fewer people, less wealth and simpler technology — the same sort of social transformation and energy revolution that will be advocated at many Earth Day rallies on Wednesday.

But among researchers who analyze environmental data, a lot has changed since the 1970s. With the benefit of their hindsight and improved equations, I'll make a couple of predictions:

1. There will be no green revolution in energy or anything else. No leader or law or treaty will radically change the energy sources for people and industries in the United States or other countries. No recession or depression will make a lasting change in consumers' passions to use energy, make money and buy new technology — and that, believe it or not, is good news, because...
2. The richer everyone gets, the greener the planet will be in the long run.

I realize this second prediction seems hard to believe when you consider the carbon being dumped into the atmosphere today by Americans, and the projections for increasing emissions from India and China as they get richer.

Those projections make it easy to assume that affluence and technology inflict more harm on the environment. But while pollution can increase when a country starts industrializing, as people get wealthier they can afford cleaner water and air. They start using sources of energy that are less carbon-intensive — and not just because they're worried about global warming. The process of "decarbonization" started long before Al Gore was born.

The old wealth-is-bad IPAT theory may have made intuitive sense, but it didn't jibe with the data that has been analyzed since that first Earth Day. By the 1990s, researchers realized that graphs of environmental impact didn't produce a simple upward-sloping line as countries got richer. The line more often rose, flattened out and then reversed so that it sloped downward, forming the shape of a dome or an inverted U — what's called a Kuznets curve. (See nytimes.com/tierneylab for an example.)

In dozens of studies, researchers identified Kuznets curves for a variety of environmental problems. There are exceptions to the trend, especially in countries with inept governments and poor systems of property rights, but in general, richer is eventually greener. As incomes go up, people often focus first on cleaning up their drinking water, and then later on air pollutants like sulfur dioxide.

As their wealth grows, people consume more energy, but they move to more efficient and cleaner sources — from wood to coal and oil, and then to natural gas and nuclear power, progressively emitting less carbon per unit of energy. This global decarbonization trend has been proceeding at a remarkably steady rate since 1850, according to Jesse Ausubel of Rockefeller University and Paul Waggoner of the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station.

“Once you have lots of high-rises filled with computers operating all the time, the energy delivered has to be very clean and compact,” said Mr. Ausubel, the director of the Program for the Human Environment at Rockefeller. “The long-term trend is toward natural gas and nuclear power, or conceivably solar power. If the energy system is left to its own devices, most of the carbon will be out of it by 2060 or 2070.”

But what about all the carbon dioxide being spewed out today by Americans commuting to McMansions? Well, it's true that American suburbanites do emit more greenhouse gases than most other people in the world (although New Yorkers aren't much different from other affluent urbanites).

But the United States and other Western countries seem to be near the top of a Kuznets curve for carbon emissions and ready to start the happy downward slope. The amount of carbon emitted by the average American has remained fairly flat for the past couple of decades, and per capita carbon emissions have started declining in some countries, like France. Some researchers estimate that the turning point might come when a country's per capital income reaches \$30,000, but it can vary widely, depending on what fuels are available. Meanwhile, more carbon is being taken out of the atmosphere by the expanding forests in America and other affluent countries. Deforestation follows a Kuznets curve, too. In poor countries, forests are cleared to provide fuel and farmland, but as people gain wealth and better agricultural technology, the farm fields start reverting to forestland.

Of course, even if rich countries' greenhouse impact declines, there will still be an increase in carbon emissions from China, India and other countries ascending the Kuznets curve. While that prospect has environmentalists lobbying for global restrictions on greenhouse gases, some economists fear that a global treaty could ultimately hurt the atmosphere by slowing economic growth, thereby lengthening the time it takes for poor countries to reach the turning point on the curve.

But then, is there much reason to think that countries at different stages of the Kuznets curve could even agree to enforce tough restrictions? The Kyoto treaty didn't transform Europe's industries or consumers.

While some American environmentalists hope that the combination of the economic crisis and a new president can start an era of energy austerity and green power, Mr. Ausubel says they're hoping against history.

Over the past century, he says, nothing has drastically altered the long-term trends in the way Americans produce or use energy — not the Great Depression, not the world wars, not the energy crisis of the 1970s or the grand programs to produce alternative energy.

“Energy systems evolve with a particular logic, gradually, and they don't suddenly morph into something different,” Mr. Ausubel says. That doesn't make for a rousing speech on Earth Day. But in the long run, a Kuznets curve is more reliable than a revolution.

[In the Los Angeles Times and Hanford Sentinel Opinion, Sunday, April 19, 2009](#)

Another View: No way to run a railroad

High-speed rail networks might very well be the "smart transportation system" of the 21st century, as President Obama declared Thursday. The trouble is, we're using a very 20th century method to pay for them.

Obama envisions a nationwide system of high-speed lines. The \$787-billion economic stimulus package included \$8 billion to pay for them, and Obama's proposed budget would dole out another \$1 billion a year for five years for passenger rail. On Thursday, the White House identified 10 corridors throughout the country that would be eligible for funding, including a line in California that would run from San Diego to San Francisco and Sacramento.

"Now, all of you know this is not some fanciful, pie-in-the-sky vision of the future. ... It's been happening for decades. The problem is, it's been happening elsewhere, not here," Obama said, referring to countries such as France, Japan, Spain and China that have impressive bullet-train networks. But there was something he failed to mention: With the exception of China, whose government can spend any way it likes, all of these countries impose steep taxes on gasoline. The taxes have the dual purpose of providing the funding to build public transit and encouraging people to ride it because they make driving prohibitively expensive. Gas taxes in the United States are minuscule in comparison.

Instead of raising the money to pay for his vision, Obama proposes to fund it with debt. So does the state of California, where voters last November approved nearly \$10 billion in bonds for the San Diego-to-Sacramento train Obama aims to support. That's all well and good, except that the California train alone is expected to cost in excess of \$40 billion. Obama's \$13 billion over five years won't go far in building a national network that would cost hundreds of billions. So where's the rest of the money going to come from?

Moreover, making rail travel attractive will take a lot more than building bullet trains. U.S. passenger train lines are notoriously unreliable, in part because so many of them share tracks with freight trains, which cause constant delays and the occasional devastating accident. Solving that problem will require new tracks, improved signaling, GPS technologies and other expensive systems.

Obama is dead right that a 21st century rail network would improve mobility and productivity while reducing emissions and reliance on foreign oil. But the current gas tax can't even maintain our existing infrastructure of highways and bridges, let alone fund the president's vision. As Congress negotiates a transportation bill that will determine federal taxing and spending for the next five years, it must keep that in mind.

This editorial appeared in the Los Angeles Times.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses environmental proposition AB-1405 will benefit environmental justice communities in California. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Propuesta ambiental beneficiaria a comunidades pobres de California

Rubén Tapia

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Monday, April 20, 2009

El asambleísta estatal, Kevin de León, representante del distrito 45th, con el apoyo de grupos ambientalistas y comunitarios de los Ángeles presentará hoy lunes por la tarde en la Asamblea de California la propuesta de ley, AB- 1405, que de ser aprobada dedicaría recursos económicos para mitigar los efectos de la contaminación y el cambio climático en las comunidades pobres del estado que viven en la ciudad y en el campo.

Dicha propuesta será presentada en el Comité de Recursos Naturales. El asambleísta Kevin de León declaró a Noticiero Latino que "tenemos que mandar un mensaje duro y directo a todas las corporaciones petroleras que siguen contaminando nuestros ríos, nuestro aire, que ya basta".

California es considerado por grupos ambientalistas como el estado mas contaminado del país. Mientras Estados Unidos consume el 20 por ciento de todos los plaguicidas que se producen del mundo.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses EPA determines that emissions that cause climate change are a risk to human health.](#)

Determina EPA que gases que causan cambio climático son un riesgo para la salud

Manuel Ocaño

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Monday, April 20, 2009

La Agencia federal de Protección Ambiental, EPA, determinó que los gases que producen el cambio climático dañan la salud humana. Aunque la Corte Suprema de Justicia había llegado a la misma conclusión hace dos años, esta es la primera vez que la autoridad ambiental lo reconoce. La propia EPA estimó que esa determinación es un primer paso para establecer nuevos límites a la contaminación del aire en Estados Unidos. La administradora de EPA, Liza Jackson declaró que la contaminación peligrosa no sólo tiene remedio, sino que su solución se basa en crear millones de nuevos puestos de trabajo conocidos como "empleos verdes".