

Court turns down utilities over mercury emissions

Modesto Bee, San Francisco Chronicle and other papers, Monday, February 23, 2009

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court is refusing a request by electric utility companies to step into a case concerning the regulation of mercury emissions from power plants.

The court said Monday that it will not hear the companies' appeal of a lower court decision that struck down an industry-favored Bush administration rule governing emissions. That rule would have allowed utilities to purchase emission credits instead of actually reducing emissions.

Such a plan would have allowed some power plants to release more mercury pollution than others, creating localized "hot spots" where concentrations are higher, states and environmental groups argued. The law requires all facilities to install the best technology available to curb emissions.

The Obama administration had earlier abandoned its predecessor's appeal of the ruling by a federal appeals court in Washington. The Environmental Protection Agency said it would begin crafting a new rule limiting mercury emissions from power plants, which are the biggest source of mercury. It is commonly found in high concentrations in fish. Mercury can damage developing brains of fetuses and very young children.

Ask TBC: Am I the only one who thinks our traffic signals are messed up?

Bakersfield Californian, Monday, Feb. 23, 2009

Q: Is it only me, or are the signals in town really screwed up?

With all the talk of particulates in the air, no fireplace burn days, and how bad diesel trucks are for our air quality, why do I have to stop at a red light on Ming Avenue at the Marketplace when there are no cars pulling out onto Ming Avenue from the Marketplace?

Why don't those low traffic intersections only trip when cars are there?

And why don't we have green signals after a green arrow to turn left when it's clear as we have at South H Street and Wilson Road? Many other cities do.

What is wrong with the City of Bakersfield traffic engineers?

— Bob McDougal

A: We took a look at the issue of traffic signals back in August. But we checked with Ryan Starbuck, the head of traffic for the city, and he said this shouldn't be a problem. Ming Avenue's lights are synchronized, but the lights shouldn't turn if there's no traffic coming out.

He said it could be an issue with the traffic detector.

"It sounds like it's getting a false detection. We'll send a technician out there," he said. "That's something we can easily take care of."

If you have concerns about a signal that's not working right, call the city's traffic department at 326-3000 or go to the Web site at www.bakersfieldcity.us/cityservices/pubwrks/TrafficEng/inquiry.htm. Include, like this reader did, the location. But it also helps to include the time of day — the more precise, the better.

As for the left-turn-yield-on-green, now-retired traffic engineer Steve Walker said this back in August:

"They don't work well on six-lane streets," he said. "Frankly, people don't know how to drive it."

There are two intersections where the turn is allowed — H Street at Planz Road and H Street at Wilson Road. Those work, Walker said, because they're low-speed intersections.

The city has installed them at other major intersections but saw the accident rate shoot way up.

You can read our August story at bakersfield.com/hourly_news/story/512586.html.

Kern's newest 'green' building banks on helping environment

By STACEY SHEPARD, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Sunday, Feb. 22, 2009

San Joaquin Bank's newest branch in southwest Bakersfield will be energy-efficient and environmentally friendly. And it's not just because of a few light bulbs and modern appliances.

The bank's fifth branch, set to open Feb. 27, was designed to meet green building standards and is registered to receive certification from the U.S. Green Building Council Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design rating system. If certified, it will be Kern's second building to receive the LEED title.

"It's just simply the right thing to do," Bart Hill, president of San Joaquin Bank, said of the decision to build green. "One of the roles of a community bank is to make the community a better place to live. I hope we're encouraging other businesses to also do this."

Buildings designed to LEED standards lighten the structure's environmental impact and promote sustainable construction.

Features built into the new bank should result in a 43 percent energy use savings over a standard building of the same size.

Bank patrons will notice a green feel even before they get inside. Parking spaces closest to the bank's entrance are designated for low-emission vehicles.

Inside, the building has open, bright layout, with large windows that allow natural light to pour into the lobby. The artificial lighting system is designed to automatically adjust depending on the amount of natural light coming in.

Other features include:

- Roof-top solar panels that will supply about 13 percent of the building's energy use.
- Wood furnishings from certified lumber yards that plant one tree for every tree cut down.
- Carpeting made with recycled materials.
- Concrete walls and a super-efficient heating and cooling system to better control the indoor temperature.
- Landscaping that uses bubbler irrigation for better efficiency

The building also has windows that open so the heating and cooling system doesn't have to run when the outdoor temperature is mild.

"For too long buildings were built with fixed windows and we regret that," said Ken Svendsen, the Renfro & Cuninghame architect who designed the branch.

The green design added about 2 to 5 percent to up-front construction costs for the branch but Hill expects to recoup the money in three to four years.

"Yes, it's more expensive to build a green building, but the payback isn't that long, and once the costs are paid for, the bank is saving money," he said.

The branch will also incorporate business policies that protect the environment — extra steps that don't count toward its LEED certification. Recycling bins are scattered around the facility, and some records will soon be digitized, reducing paper use.

A dishwasher was also installed in the employee break room to encourage the reuse of dishes instead of going for disposable paper or plastic.

"Imagine that," Hill said, "we're going back to opening windows and washing dishes."

Berkeley residents protest steel foundry emissions

The Associated Press

Merced Sun-Star, Sunday February 22, 2009

WEST BERKELEY, Calif. -- Some Berkeley residents are protesting a steel foundry that they say should be cleaned up or closed down.

Dozens of residents marched Saturday to the Pacific Steel Casting plant in West Berkeley, where they wore gas masks and carried signs that read "I can't breathe."

Some residents say they suffer from headaches, respiratory problems and eye irritation because of emissions from the plant, which is the nation's third-largest steel foundry.

Pacific Steel officials say the foundry, which has operated in Berkeley for 76 years, meets government emissions standards and the company is continually upgrading the plant to further reduce emissions.

The family owned foundry melts scrap metal and turns it into steel parts for industrial uses.

Cleanup at the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach begins to pay off Older polluting trucks are being barred and electric ones rolled out in the harbors' effort to cut emissions.

By Ronald D. White

L.A. Times, Sunday, Feb. 22, 2009

An ambitious plan to clean up once-filthy air around the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach has shifted into high gear.

Hundreds of 1988-and-older trucks have been banned since October. Others that don't meet 2007 air pollution standards began paying a \$70 fee last week each time they haul cargo to and from the ports. This week, the first of a fleet of electric trucks will debut. And within three years, most ships will be able to plug into the ports' electrical grid and turn off their exhaust-belching diesel engines.

For more than a decade, South Bay and Long Beach residents have complained about pollution from the ports, and 1,200 annual premature deaths have been linked to the ports' air pollution problems. But in October, the ports launched the cleanup, and it's beginning to pay off.

"This is the No. 1 health issue in our city," said Long Beach Mayor Bob Foster, who was pleased with the new truck fees introduced last week. "By paying these fees, the people who benefit from the goods-movement industry have become part of the solution to cleaning the air."

Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa agreed. The new fee collection "marks a milestone in our

efforts to clean up the ports as we roll ahead with taking 16,800 dirty-diesel trucks off the road for good."

The National Resources Defense Council, long one of the ports' toughest critics, was impressed. It praised the step in October to remove about 2,000 trucks that were at least 20 years old. As a result, the group estimated that diesel particulates emissions may have been reduced 50%.

"These are the dirtiest ports in the nation, with the worst air pollution, but if this program survives its legal challenges, the changes these ports are making now could be adopted throughout the country," said David Pettit, senior attorney for the resources council.

Experts say no other part of the nation has taken such broad steps to reduce the effect their ports have on health.

"This is putting the Southern California ports at the forefront. Port trucks are going to be cleaner than any other trucks in the region that are hauling cargo, and that is huge," said Kristen Monaco, a logistics and port trucking expert at Cal State Long Beach. "This will be used as a template for ports around the nation."

About 3,000 new clean diesel trucks have already joined the fleet, which is well above the 2,000 new trucks both ports said that they had hoped to have in place by now.

"Everybody said that this would never work, but it is not just working, it's thriving," Villaraigosa said. Other cleanup efforts underway include:

- * Ports have earmarked more than \$20 million in incentives that are encouraging more than a dozen of the world's biggest shipping lines to switch to clean-burning fuels as they approach Southern California.

- * Nearby harbor areas have also become testing grounds for the latest technology, such as compressed natural gas trucks that will be moving cargo containers between the San Pedro Bay ports and nearby freight-consolidation yards.

- * Los Angeles and Long Beach have become new technology incubators, with seed money for projects such as the world's first electric-diesel hybrid tugboat, which was delivered this month. That includes Balqon Corp., the electric truck manufacturer.

On Wednesday, amid confusion and traffic jams, officials launched a much-delayed effort to assess a \$70 fee on all trucks that do not meet 2007 air pollution standards each time they haul cargo containers to and from the ports.

The fees will be used to help subsidize truckers so that they can lease from the port new low-emissions diesel or natural gas trucks. Under the plan that is expected to start in the coming weeks, truckers would pay 50% to 60% of the truck leases and the fees would cover the rest, plus maintenance.

The timing is crucial because Dec. 31 is the next deadline for eliminating or retrofitting 2003 and older trucks.

It hasn't been a smooth road. An electronic system is finally in place at the ports to determine which trucks meet the new requirements. But it took weeks longer than anticipated to put in place. Until Wednesday, all trucks carried stickers and had to be monitored visually at the gates by attendants.

Retailers have threatened to take their business elsewhere, but it is not clear how much business might have been lost. Lawsuits filed by the American Trucking Assn. and the Federal Maritime Commission to block various parts of the clean truck program are pending.

Port traffic was snarled Wednesday when hundreds of trucks were turned away from the terminal gates because they did not have the proper credentials for the fee collection. There were fewer problems and delays Thursday and Friday.

It was "a realization for a lot of people that we are serious about doing this. It's like tax day. People will wait for the last minute to do what they have to, but you cannot wish it away; it is here," said Dick Steinke, executive director of the Port of Long Beach.

S. David Freeman, chairman of the Port of Los Angeles' board of harbor commissioners, said, "The miracle is we are ahead of schedule despite all the thrashing and whooping and hollering that has gone on."

Bruce Wargo, president and chief executive of PortCheck, the organization set up to handle the fee collections, said that the first few days went off better than expected.

"Only about 10% of the trucks today were turned away at the gates," Wargo said. "I was expecting it to be about 20%."

Not everyone was pleased. Dwight Robinson is vice president of the Los Angeles Harbor Grain Terminal, a longtime local business that helps exporters move their grains and other agricultural goods overseas by transferring them to cargo containers.

One of Robinson's drivers showed up in a 2009 natural gas truck, only to be turned away from both ports because his truck tags were faulty. But officials at the Terminal Island Clean Truck Center later told him the tags were fine, after he had waited in line for three hours.

But others, including San Pedro resident Kathleen Woodfield, were ecstatic.

"It gives me a feeling of great hope that these air pollution issues will be resolved and that we will be breathing cleaner air in the very near future," she said.

Geraldine Knatz, executive director of the Port of Los Angeles, said she had already heard from officials at some of the nation's other ports who were anxious to know how it was going.

"I think we're off to a great start," she said.

Big Asbestos Case in Libby, Mont., Goes to Trial

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

In the N.Y. Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Sunday, Feb. 22, 2009

MISSOULA, Mont. (AP) -- After years of delays, the people of a Montana mining town are getting their day in court to see a major chemical company face federal charges accusing it of poisoning their homes and schools with asbestos.

Opening statements are scheduled for Monday in the case of U.S. vs. W.R. Grace and Co. and five of its executives, who are charged with knowingly exposing the residents of the small town of Libby to the fibrous mineral linked to cancer.

Prosecutors have had to overcome legal challenges that went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court.

"This trial is one of the most complex and creative criminal prosecutions in the history of environmental regulation," said Andrew King-Ries, an assistant professor at the University of Montana School of Law.

The case stems from the mining for vermiculite from Zonolite Mountain near Libby, which began around 1920 and continued until 1990. The mineral could be processed into products used for

plumbing insulation, fireproofing and gardening. Zonolite brand insulation is in some 35 million homes in the United States.

The problem is that the vermiculite from the Libby mine was contaminated with naturally occurring asbestos mineral fibers, which can be inhaled and can cause mesothelioma, asbestosis and lung cancer.

Lawyers for Libby residents contend the pollution has killed some 225 people and sickened about 2,000 in the area.

U.S. District Judge Donald Molloy has placed a gag order on the parties involved, but court documents set the stage.

"The defendants in this case knew the dangers of asbestos they released into the Libby, Montana air, yet they concealed the dangers, putting local residents at risk while enriching themselves," prosecutors said in their trial brief.

Lawyers for W.R. Grace, based in Columbia, Md., deny there was any conspiracy to knowingly release asbestos, and also contend that most of the releases occurred years before an applicable law was passed in 1990.

"The government has illogically charged that the defendants conspired in 1976 to violate a statute that would not exist for another 14 years," Grace said in its trial brief.

The case has outraged many people in Montana, which has a long history of environmental and economic exploitation by giant corporations that extracted wealth while leaving behind their messes. Many are impatient with the delays that Grace has sought through numerous appeals.

"Folks in Libby have suffered long enough," U.S. Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont., told The Associated Press. "It's well past time for the wheels of justice to get rolling."

Libby is a town of about 2,600 people located in a forested valley of the Cabinet Mountains, about 100 miles northwest of Missoula, Mont.

Kristine Paulsen, a Libby native who wrote a master's thesis on how townspeople are coping with the pollution, said many locals are unsure how to react to the start of a trial that is expected to last for months.

"They want to get their hopes up, but they've gotten their hopes up so many times it is hard to do anymore," Paulsen said. "The things that happened to these people are just so terrible."

Tiny particles of the ore got into homes on the clothes of miners. It was also taken to processing plants in Libby, one of which was located next to a baseball field. The mill smokestack released up to 24,000 pounds of dust a day. Asbestos-contaminated mine tailings were used to build running tracks at local junior high and high schools, and lined an elementary school skating rink.

After news reports of health problems, the Environmental Protection Agency in 1999 sent an emergency team to Libby to collect information about asbestos contamination, and the town was declared a Superfund cleanup site in 2002

"There were visible flakes of vermiculite everywhere," said Dr. Charlie Weis, an EPA toxicologist, at a recent pretrial hearing.

A federal indictment unsealed in February 2005 charged Grace and its former executives with violating the federal Clean Air Act and obstructing an EPA investigation into the asbestos contamination.

The legal issue is whether W.R. Grace, which bought the mine in 1963, and its co-defendants knew of the health risks associated with the mine for years before federal regulators arrived. The government contends the company and some of its managers conspired to hide health risks from its workers.

In addition to Grace, the defendants are five retired executives. All face up to 15 years in prison and fines totaling millions of dollars. They are free on their own recognizance.

A sixth defendant, company attorney O. Mario Favorito has been severed from the case and will be tried separately because nearly all of his conduct is protected by Grace's attorney-client privilege, Molloy has ruled. A former mine manager also was indicted but has died.

In 2006, Molloy made a series of rulings that disallowed some evidence and witnesses, damaging the government's case. Prosecutors appealed and the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals reversed Molloy's decisions.

Grace appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, which last June refused to overturn the 9th Circuit and sent the case back to Molloy.

Grace and some of the executives are also charged with knowing endangerment for providing contaminated material to the community for various uses such as the running tracks. Grace is also charged with obstruction of justice for hampering EPA's assessment and cleanup efforts.

Lawyers for W.R. Grace contend the Clean Air Act's knowing endangerment provision was enacted on Nov. 15, 1990, while prosecutors are seeking to punish the company for actions dating back to 1976.

"If there is no substantive federal offense, there can be no conspiracy," Grace argues.

Smog: Budget process slows diesel rules

By Mark Grossi, FresnoBee.com, Sat., Feb. 21, 2009

Someone asked if the new diesel rules had been compromised as part of the new budget agreement in Sacramento.

Yes.

The rollback of rules for heavy-duty construction diesels probably may delay the San Joaquin Valley's bid to achieve air quality standards in the next decade or so.

The California Air Resources Board says people will suffer. The quote by Mary Nichols, chairwoman of ARB in the Los Angeles Times: "Anti-tax zealots were able to force a weakening of our anti-diesel-pollution standards as the price of a balanced budget."

Construction industry officials said thousands of construction workers would remain employed as a result of the delay in the rules.

Better in Beijing, but ...

L.A. Daily News, Friday, Feb. 20, 2009

China has fulfilled many of the promises to improve Beijing's air quality that it made after being awarded the 2008 Olympic Games but still relies too much on coal, the United Nations said Wednesday.

Beijing's air is typically two to three times dirtier than most Western countries'. The report from the United Nations Environment Program said Beijing has invested in public transport and renewable energy and phased out hydrochlorofluorocarbons.

AP Interview: Reid pushing for climate change bill

By H. JOSEF HEBERT - Associated Press Writer
Merced Sun-Star, Friday, February 20, 2009

WASHINGTON -- Democratic leaders in both the Senate and House want to take action this year to stem global warming, but the imploding economy and balking Senate Republicans are likely to make that difficult.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid of Nevada said he plans to take up the contentious climate issue by the end of the summer.

"We have to take a whack at it," Reid told The Associated Press. He said failure to act "would be neglectful."

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., also has cited "a sense of urgency" in addressing climate change, adding: "We cannot afford another year of delay." The chairman of the House committee charged with crafting a bill has promised to provide one to Pelosi by Memorial Day and a House vote could come before the August congressional recess.

But the biggest battle will be in the Senate, where Reid will have to get 60 votes including support from some Republicans. Last year a proposed climate bill garnered only 48 votes, though six senators who said they supported it were absent.

Reid noted that the election last year saw the Democrats gain seats giving them a near filibuster-proof majority and now a president who campaigned on getting a climate bill approved is in the White House. President George W. Bush vowed to veto any mandatory limits on greenhouse gases.

Still addressing climate change is likely to be an uphill battle in Congress.

In the Senate the climate debate "is going to break down much more along regional lines," predicts Bill Kovacs, vice president for energy and environment at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which opposed the climate legislation that stalled in the Senate last year. He maintains senators from manufacturing, mining and "Rust Belt" states will be reluctant to embrace climate legislation and higher energy prices during these hard economic times.

But many environmentalists see a political convergence that may open a way for passing a bill.

They cite a supportive president, a strong desire by Democratic leaders to address climate change, and a growing sense of urgency based on scientific evidence of the earth's warming. They also point to a business community that increasingly embraces action and fears that if Washington doesn't act states will, leading to a fragmented climate policy.

Obama increased the pressure on Congress when he signaled that he wants to reverse a Bush administration policy and allow California and a 13 other states to proceed with their own greenhouse gas regulations. The Environmental Protection Agency is expected to take that action shortly and appears poised to regulate carbon dioxide as an air pollutant.

"It's obvious a lot of companies would prefer to have Congress deal with this ... It does improve the chances of legislation," David Doniger, climate policy director at the Natural Resources Defense Council, said of the impending state and EPA actions.

Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., chairman of the Environment and Public Works Committee, whose climate package last year was criticized as too broad and proscriptive, has promised a streamlined version this time. She said in a statement Friday she is "encouraged" by Reid's remarks and that the committee plans "to move forward on global warming legislation in the near future."

Reid said in the interview with the AP he is convinced many senators want to take action to limit greenhouse gases, especially carbon dioxide from burning fossil fuels, ahead of international climate negotiations in Copenhagen, Denmark, in December.

He said the Senate will first take up energy legislation - focused on measures to spur development of renewables and increase energy efficiency - in the next few weeks as a prelude to the climate legislation.

A key element of expected energy legislation will be a national requirement for utilities to produce a certain percentage of their electricity from wind, solar and biofuels. Reid said he also favors some new tax incentives to encourage energy efficient buildings.

"We've got to give people incentives to build better buildings and do something about the buildings that are there right now," said Reid.

[Modesto Bee, Guest Commentary, Sunday, February 22, 2009](#)

John Michelena:

Don't blame drought for all our water woes. In the past 20 years, many farmers have seen water costs increase 10-fold. Meanwhile, federal water dwindles: 50 percent of normal in 2007, 40 percent in 2008, and possibly zilch for 2009. Full allocations were the norm before the 1990s. This has all coincided with environmental regulations -- big surprise. The latest restrictions are for delta smelt.

Already, 48 percent of developed water supply is for environmental uses, compared with agriculture's 41 percent and urban's 11 percent.

Environmentalists are more than an annoyance; they are hurting our beloved desert valley. Greenhouse gases will worsen if crops are not there for carbon dioxide conversion. The air will get more polluted as wind blows across dusty, fallowed fields.

Are humans still part of the sacred ecosystem? With fewer jobs and less production in the private sector, will government also struggle to survive? Should we care? Those projects that can add productive capacity to the economy, like water storage, will be bypassed for spending that only adds to debt. Never mind the 26 million more Californians here since most dams were built in the 1950s. Even so, public funding will undoubtedly wither as both budgets and bond markets falter.

Precious aquifers will diminish as less surface water percolates from above, while farmers and cities pump more groundwater. What new habitat can we destroy, as the wind and dust blows on our backs? With environmentalism run amok, more rain and more dams will not make a difference. Water is just another resource for the government to squander.

Michelena is a Patterson-area farmer.

[S.F. Chronicle editorial, Monday, Feb. 23, 2009:](#)

A dirty air budget deal

California legislators may be proud they survived a marathon budget ordeal. But none should be saluted for a backroom deal that may sicken or kill thousands in the name of a special-interest loophole.

If that sounds extreme, consider what happened. The budget bargaining, which wrapped up at dawn last Thursday, contains a proviso to delay the start of pollution controls on off-road diesel engines. It's a category covering some 180,000 road graders, forklift trucks, airport baggage trucks and even ski resort snow-packing vehicles, which spew out lung-damaging soot and a key chemical that causes smog.

The delay will push back rules adopted in 2007 by the state Air Resources Board, which enacted the tailpipe limits after years of study and public hearings. Beginning next year, the off-road engines were due to be replaced or retrofitted as part of wide-ranging process to clean emissions pouring into some of the nation's dirtiest air.

These diesel power plants may be reliable, durable and thrifty. But these qualities come with a human price. The off-road engines kick out particulates, the speck-sized particles in the dark clouds of exhaust. The state rules intended to remove 85 percent of the amounts in a series of steps running from 2010 to 2025 and up to 70 percent of the oxides of nitrogen, a smog-causing chemical. During this multiyear period, the board projected the changes would save 4,000 lives.

Thus, it's no stretch to say that delaying a diesel cleanup will prolong this public health hazard. There will be more hospital admissions for lung and heart disease and asthma rates will sail on. The ill-founded decision also jeopardizes California's chances of federal highway money because of unabated dirty air levels in the San Joaquin Valley and parts of Southern California.

It's not hard to see what's going on. Construction firms had fought the rules for financial reasons, estimating that engine replacements and retrofits would cost \$13 billion. (It's a number that state smog officials pegged at considerably less.) Early in the budget debate, Republican leaders brought up the notion of delaying an even larger goal - overall limits on greenhouse gas emissions - as a bargaining chip.

For a while these arguments went nowhere. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, who appointed the leadership of rule-setting state agency, stood firm behind the plans. Democrats in the Legislature disregarded the GOP criticisms. But these leaders have caved.

Was any of this debated or publicly discussed? Of course not. That's what the shame factor will do.

The decision was done quietly, and few noticed until the decision was made to delay the diesel rules. The environment and public health took a back seat to political deal-making.

When Sacramento recovers from the budget ordeal, it should reconsider this mistake. Muster a majority vote to return California to a timetable that will produce cleaner air and a healthier population.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Friday, Feb. 20, 2009:](#)

Outlaw leaf blowers

Having been affected by Valley fever as a child, and after reading the recent Associated Press report in The Bee (Feb. 13), I find it appalling that leaf blowers are still a staple in gardening and neighborhood cleanup by city crews.

My neighborhood public walks and planting areas are cleaned up twice yearly; I have thanked the crews for doing so. However, when the blower is used to "sweep" the walkway, a cloud of dust is

created that averts my dog-walking for the day. Along with that, no face masks are worn by these workers!

As much as I appreciate a clean walkway, the alternative of the effects of the raised dust is not acceptable. An old-fashioned push broom to clear the major debris would suffice.

At the risk of being unpopular, it is past time to outlaw the noisy, dirty leaf blowers and stop the contribution to Valley fever and asthma.

Diane Woody, Fresno

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the Chamber of Deputies filed a lawsuit against President Felipe Calderon to make invalid the proposal that would require that all vehicles imported for the US and Canada provide a certificate of origin in order to accredit the vehicle that it was assembled in North America. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at (559) 230-5851.

Exigen invalidar regla 'antichuecos'

Frontera, Monday, February 23, 2009

MÉXICO, D.F.-La Cámara de Diputados demandó al presidente Felipe Calderón por emitir un decreto en el que impuso requisitos para la importación de vehículos usados desde Estados Unidos y Canadá.

Los legisladores pidieron a la Suprema Corte de Justicia invalidar una porción del decreto publicado el 24 de diciembre de 2008 por el Ejecutivo, que exige un certificado de origen para acreditar que el vehículo fue ensamblado en América del Norte.

La controversia, que los diputados no publicitaron, fue admitida a trámite por el ministro Genaro Góngora el 19 de febrero. Es la segunda demanda del Congreso contra Calderón en menos de un mes, luego de que en los primeros dos años del sexenio no se había presentado ninguna.

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La Cámara también impugnó recientemente el Reglamento Interior de la SCT, por considerar que el Presidente lo utilizó para debilitar a la Comisión Federal de Telecomunicaciones en temas como la asignación de concesiones de radio y televisión.

El decreto presidencial ha generado inconformidad en el norte del País, donde mucha gente usa vehículos de segunda mano, que compra en Estados Unidos.

El 1 de enero de 2009 entró en vigor una disposición del Tratado de Libre Comercio que permite importar a México vehículos usados con más de 10 años de antigüedad, con arancel preferencial de 10 por ciento y sin necesidad de permiso previo o certificado de origen.

Pero los demás vehículos usados -es decir, los de menor antigüedad- quedaron sujetos al artículo tercero del decreto.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses Google and NASA become allied in proving areal pollution by providing world maps that show with detail fuel emissions that pollute the atmosphere.

Aliados para mostrar contaminación aérea

La Opinión, Saturday, February 21, 2009

WASHINGTON (EFE).- Google y la NASA pusieron hoy a disposición de los navegantes de internet mapas mundiales que muestran con detalle las emisiones de combustibles fósiles que contaminan la atmósfera terrestre.

Las imágenes, aportadas por la NASA y el Departamento de Energía de EE.UU., revelan la dispersión atmosférica de esos combustibles cada hora, por región y por tipo, informó la agencia espacial estadounidense.

Las emisiones están formadas principalmente por dióxido de carbono (CO₂), considerado el principal de los gases invernadero que, según los científicos, han causado un aumento global de las temperaturas y un consiguiente cambio climático.

La creación de los mapas en el Proyecto Vulcano estuvo a cargo por investigadores de la Universidad Purdue que recibieron datos transmitidos por el satélite Landsat 5 de la NASA e información sobre las emisiones de CO₂ de la Agencia de Protección Ambiental (EPA) y el Departamento de Energía.

"La difusión del inventario del Proyecto Vulcán en Google Earth lleva la información al salón de cualquier persona que cuente con una computadora", manifestó Kevin Gurney, profesor de ciencias atmosféricas de la Universidad Purdue.

"Vulcán proporciona una descripción de dónde y cuándo la sociedad influye en el clima a través de las emisiones de dióxido de carbono", añadió.

Gurney agregó que quienes usen los mapas podrán determinar con precisión el nivel de emisiones de su país en relación con otros y también ver cuál es la actividad económica que aumenta esas emisiones.

Según el científico, el proyecto Vulcán podría desmitificar el cambio climático y ayudar a la gente a informarse sobre el nivel de contaminación que sufre su país o su región.

"Será como calcular el rendimiento de kilómetros por litro de gasolina de un automóvil híbrido", manifestó.

El anuncio sobre la difusión de los mapas mundiales de la contaminación por parte de Google Earth se hizo pocos antes del lanzamiento la próxima semana de un satélite de la NASA que realizará sus propias mediciones desde el vacío espacial.

El "Observatorio Orbitador del Carbono" (OCO) partirá el próximo martes desde la base Vandenberg de la Fuerza Aérea de EE.UU. en California montado sobre un cohete Taurus XL.

OCO realizará mediciones precisas sobre el CO₂ y sus datos ayudarán a comprender mejor los procesos naturales y la actividad humana que regulan la existencia y distribución de ese gas invernadero en el mundo, dijo la NASA.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses burning the jungle in the automotive. Farmers in tropical regions might see themselves forced to cultivate biofuel which would be a devastating to climate change and everyone.](#)

Quemando selva en el automóvil

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Los agricultores de los trópicos podrían verse empujados a cultivar biocombustibles y esto sería un tremendo desastre para el cambio climático y todos nosotros.

Según Holly Gibbs, de la Universidad de Stanford, si utilizamos biocombustibles producidos en los trópicos para hacer funcionar nuestros automóviles entonces estaremos quemando la selva en los motores de esos mismos vehículos.

La producción de biocombustibles en esos lugares no sólo no detendría las emisiones de dióxido de carbono, sino que las aumentaría, incrementando con ello el efecto invernadero y el calentamiento global. Esta investigadora afirma que si se adoptan políticas que favorezcan estos biocombustibles el desastre estará a la vuelta de la esquina, y espera que se tomen medidas sensatas en políticas de biocombustibles y de subsidios agrarios.

Sus predicciones se basan en un nuevo estudio que se vale de observaciones de satélite realizadas entre 1980 y 2000. Este estudio es el primero en hacer una caracterización detallada

de los caminos de expansión de la agricultura a través de las regiones tropicales. Gibbs presentó sus hallazgos el pasado 14 de febrero en un simposium en Chicago sobre este tema.

Países como Brasil, Malasia o Indonesia han respondido a la creciente demanda de biocombustibles plantando más caña de azúcar, soja y palma de aceite. Plantaciones que se hacen a expensas de la superficie de selva virgen.

Por ejemplo, la superficie dedicada a las plantaciones de soja en Brasil han aumentado cerca de un 15% desde 1990, la producción de palma de aceite en Indonesia se triplicó en los años noventa y de 2000 a 2007 se dobló de nuevo.

Una señal de alarma es lo rápido que aumenta la producción de biocombustibles. Desde 2000 a 2007 la producción global de etanol se ha multiplicado por 4 y la de biodiésel por 10.

Las autoridades de estos países dicen que se hacen estas plantaciones en áreas degradadas, pero los grupos medioambientales no están de acuerdo con estas afirmaciones.

Gibbs se propuso calcular cuánta cantidad de superficie virgen dedicada al bosque pristino, sabana o tierra agrícola termina siendo utilizada para los biocombustibles.

Si se utiliza selva virgen para plantar cultivos dedicados a producir biocombustibles el balance en las emisiones de dióxido de carbono es desastroso. Las selvas secuestran mucho carbono en la madera de los árboles y en el suelo. El bosque tropical es muy eficiente haciendo esto y ahora almacena unas 340.000 millones de toneladas de carbono. Esto es equivalente a 40 años de emisiones humanas quemando combustible fósil. Con su sustitución por estos cultivos dedicados a los biocombustibles se libera carbono en grandes cantidades y nunca se recupera porque los cultivos no son tan eficientes secuestrando carbono.

Estos países y otros países que también destruyen selva y bosque virgen son unos grandes contribuidores a las emisiones de dióxido de carbono.

Gibbs asegura que la recuperación de la deuda de carbono producida por la eliminación de la selva tardaría siglos o un milenio en recuperarse a través de la producción de biocombustibles.

Además, este tipo de cultivos degradan el suelo aumentando la erosión, la salinidad y lo empobrece en nutrientes, con el resultado de una muy baja productividad.

Aunque Indonesia y Brasil tienen grandes cantidades de tierra degradada que podría utilizarse para la producción de biocombustibles, sin una buena política que lo incentive se destruirá en su lugar selva virgen, pues para el agricultor no es tan fácil y rentable cultivar áreas empobrecidas.

Incentivar el uso de estas tierras degradadas para la producción de biocombustibles podría estar bien, pero en algunos casos si se ayudara a estos terrenos a volver a ser selva virgen se secuestraría mucho más dióxido de carbono, se evitaría la erosión, se mitigarían los problemas causados por las inundaciones, se protegería a las especies en peligro de extinción y se conservarían los recursos hídricos.

Gracias a los datos de satélite que guarda la FAO Gibbs pudo analizar más de 600 imágenes de unas 100 regiones tropicales y estudiar su evolución en el tiempo, viendo por dónde se están expandiendo los cultivos. El patrón general es que el crecimiento de estas áreas de cultivo (sea para biocombustibles o comida) se hace a expensas del bosque tropical virgen.

Por tanto, la producción de biocombustibles produce, sin ninguna duda, deforestación, pudiéndose afirmar que los biocombustibles aumentan el calentamiento global si proceden de regiones tropicales. Gibbs predice que la tendencia continuará en el futuro. Por ejemplo, entre 1980 y 2000 más de la mitad de los nuevos campos de cultivos procedían de la selva tropical virgen y un 30% de bosque ya alterado. Todo esto es justo lo contrario de lo que dicen los que apoyan este tipo de combustibles.

Aun así, Gibbs no se opone frontalmente a los biocombustibles: "...creo que los biocombustibles pueden tener un papel importante en nuestros futuros planes energéticos, pero la manera en la que actualmente se están produciendo puede tener consecuencia no deseadas. La nueva administración debería de ser cuidadosa al considerar las consecuencias de cualquier plan

energético para asegurarse la protección del secuestro de carbono en la selva tropical, así como reducir nuestras emisiones debidas a los combustibles fósiles”.

Por otro lado un estudio de Sandia National Laboratories y General Motors Corp. (el fabricante de automóviles) dice que hay maneras de producir bicombustibles de manera sostenible y que podrían reemplazar un tercio de la gasolina de EEUU para 2030, es decir, producir unos 360.000 millones de litros de etanol.

Se asume un progreso al ritmo actual en la tecnología necesaria para la producción de bioetanol y que éste se obtiene a partir de celulosa procedente de la limpieza de bosques, residuos agrícolas y cultivos apropiados, aunque aproximadamente un 20% procedería del maíz. También se tiene en cuenta el gasto de energía y combustible en su producción y transporte.

El estudio elabora un plan minucioso para alcanzar el objetivo fijado.