

State eases rules regulating fumigant pesticides

By the Associated Press

In the S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Thursday, April 23, 2009

Fresno, Calif. (AP) -- As temperatures rise and air stagnates in the San Joaquin Valley, state regulators are relaxing pesticide rules in a way that some say will increase the region's air pollution.

The Department of Pesticide Regulation said Wednesday that it had eased restrictions on fumigants, which are worked into soil to kill insects. Without the change, farmers in the San Joaquin Valley would have had to meet tougher standards for reducing emissions from the poisonous substances when air quality was poor.

State figures show that pesticides contribute to 6 percent of the pollution in a region with the nation's worst air quality.

A lawyer for the Center of Race, Poverty & the Environment says the group is considering a lawsuit to challenge the rule change.

State pesticide rules relaxed

In a victory for farmers, more emissions from fumigants to be allowed.

By E.J. Schultz / Bee Capitol Bureau

The Fresno Bee, Thursday, April 23, 2009

SACRAMENTO -- State regulators this week finalized looser pesticide rules that environmentalists say will slow efforts to clean the Valley's smoggy air.

The Department of Pesticide Regulation will allow more emissions from "fumigants" -- pesticides that are injected into soil to kill pests and disease.

The ruling is a victory for farmers, who feared that stricter limits would force some growers to stop using pesticides in years when the region approaches the limit.

Pesticides contribute to about 6% of the smog problem in the Valley, according to state figures. Fumigants are just one type of pesticide.

The department "claims that this is not a big deal because it's such a small amount," said Alegría De La Cruz, an attorney with the Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment. But "this, from our perspective, is not making good on a promise that they made to Valley residents to protect [their] health."

The center is considering filing a lawsuit to change the rules. The regulations cover the prime growing season of May 1 through October 31.

The department said the looser limit will still "meet our obligation to reduce pesticide emissions, but do so in a way that avoids placing an unreasonable or disproportionate burden on fumigant pesticide users," according to regulatory documents.

The rule covers smog-making gases, called volatile organic compounds, emitted by pesticides.

For the Valley, the rule sets the emissions limit at 18.1 tons per day, 2.1 tons higher than what clean-air activists wanted.

In 2006, a federal judge ruled that the pesticide department ignored clean-air laws and ordered regulations that would cut pesticide emissions in the Valley by 20% from 1991 levels.

But in August, the department won an appeal to overturn the ruling. The new regulations call for a smaller decrease -- a 12% cut from 1990 levels. Other regions still face a 20% cutback, the department said.

The rules became an issue during state budget negotiations earlier this year when Republican lawmakers sought to write the looser rules into law, which would have made it harder for environmentalists to pursue a change. The GOP backed off.

The department is now turning its attention to nonfumigant pesticides. Those regulations must be in place by 2014, according to law.

Council votes for appeal in West Park lawsuit

WS-PACE drops its suit, supports city's appeal, goes before supervisors

By James Leonard

Patterson Irrigator, Saturday, April 25, 2009

The city of Patterson will appeal a Fresno Superior Court judge's decision to dismiss its lawsuit against the proposed West Park industrial development, Mayor Becky Campo announced at Tuesday's City Council meeting.

The decision was made by a 3-1 vote in closed session, Campo said, and came less than two weeks before the city's deadline to appeal the January ruling.

The city's lawsuit had been dismissed by Judge Tyler Tharpe, who ruled that the Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors did not — as the city had claimed — violate state law by moving forward with a proposal by PCCP West Park LLC for a 4,800-acre industrial park and inland port in and around the county-owned Crows Landing Air Facility.

Despite having already spent \$275,000 on the case in this fiscal year, the council decided it was worth moving forward, partly because of a precedent set by the state Supreme Court in a similar case last year.

"We're too far along to just throw in the towel and give it up," Campo said. "Even though money was an issue, defending the potential impacts to Patterson was overriding, in my opinion."

Ideally, the city would like to derail the project altogether. The sheer size of the project is a concern, as are [air quality](#), traffic, increased population and increased rail traffic through the city.

Councilwoman Annette Smith voted in favor of the appeal.

"When the council took the action of suing, it wasn't to test the water," Smith said. "It was to go the distance and to achieve the mitigation that our community needs and deserves with regards to the rail portion of this project."

Smith also noted that while pushing forward will cost the city more money, the appeal also represents the only chance of getting back any legal fees already paid.

Councilman Sam Cuellar cast the lone dissenting vote. He suggested allowing the project's environmental impact review — which is ongoing — to be completed rather than spending more of the city's money to pursue the case. Cuellar was part of the unanimous vote to sue the county and developer last year.

"I didn't see we gained much even if we won the appeal," Cuellar said. "At this point, we ought to just wait until the (environmental review) finishes up."

Councilman Dominic Farinha cast the third vote for the appeal. Councilwoman Dejeune Shelton abstained because her employer, the nonprofit Great Valley Center, received a donation from West Park developer Gerry Kamilos in 2006.

County Counsel John P. Doering wrote in an e-mail to the Irrigator that the county attempted to reach out to the city after the original decision but received no cooperation.

"We can only surmise that the city has ulterior motives," Doering said. "The city's objective appears to be either to delay or stop the project, not to seek reasonable project improvements or modifications that help the residents of Patterson — or to secure bragging rights and attorney fees."

While the city's lawsuit against West Park moved forward, another suit was being withdrawn.

Opposition group WS-PACE.org announced it would not pursue its lawsuit against the county and West Park, which had been in a holding pattern since the city's suit was dismissed.

WS-PACE.org President Ron Swift said in a statement that the group fully supports the city in its suit, which was joined last year by the Del Puerto Health Care District and others.

"We are pleased that the city and health district are moving forward," Swift said. "WS-PACE.org has not ruled out future legal action in this matter. We hope that Stanislaus County planning processes concerning the West Park Crows Landing project will be open, transparent and legally compliant."

Swift, meanwhile, went before the board of supervisors Tuesday to request that the county seek a surety bond or other guarantee that Kamilos has secured the estimated \$35 million he has committed to pay for the county's share of the cost of the inland port and short-haul rail.

One of the project's primary financial backers, Lehman Brothers, filed for bankruptcy last year.

"In these difficult financial times, it seems reasonable that our county government assure itself that private funding is available for these rail and all other infrastructure improvements of the project," Swift said. "Consider that far larger developers than Kamilos are failing."

Supervisor Jim DeMartini, one of the project's most vocal critics but often the only opposing voice on the board, sided with Swift.

"I think he's right," DeMartini said Wednesday. "We need some type of guarantee (Kamilos) has got this money."

DeMartini said he expects the issue to show up on a board meeting agenda soon.

"I will just insist on it," he said. "It's something that needs to be done."

John Saiz of the Irrigator contributed to this report.

Clinton tells nations US acting on climate change

By Dina Cappiello - Associated Press Writer
In the Modesto Bee, Monday, April 27, 2009

WASHINGTON -- Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton told representatives from 16 major world economies Monday that the United States is moving quickly to address global warming.

At an international forum on energy and climate change organized by President Barack Obama, Clinton said the U.S. no longer doubts the urgency or magnitude of the problem.

"The United States is fully engaged and ready to lead and determined to make up for lost time both at home and abroad," Clinton said at the start of the two-day meeting. "The United States is no longer absent without leave."

The Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate Change was announced in March by Obama and includes the countries responsible for 75 percent of the global emissions of heat-trapping gases. Its goal is to lay the groundwork for an international agreement to curb climate-changing pollution by December.

That's when delegates from 175 countries will meet in Copenhagen, Denmark, to forge a new treaty to replace the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which expires in 2012. The Kyoto Protocol required 37 countries to cut emissions by a total of 5 percent by 2012.

During President George W. Bush's tenure, the United States refused to take part in the Kyoto regime, calling it unfair since it made no demands on rapidly developing economies like China and India.

Outside the State Department on Monday, police shut down a street and arrested seven Greenpeace activists for unlawful entry. Two of the environmentalists had climbed a construction crane and hung a 600-square-foot banner with an image of Earth that read: "Too big to fail. Stop global warming, rescue the planet."

Clinton referred to the fragile planet when she told leaders that the U.S. was "working tirelessly" to ensure that this time there would be a successful outcome. But she acknowledged that there is

no sense in negotiating an agreement if it will not have a practical impact in reducing emissions, meaning developing countries such as India and China will have to be included.

"Of course each economy represented here is different. And some, like mine, is responsible for past emissions, some for quickly growing present emissions," she said. "But people everywhere have a legitimate aspiration for a higher standard of living. We want people to have a higher standard of living. We just hope we can work together in a way to avoid the mistakes that we made that have created a large part of the problem that we face today."

As evidence that the U.S. was taking action, Clinton cited the recent finding by the Environmental Protection Agency that six greenhouse gases pose threats to human health and welfare.

Calling it "a decisive break with past policy," Clinton said the ruling opened the door to tighter regulations on tailpipe emissions from cars and trucks. But those regulations will take time.

Another Obama initiative - new legislation setting mandatory limits on greenhouse gases - is meeting stiff resistance in Congress, where House Republicans and moderate Democrats are concerned about the cost. That bill will be the primary mechanism for the U.S. to reduce emissions and will set the targets necessary to negotiate and follow through on an agreement.

At the last major meeting on a new climate treaty in Bonn earlier this month, little progress was made on two key issues: the carbon emissions targets to be adopted by rich countries and how to raise an estimated \$100 billion a year to help poor countries adapt to climate change.

Developing countries want industrial nations to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases by at least 40 percent from 1990 levels by 2020. The Obama administration has called for a 14 percent reduction from 2005 levels by 2020. Legislation being considered by Congress would reduce greenhouse gases by 20 percent by 2020, but opponents are already pushing for a more modest reduction.

Judge could halt part of clean trucks program

Daily News Wire Services

L.A. Daily News, Monday, April 27, 2009

A federal judge today is expected to put a temporary halt to a provision of a clean-trucks program that some believe amounts to an attempt by the Teamsters to unionize big-rig haulers at the Los Angeles-Long Beach ports complex.

The requirement that harbor trucking companies eliminate independent owner-operator drivers and replace them with drayage company employees within four years has been a hotly contested element of the Clean Trucks Program, which ostensibly targets toxic diesel emissions largely by banning all pre-1989 trucks at the complex.

The program bans some 16,800 of the oldest, most-polluting rigs and requires all trucks using the ports to meet stringent new vehicle emission regulations.

The plan also requires all motor carriers operating at the ports to obtain federal licenses and join concessions, companies that would employ some of the thousands of independent big-rig drivers who own and operate their own equipment.

The American Trucking Associations, the national trucking group that filed suit in Los Angeles federal court to stop the ports' concession provision, says that provision is backed by the Teamsters because they want to unionize drayage operations at the complex, which handles about 40 percent of the nation's imports.

ATA spokesman Clayton Boyce said many people mistakenly believe independent truckers are the cause of pollution at the port. In fact, he says, his group supports clean-air initiatives, including updating the trucking fleet to meet new emission standards.

"Clean air is not the issue," Boyce said.

“There's no good reason to kill off the independent trucker except to allow the Teamsters to cut down the number of trucking companies working the ports so they can unionize the drivers more easily. It's a con job. If you want to clean up the port, then ban older trucks that are causing the emissions, not independent owner-operators.”

Today's hearing before U.S. District Judge Christina Snyder stems from the lawsuit filed by the ATA against the cities of Los Angeles and Long Beach.

In a written ruling last July, Snyder refused to issue an injunction against the concession agreements because of a loophole in federal law that says states are still allowed to impose safety requirements on trucks. But last month, a federal appeals court overruled her, finding that the concession mandate has little to do with vehicle safety.

The three-judge appellate panel remanded the case “as quickly as possible” back to Snyder “for an appropriate preliminary injunction.”

Snyder will hear arguments in the case today. She is expected to issue a new ruling that would halt the employee-trucker plan.

Newhall Ranch project moving forward

By Jerry Berrios, Staff Writer

L.A. Daily News, Monday, April 27, 2009

The long-planned Newhall Ranch project has entered its next phase, with developers promising Friday to take a more environmentally sensitive approach as they build the 21,000-home mini-city between the San Fernando and Santa Clarita valleys.

Their commitment came as The Newhall Land and Farming Co. previewed federal and state environmental impact reports that laid out plans for dealing with traffic, air quality, conservation and other issues raised during the years-long process of getting the project approved. The 60-day public comment on the EIR opens Monday.

“This is a significant milestone,” said Newhall Land spokeswoman Marlee Lauffer.

Newhall Ranch, the largest subdivision in Los Angeles County history, was approved by the Board of Supervisors in 2003, despite residents' concerns about traffic and the impact on the Santa Clara River, which runs through the project.

Planned for 12,000 acres along Highway 126, it would provide homes for an estimated 60,000 people, along with commercial and industrial development. Developers estimate that 19,000 jobs would be created locally, which would help minimize the impact on the region's freeways.

Nearly 60 percent of the project will be permanent open space.

Although the project was originally slated to break ground in 2006, lawsuits and regulatory approvals delayed its development. In the meantime, the nation plunged into recession, the real-estate market languished and Landsource, the company that bought Newhall Land, filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection.

Officials said the bankruptcy filing will not impact funding for several essential elements, including improvements to the Interstate 5-Magic Mountain interchange. And local economists predict the housing market will be back on track by the time Newhall Ranch is built.

“They are positioning themselves” so they will be ready when the housing market rebounds, said Jack Kyser, founding economist of the Kyser Center for Research at the Los Angeles County Economic Development Corp.

Detailed in documents filling more than a dozen binders, state and federal officials outlined the project's impacts, including traffic, water, air quality and noise.

Recycled water will be used to meet more than half of all water needs, for instance, and 167 acres will be preserved to protect the endangered spineflower.

"As a master-plan community builder, we wanted to look at everything in its entirety," Lauffer said.

The state and federal EIRs are separate from environmental documents approved for the county and other public agencies. Following the public review process, they will be finalized by the California Department of Fish and Game and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Lauffer said the company hopes to get final approvals by 2010, with construction starting three or four years after that.

Power, and pitfalls, of an electrical smart grid

The economic stimulus invests \$4.5 billion in a digital energy network, which may prevent blackouts. The project to build one is daunting, though, experts say.

By Rebecca Cole, staff writer

L.A. Times, Monday, April 27, 2009

Reporting from Washington -- One warm August afternoon in 2003, a power failure originating in Ohio coursed through the electrical grid in the Northeast, sparking the nation's largest blackout and leaving millions in eight states without air conditioning, traffic lights and cellphone service.

Energy experts say that shutdown, which cost an estimated \$6 billion, might have been averted by a "smart grid."

President Obama has made the smart grid a major plank of his "rebuilding America" plan, viewing it as a way not only to eliminate blackouts and power failures, but also to create jobs and cut greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to global warming.

A smart grid -- a digital network enabling utilities, consumers and alternative sources of renewable energy to "talk" to one another instantaneously -- could steer electricity to where it is needed most.

In the economic stimulus act that the president signed in February, Congress allocated \$4.5 billion for smart grid investments, a thin slice of the \$38.7 billion that the package funneled to the Department of Energy.

But is it enough?

"We are making a down payment," said Matt Rogers, a senior advisor to Energy Secretary Steven Chu.

The down payment will fund a set of pilot projects to demonstrate the viability of the smart grid and to show that it can deliver energy on a large scale, Rogers said.

Another goal: driving electrical utilities to make long-term investments in smart-grid technologies.

The Electric Power Research Institute, a utility industry think tank, has estimated the cost of building a smart grid at a staggering \$165 billion -- about \$8 billion a year for two decades.

And one of the biggest challenges in rolling out a smart grid, energy experts say, is getting hundreds of industries, from power generators to appliance and auto manufacturers, to agree on a set of standards -- some already developed, many not ready yet.

"If you look at how vast the grid is, all the way from generator to consumer, to bring together a communication fabric so that information can be exchanged will take four to five years, easy," said Arshad Mansoor, vice president of power delivery and utilization at the institute.

Hired by the National Institute of Standards and Technology, a nonregulatory agency within the Department of Commerce, to develop a road map of standards and find consensus on a plan, Mansoor's group will help NIST, Chu and Commerce Secretary Gary Locke jump-start the process in early May.

The potential problems are daunting: "It will be a mess," Mansoor says, if auto manufacturers each come up with a unique standard for how plug-in hybrid technology will communicate with the smart grid. To avoid that scenario, the electric utility industry is working with automotive engineers to develop plug-in standards.

Demand for electricity is predicted to grow 30% by 2020, placing yet more stress on the grid and increasing risk of blackouts. That's without the additional demand of 1 million plug-in hybrids that Obama has pledged to add to the nation's roads by 2015.

"Today an American consumer uses 13 times the electricity he or she did a half-century ago, and there are twice as many of us," James Hoecker told a House energy subcommittee this year. The former chairman of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, now counsel for electricity industry advocacy group WIRES, said: "We're asking the transmission system to perform tasks for which it was not designed."

Today, on hot summer days when consumers crank up the air conditioning, electric utilities have no way of controlling that demand. All they can do is turn on more power plants to try to meet it.

Bracken Hendricks, a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress, says that the "dumb and old energy distribution system" hasn't changed much from the pioneering days of Thomas Edison and Nikola Tesla at the turn of 20th century.

"Electricity in the grid is like water in pipes," Hendricks said. "You need to manage supply and demand. You have to keep the levels in balance or the whole system crashes down."

In order to meet rising demand, he says, energy companies just build more power plants -- primarily fueled by coal or natural gas, a major source of carbon dioxide emissions.

Spreading a small measure of renewable energy around even a portion of the grid, Hendricks said, could prevent a cascading blackout like the one in 2003.

"We're looking at a period that has all the potential to be very transformative, depending on how lean and mean the electricity industry can be," Hoecker said in an interview. "It's a quarter-century-long sustained effort."

Lawmakers await possible Palin vetoes

The Associated Press

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Monday, April 27, 2009

FAIRBANKS, Alaska—A week after the Alaska Legislature adjourned, lawmakers are waiting to find out if Gov. Sarah Palin will break out her veto pen.

Palin will have 20 days, not counting Sundays and holidays, to decide whether to use her veto power on spending and policy measures. As of Saturday, only 10 of the 61 bills and 29 resolutions approved by the Legislature had been sent to the governor.

Bills commonly wait a week or two before landing on the governor's desk, giving lawyers and accountants a chance to review the legislation.

Sen. Joe Paskvan, D-Fairbanks, carried a bill that calls on Alaska to create an electronic health records system. The availability of federal money to launch the process was a motivator for lawmakers to approve the bill.

The Department of Health and Social Services estimates the total cost to the state at \$27.5 million, with almost \$25 million coming in stimulus dollars if the state requests the money this year. The act offers a match of \$10 in federal money for every \$1 in state money the first year of the program. The federal match falls to \$7 the following year and to \$3 the year after.

However, Palin has not included that pot of money on her list of acceptable stimulus package money, citing strings attached.

Her final decision is not expected until May.

Office of Management and Budget Director Karen Rehfeld said Palin asked the Legislature to bring the public into the process of deciding which stimulus funds to accept.

"She will be evaluating that information and making decisions on the appropriation bills and the substantive legislation, including health records, unemployment insurance, and air quality grants,"

Rehfeld said in an e-mail to the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner. "And no, she has not said she would reject anything—she wants to make good decisions and she wants to make sure that these funds are used wisely and people understand they are one-time."

Palin said repeatedly throughout the session that she opposes accepting federal stimulus money that comes with strings attached. Paskvan said a month's delay is not a concern but a year's delay would be.

"The whole purpose of this is to save lives, provide better health care and, eventually, save a lot of money," he said. "It just puts people unnecessarily at risk for a longer period of time."

Besides accepting stimulus money, lawmakers approved \$1.8 billion in capital spending. That included about \$10 million for Sitka projects, but lawmakers there cautioned constituents not to count on the money just yet.

Sen. Bert Stedman, R-Sitka, told the Sitka Sentinel the governor might even veto projects paid for by the cruise visitor head tax.

"I would wait for the process to be completed before I got too excited," Stedman said.

The capital budget included \$2 million in federal highway money for infrastructure projects on Japonski Island. The money was included in the capital budget that Palin submitted, but the governor in the past has vetoed her own budget requests.

Both Stedman and Rep. Peggy Wilson, R-Sitka, said 2009 was an unusual legislative session for the budget. Typically, the governor submits a capital budget before the session and lawmakers tack on money for local projects. This year, the Legislature cut about \$500 million from Palin's budget, Stedman said.

Environmentalists, businesses unite on emissions

By John Fritze

USA Today, Sunday, April 26, 2009

WASHINGTON — After fighting each other for decades, environmentalists and industrial businesses are working together in Congress to clear the air — literally — through a reduction of carbon dioxide emissions.

While hundreds of groups are lobbying Congress on proposed climate change legislation, the 2-year-old U.S. Climate Action Partnership (USCAP) — which has put rivals General Electric and the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) on the same page — is having more influence than most.

Draft legislation that Democrats hope to advance next month is "modeled closely" on the recommendations of the group, according to a summary of the measure provided by its authors. USCAP was repeatedly touted by lawmakers in hearings on the legislation last week.

"It's a remarkable dynamic," said Rep. Jay Inslee, D-Wash., a member of the Subcommittee on Energy and the Environment. "It is not lost on members of Congress that you have this coalition that touches all points of the economy."

Thirty companies and non-profit organizations belong to the coalition, including Dow Chemical, Duke Energy, the Nature Conservancy and the Pew Center on Global Climate Change. Members say a united front by disparate groups will be key to approving energy policy — particularly in the Senate, where 60 votes likely will be needed to overcome a Republican filibuster and win passage.

"We have to construct a system that makes sense not just environmentally but economically," said Steve Cochran, director of the climate campaign for the Environmental Defense Fund, a USCAP member. "Doing it 'with these companies' rather than 'to these companies' makes some sense."

Under the bill, the government would impose a limit on emissions — the proposal calls for a 20% reduction from 2005 levels by 2020. Companies that exceed their pollution limit may purchase credits, or "allowances," from other companies that cut emissions by more than required.

Over time, the cap is reduced, and companies must decide whether to invest in technology to cut emissions, purchase more power from renewable sources or buy additional allowances. Both sides get something: environmentalists, a defined cap on emissions; companies, a smooth transition and more certainty.

"We are in that group shoulder-to-shoulder with several of the country's leading environmental groups," said Pacific Gas and Electric spokesman Brian Hertzog. "There's a lot of similarities between what we're looking to advance and what that community is looking for."

Significant questions remain, such as whether the government will initially distribute the allowances to companies for free, auction them off, or do a combination of both. Also unresolved is how revenue collected by the government for the allowances would be spent. Even so, a number of USCAP recommendations are now part of the draft bill:

- Companies could buy offsets by investing in reforestation or renewable energy that could be used to meet emission targets.
- Carbon polluters could "bank," or save allowances for use in future years.
- The Environmental Protection Agency would create a reserve of allowances that would be made available if the price of the permits rose to "unexpectedly high levels" under the system known as cap and trade.

USCAP members argue the proposal must not result in a sudden spike in costs. The EPA estimates that an average household would pay an extra \$98 to \$140 annually for energy under the cap-and-trade system, but some Republicans say the price tag could be significantly higher.

"Ultimately, it's the end user that is going to pay for this," said Rep. Michael Burgess, R-Texas, an energy subcommittee member who said the companies involved with USCAP have had a "mixed" impact on the debate. "Those companies will simply be passing along those higher costs."

USCAP may help sway moderate members of the House panel, said John Coequyt, a global warming legislative expert with the Sierra Club, which is not a coalition member. Coequyt, who described the environmentalists in USCAP as "taking one for the team," predicted the effort will be more difficult in the Senate.

The Sierra Club has not taken an official position on the draft bill. Though the group supports many of its provisions, including the timeline for cutting emissions, it would prefer stricter limitations on new coal plants, spokesman Josh Dorner said.

"They negotiated a reasonably tough deal with the other groups in USCAP, and they brought it forward at a pretty tough time," Coequyt said. "On the other hand, the environmental groups probably signed up for something that they might not have been willing to sign up for if they were saying what they really felt."

Environmental challenges loom

By Pat Brennan

The Orange County Register, Sunday, April 26, 2009

Judging the state of Orange County's environment demands clear-eyed measurements of air, water and habitat quality. And most of those measurements suggest one word: change.

In some cases, a lot of it.

Air quality

While Orange County's air quality is often better than that of its neighbors to the north, smog scientists are increasingly raising concerns about fine-particle pollution – tiny bits of brake dust, soot and other material that can work their way deep into the lungs.

As perceptions – and air-quality regulations – change, what once seemed to be acceptable pollution levels are moved into the “unhealthful” column. The challenge will be finding new ways to reduce air pollution in Southern California, where state and federal air-quality regulations are already among the strictest.

The South Coast Air Quality Management District is seeking ways to cut fine-particle pollution in time to meet a 2015 deadline. Missing it could jeopardize federal funds, such as highway funding.

Orange County and the rest of the Los Angeles basin has seen a gradual drop in the number of days in which pollution levels violated national health standards. The basin has seen four such days so far in 2009, preliminary data show; last year, there were 119. In 2000, there were 126, and in 1990 there were 181, according to the state Air Resources Board.

Water supply

Water remains an issue, whether it's coming into homes or leaving them. Supplies are tightening for a variety of reasons, including the often-dry conditions affecting reservoirs statewide and required protections for a tiny fish called the delta smelt. Saving the smelt has meant reducing pumping from the California Bay delta, which means less water flowing to Southern California.

The Metropolitan Water District in Los Angeles, the region's water wholesaler, cut water allocations to downstream agencies earlier this month by 10 percent. Combined with other cuts during the previous fiscal year, the district's supply is down about 20 percent.

Metropolitan also boosted the rates it charges those agencies by 19.7 percent, a number that includes a \$69-per-acre-foot surcharge that could be ended if conditions improve for the smelt.

The decision, expected for months, will likely trigger a variety of conservation measures, including water rationing, as summer approaches. Water agencies and cities will now decide what measures to take.

The Municipal Water District of Orange County has been working with its 28 member agencies to craft new ordinances that include conservation measures as well as penalties for violators.

The drinking-water aquifer beneath north and central Orange County, managed by the Orange County Water District, provides more than half the water needed by 23 cities. The rest is imported. South Orange County imports nearly all its water.

Wastewater

Wastewater presents its own challenges. Even runoff from too much watering can pick up contaminants and carry them into the ocean. Some of the runoff creates full-strength streams and waterfalls that wreak havoc with native ecosystems adapted to drier conditions.

Sewage is treated at the county's sanitation district plants, although occasional spills send raw sewage down storm drains and into the near-shore ocean.

The cities, along with the regional water boards, make rules to limit urban runoff, while bacteria levels in the near-shore ocean are monitored by Orange County Health Care Agency officials and the Orange County Sanitation District.

Sewage spills reported to the county have been dropping steadily for years. There were 266 sewage spills in 2008, down from 293 a year earlier. There were 18 ocean swimming closures, up a bit from 12 in 2007 but not a statistically significant increase, said Larry Honeybourne of the Health Care Agency.

Habitat, species preservation

And in the world of native habitats, significant changes also are registering among scientists. A recent study by Audubon California projected that bird species, including the threatened California gnatcatcher, could shift their ranges in coming decades in response to global warming – shifts that might lead to loss of habitat. A companion study on a national level by the Audubon Society showed that more than half of the 305 birds studied shifted their ranges by an average of

35 miles over 40 years. The shifts, mainly northward or up slope, could wipe out some bird species entirely or significantly diminish their habitable range.

Orange County has managed to set aside a variety of wilderness areas for preservation, but that is far from the end of the story.

A 2008 estimate by county planning officials put the amount of undeveloped habitat in Orange County at 190,066 acres, including the dwindling coastal sage scrub plant community. Another 11,800 were expected to be developed by 2020. From 1998 to 2008, the county developed about 34,000 acres of natural habitat.

A 37,000-acre reserve area, the Nature Reserve of Orange County, was approved in 1996; a companion reserve of about 33,000 acres in south Orange County, much of it on Rancho Mission Viejo, won federal approval in 2007.

Threats

Not only global warming, but wildfire, possibly stoked by warmer temperatures and more-frequent drought, threatens to forever alter the character of the county's native scrublands.

Large swaths of preserve area have been torched in recent fires.

An estimated 90 percent of the Nature Reserve of Orange County burned over the course of 14 years. Habitat managers worry that too-frequent burnings could permanently alter the composition of the county's native lands.

And while the plants are adapted to periodic wildfire, too much can convert what was once a landscape bursting with scents, colors and native flowers into monotonous expanses of non-native weeds.

About 90 percent of Chino Hills State Park burned in last year's Freeway Complex Fire. Parks officials, however, say they plan to try to replant native trees in the park to help nature along in its recovery.

As many as a million trees and native shrubs could be planted in Chino Hills and San Diego County's Cuyamaca Rancho state parks over 10 years. The planting, to be paid for by private businesses, began modestly, with 25 trees at Chino Hills in a Earth Day event Saturday.

O.C. green businesses thrive during recession

By Pat Brennan

The Orange County Register, Sunday, April 26, 2009

The owner of a small, "green" business in Laguna Beach got her start just as the country was settling in for a steep recession.

In Santa Ana, a pollution-control equipment-maker is still going strong – though economic woes cut into his revenues and forced some cuts in contract employees.

And in the same city, a solar power company found a way to double its business, even as similar businesses were pulling back.

Orange County has become the proving ground for a homegrown and emerging green economy. Despite frightening economic news arriving almost daily, green businesses are thriving, or at least holding on, helped along by a powerful sense of community.

"I think Orange County is well positioned because it's such a diverse economy," said Laura Curran, a part-time faculty member at Cal State Fullerton and head of "Green is Good" consulting. "There are businesses of all sizes."

Some 10,000 small businesses can be found here that do \$1 million or more in business, she said, a good climate for green companies to thrive. And in her view, the future is bright: a flowering of technology-driven products, as well as biomedical companies linked to UC Irvine.

And it isn't just products and services. Many Orange County companies are adopting green practices in the work place, such as cutting energy use or using recycled materials.

A jittery economy, in fact, could actually stimulate the drive to green, Curran said.

"Most companies realize that when they invest in so-called green business practices, they're really getting at reducing waste and increasing efficiency," she said. "The economy makes thrift cool."

Increasing green awareness and the business incentives that come with it are a big part of what Pamela Sterling, owner of Lagunagreen ecomart kitchen and bath gallery, is counting on.

Sterling, who runs what she calls "Southern California's only exclusively green kitchen and bath showroom," opened her doors right around Thanksgiving – for most of us, just as the realization of deep recession was soaking in.

"This opportunity opened up to move into this space, so I just jumped on it," said Sterling, a software business analyst who still does consulting work in the field. "I just decided to leave and follow my passion."

She shared the space with the outgoing business owner, remodeled in October, and opened her showroom soon after.

Sterling says she's not yet able to measure how successful her business is.

"I try not to focus on it, because it's already scary enough starting your own business," she said. "I guess a good thing I can say is I have nothing to compare it to."

Right now, her consulting work is paying the bills. But she expects the emphasis on green practices at home and at work – likely to increase because of green elements of the federal government's stimulus – to increase demand for what she's selling.

"All the right people are coming into my showrooms," she said. "People who are doing large, green remodels, or are interested in doing that, or people who have been waiting for this kind of store in Orange County."

That kind entrepreneurial spirit is part of the history of California, says Kirwan Rockefeller, a social psychologist who runs UC Irvine's continuing education program in sustainability – itself seeing a spike in public interest.

"Southern Californians live outside so much," he said. "I think there's a really heightened sensitivity to the delicate balance between the natural environment and human beings."

And the county might be experiencing a kind of goldilocks effect: it's not too big and not too small, permitting more collaboration among green businesses and a stronger sense of a shared future among business owners, he said.

Al Munoz, president and chief executive of Wahlco Inc., said his company considered whether to relocate outside Orange County when it recently contemplated moving after more than 30 years in Santa Ana.

The company does a robust business in an unusual niche: designing and manufacturing air pollution control equipment for coal-fired power plants around the world.

The company's U2A device allows the plants to create ammonia from urea on site, far safer than storing large amounts of highly toxic ammonia. The ammonia is used to remove nitrogen oxides, a smog precursor, from the plant's emissions.

Wahlco officials considered changing locations, even going outside the county, and contracting out their manufacturing work. But Munoz said having the engineering and fabrication side by side was an important part of the company's success.

Instead of leaving the county, Wahlco moved about five blocks away, to an enterprise zone in the same city. Doing business in the zone allows tax credits for product development, he said.

Munoz said there's a lag time in his business, so a lull in the latter part of 2008 is just catching up with him.

The company did about \$24 million in business in 2008, he said, but he expects to do about \$20 million this year.

He also had to reduce his work force from about 140 to about 108, mainly by not renewing contracts for temporary laborers.

But Munoz attributes the company's continued survival to going "outside the box," and expanding its marketing across the globe.

"If the domestic market is shut because of budgets," he said, "and because of capital constraints, there is a large market outside, in Third-World countries or in countries where nox (nitrogen oxides) still has a high visibility.

"All countries are in the green pattern, they're just in different phases."

And while the recession has caused some solar-power companies to pull back on their business, SolarCity, also in Santa Ana, is growing.

The company, which has stores around the country, attributes part of its success to the federal stimulus, said Lyndon Rive, the company's chief executive.

The stimulus included a provision for a "tax grant" for customers who put in solar panels. That, combined with the fact that SolarCity leases systems to many of its customers, instead of selling them, means homeowners can better afford the systems – and will quickly see a drop in their energy bills.

That has meant a doubling of business, from 199 customers in the first quarter of 2008 to 434 in the second quarter of this year.

It isn't all rosy, Rive said.

"We were expecting to triple," Rive said.

But he acknowledges that, in a difficult economic atmosphere, doubling up on business isn't half bad.

"When I tell other companies things are not going so great as I'd like, we're only doubling this year, I don't get any sympathy," Rive said.

The greening of Orange County

By Pat Brennan

The Orange County Register, Sunday, April 26, 2009

In Orange County, green is growing up.

The trend, of course, has been gathering for years. In neighborhood shops, company meeting rooms, government offices; among networking groups, builders and architects, school children – the tendrils of green have infiltrated and taken hold like tree roots breaking up a once-solid sidewalk.

But while green lifestyles, green products and green speak seem to be everywhere, it's no longer quite safe to call it "trendy."

As the networks converge and the green tide rises, the trend seems to be mutating into a mature, living, breathing community.

Green, in other words, is here to stay.

"I think it's exploding, for maybe a couple reasons," said Kirwan Rockefeller, a PhD who runs UC Irvine's continuing education program in sustainability.

First, Orange County is part of California, known for being forward-thinking in all things environmental. Then there's proximity to the ocean – bringing with it a subtle influence on public perception of nature and the environment, Rockefeller said.

Add several large park and open-space areas, managed to preserve native wildlife and habitat, and that equals even more heightened awareness of humanity's relationship to raw nature.

But one of the biggest factors might be a deceptively simple one: Orange County's size.

“Los Angeles and San Diego (counties) are very involved and highly sensitive” to green issues, Rockefeller said. “But by the same token, they're also so large. Whereas Orange County, because of a more manageable size, I think maybe is able to collaborate a little bit more efficiently.”

That collaboration takes a variety of forms. It might include businesses, small and large, educational institutions, nonprofit organizations and government.

It's as low cost and low tech as home craft; classes on the subject at the Road Less Traveled store in Santa Ana are becoming more and more crowded. There, enthusiasts learn to repurpose household items into collages, jackets, aprons, candles, soap and purses, thus avoiding a trip to Wal-Mart.

“Part of the green movement is making things yourself,” said owner Delilah Snell, who also offers a variety of products that are made from “green” materials or are certified as sustainable (made in a way that doesn't take an irreplaceable bite out of nature).

Collaboration also can be high-tech and high concept: the Emerging Green Builders of Orange County, a subset of the U.S. Green Building Council, comes together to network and discuss the latest architectural innovations.

The group recently celebrated a platinum LEED certification for the Environmental Nature Center in Newport Beach, which incorporates cleverly designed skylights, windows, room designs and materials to reduce energy use.

Orange County has its “Green Drinks” – a monthly networking get-together at varying locations for anyone, professionals and enthusiasts, interested in greening up their lives, and one of many found around the nation. It has its green Web sites, such as Casey Cochran's “OC Green Guide,” as well as those who try to take care of nature itself.

Joel Robinson was a kind of pioneer in his Orange neighborhood, planting a palette of native plants so his property could be certified by a conservation group as backyard habitat. The planting brought piques of anger from some of his neighbors, who thought Robinson had planted “weeds” because they weren't traditional, ornamental plants.

He eventually calmed the neighbors and city code-enforcement officials by agreeing to keep his plants well trimmed and to use evergreens when possible.

Greening can be a bit more subtle, such as in efforts by Irvine, Anaheim, Newport Beach and other cities to incorporate green practices into their building policies. Or it might be green marketing and investment, or streamlining industrial plants to curb energy use and pollution.

Laura Curran, a part-time faculty member at Cal State Fullerton and head of “Green is Good” consulting, likes to call out unusual green projects that never make the news. For instance, Wahlco Inc., of Santa Ana, makes air-pollution-control devices for industrial use.

“In Orange County, the next thing is going to be large companies,” Curran said. “They are going to be the drivers. A lot of our local companies are technology innovators. I think Orange County is well-positioned because it has such a diverse economy.”

As ever, perception is everything when deciding how easy – or hard – it is to link up with Orange County's green world.

“In some ways, it's easier in Orange County; in some ways, it's harder,” she said. “The first thing you have to ask is, ‘What do I mean by green?’ The first step for most people is looking at what

businesses look at: how to save water and energy. Then it's making decisions that go deeper – what you acquire, what you have in your life, how much you walk, how much you drive.

“Take the two or three things you want to work on most, and accomplish those.”

Republicans push nuclear energy to lower costs

The Associated Press

In the Modesto Bee, Saturday, April 25, 2009

WASHINGTON -- The U.S. should build 100 more nuclear plants rather than spend "billions in subsidies" for renewable energy if it is truly committed to lowering electric bills and having clean air, the Republicans say.

In the party's weekly radio and Internet address, Sen. Lamar Alexander said the United States should follow the example of France, which promoted nuclear power decades ago. Today, nuclear plants provide 80 percent of France's electricity, and the country has one of the lowest electric rates and carbon emissions in Europe, he said.

In contrast, renewable electricity provides roughly 1.5 percent of the nation's electricity, according to Republicans. Double it or triple it, and "we still don't have much," the Tennessee Republican said.

"There is a potentially a dangerous energy gap between the renewable electricity we want and the reliable electricity we must have," he said.

In contrast to Democrats, Alexander said Republicans:

-Start with conservation and efficiency. "We have so much electricity at night, for example we could electrify half our cars and trucks and plug them in while we sleep without building one new power plant."

-Seek to keep bills down. "Democrats say, put a big new national sales tax on electric bills and gasoline."

-Wish to find more natural gas and oil offshore. "Farmers, homeowners and factories must have the natural gas. And more of the oil we'll still need should be ours, instead of sending billions overseas."

California's low-carbon fuel standard has oil companies anxious

By Dale Kasler

Sacramento Bee, Saturday, April 25, 2009

In car-crazy California, a new fuel standard ordered by state officials to curb greenhouse gases could dramatically change how vehicles run.

It also could have a huge effect on cost.

The petroleum industry and some economists say the new standard adopted by the state Air Resources Board on Thursday will cost motorists billions, because blending gasoline will become considerably more complicated.

But state officials and environmentalists say the "low-carbon fuel standard" will actually save Californians money by reducing oil consumption and ushering in a competitive new era of biofuels and electric vehicles.

The stakes are enormous. The price of fuel can have a significant impact on the state's economic health. When gas hit \$4.50 last summer, it severely hurt tourism and caused delivery companies to impose fuel surcharges.

Gasoline now sells for a relatively affordable \$2.35 a gallon on average, but the state's already strict fuel formulas create a delicate balance between supply and demand. Even minor supply glitches have caused big price spikes because only a small number of refiners make gas to California's specifications.

Business advocates say significant price increases during a recession could be disastrous. They are casting a wary eye at the fuel standard.

"Reformulating the fuel supply – we shouldn't undergo that without a certain amount of trepidation," said Dorothy Rothrock, senior vice president with the California Manufacturers & Technology Association.

Every time California has instituted stricter clean-air standards for motor fuel, "they all have had a cost associated with it," said Cathy Reheis-Boyd, chief operating officer at the Western States Petroleum Association. "I know there's going to be a cost associated with this."

A big problem, she said, is that the air board's standards will limit the use of corn-based ethanol in gasoline – leaving refiners with a major hurdle.

Yet the Air Resources Board, in approving the low carbon standard Thursday, dismissed forecasts of higher costs. The board's staff contends that when the standard is fully operational, in 2020, Californians will save about \$11 billion a year.

"It's the reduction in the use of petroleum," said board spokesman Dimitri Stanich.

The first-in-the-nation carbon standard is a key element in California's goal of reducing overall volume of greenhouse gases 25 percent by 2020, as required by a 2006 state law. The air board's standard dictates that the "carbon intensity" of fuels be reduced starting in 2011, ramping up to a 10 percent cut by 2020.

The board believes the standard will encourage the development of hydrogen, electricity and biofuels to power vehicles. But there's a ton of controversy about how the standard treats what is currently the leading biofuel, ethanol made from corn.

Corn ethanol is now a staple of the transportation scene. It makes up 6 percent of the gas sold in California, and that's going to grow to 10 percent next year.

But the air board decided that corn ethanol is not so great for limiting greenhouse gases. The argument goes like this: Eager to cash in on ethanol demand, farmers around the world plow up grasslands and chop down trees to make way for corn, a process that releases more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

The air board's ruling infuriated the corn ethanol industry, which is in severe financial distress already. Companies like Sacramento's Pacific Ethanol Inc. are on the verge of bankruptcy. It also angered the petroleum refiners, who argued that they have few viable options for meeting the 10 percent carbon reduction if they don't get much credit for using corn ethanol. The alternatives, for the most part, consist of fuel technologies that are still expensive or are in the early stages of commercialization.

"We have no way to know how we're supposed to comply with this," Reheis-Boyd said.

She said the only real solution is to blend in ethanol made from sugar cane – which gets a better "carbon score" from the air board. But that means importing it from Brazil and paying costly U.S. import tariffs, she said.

All told, her association believes fuel costs in California could rise \$3 billion a year.

Air board officials and environmentalists said the refiners are crying wolf. The standard will phase in slowly in the early years. Refiners and entrepreneurs will have plenty of time – and economic incentive – to make inexpensive biofuels, hydrogen-based fuels, even ethanol from such "cellulosic" materials as switchgrass.

"The program starts off on a rather gentle slope," said Roland Hwang, vehicle policy director at the Natural Resources Defense Council in San Francisco. There are even ways of making ethanol out of corn that can reduce its "total carbon score," he said.

But Severin Borenstein, director of the Energy Institute at the University of California, Berkeley, said there's no certainty that these emerging technologies will be ready to meet the demand.

The air board "is betting that with the phase-in, those (alternative) fuels are going to get a lot cheaper," Borenstein said. "They might, but there certainly is not any guarantee at all."

The impact on the economy wouldn't be "devastating," but the new standard is an inefficient way of attacking greenhouse gases, he said.

House Dems discuss cuts to tough climate rules

Juliet Eilperin, Washington Post

In the S.F. Chronicle, Saturday, April 25, 2009

Washington - -- Democrats on the House Energy and Commerce Committee are negotiating among themselves on whether to scale back legislation that would impose a mandatory limit on

greenhouse gases, with some conservatives and moderates calling for electric utilities to be given pollution allowances for free and for more modest cuts in the targets for cutting emissions.

Many environmentalists argue that all emissions allowances should be auctioned off under a cap-and-trade system, using the proceeds to finance development of clean energy sources or to offset the resulting higher energy costs for consumers.

The talks suggest that utilities that distribute electricity from coal-fired plants are making progress in their efforts to get free access to 40 percent of the emissions permits, underscoring the challenge lawmakers face in seeking strict limits on carbon dioxide and other contributors to global warming.

Some of the proposals to ease the impact on utilities, which lawmakers are discussing behind closed doors, were summarized in a four-page document authored by Rep. Rick Boucher, D-Va., whose district is dependent on coal and who sponsored his own climate legislation in the last Congress along with the panel's chairman at the time, John Dingell, D-Mich.

The draft list of suggestions, which Boucher spokeswoman Courtney Lamie described as "a very early version" of what Boucher is seeking, includes lowering the proposed targets for greenhouse gas emissions cuts proposed by House Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Henry Waxman, D-Los Angeles, and Rep. Edward Markey, D-Mass., who co-chair the panel's energy and environment subcommittee.

The Waxman-Markey bill would cut U.S. emissions to 20 percent below 2005 levels by 2020 and to 83 percent below by 2050; the Boucher proposal would reduce greenhouse gas emissions by just 6 percent by 2020 while leaving the 2050 goal in place.

On Friday, both former Vice President Al Gore and former House Speaker Newt Gingrich testified before Waxman's panel on the bill, which Gore called "one of the most important pieces of legislation ever introduced in Congress" and Gingrich described as "environmental extremism."

Daniel Weiss, a senior fellow at the liberal think tank Center for American Progress, said senior Democrats are unlikely to adopt some of Boucher's requests - such as lowering emissions targets - because they simply reflect the legislation he and Dingell pushed unsuccessfully last year, but they might accept his proposal on free allowances.

"The Boucher list seems to be a very thoughtful distillation of good ideas, old ideas and areas for discussion," Weiss said, adding that awarding the allowances for free could "soften the transition" to a low-carbon economy for consumers. "Boucher's request means a deal is very possible."

Quick Hits

Tracy Press, Saturday, April 25, 2009

- Cutting edge: "California's first-in-the-world low carbon fuel standard will not only reduce [global warming pollution](#), it will reward innovation, expand consumer choice and encourage the private investment we need to transform our energy infrastructure." — Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger

NUMBERS

- First: Where California's mandate for low carbon fuels — approved this week — puts it in the nation and world.
- 10 percent: California's goal for shrinking carbon impacts by 2020, thanks to a phased-in reduction of greenhouse gas emissions starting in 2011.
- 16 million: Metric tons of carbon emissions expected to be eliminated from the air over the next decade as a result of the new regulation.
- 80 percent: Goal for ratcheting down heat-trapping emissions in California by mid-century.
- 16: Number of other states that are looking to California as a model for fuel standards.
- \$3.7 billion: Amount the rule could cost the state to put into effect — according to opponents in the ethanol industry, fuel producers and business interests.

Businesses see employment upside with carbon cap

By Renee Schoof - McClatchy Newspapers

In the Modesto Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Friday, April 24, 2009

WASHINGTON -- One question was on everyone's mind during hearings this week on a new U.S. energy policy: What would it do to the country's jobs and the American lifestyle?

"It's about jobs," and whether the new policies would help or hurt the country's economy, said Rep. Peter Welch, D-Vt. "It's not just political. It's a legitimate concern."

Congress has just started debate over a 648-page draft of legislation addressing renewable fuels, energy efficiency and global warming, called the American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009. The House Energy and Commerce Committee held hearings all week. Hammering out details is likely to run into next year before the House of Representatives and the Senate are ready to send a final bill to President Barack Obama.

Because so much of the legislation remains to be worked out, experts can't tell consumers how much more they might have to pay for energy. Some said during the hearings that using energy more efficiently could lower bills even if prices rose. Others said that with the right mix of incentives and rebates in the legislation, the cost to the economy could be low. Skeptics dismissed the promise of efficiency and renewable energy and said that high energy prices would drive up the cost of everything and send jobs overseas.

Against the worries and uncertainty, however, many businesspeople sounded optimistic. Executives of leading corporations, as well as energy entrepreneurs, said that a shift away from dirty fuels offered opportunities.

For example:

- Jim Robo, the president and chief operating officer of FPL Group, the country's largest producer of energy from the wind and sun, said, "We've barely begun to tap this unlimited resource." He called for Congress to set a renewable-energy standard that would require all states to get a portion of energy from renewable sources.

- Dan Reicher, the director of climate change and energy initiatives at Google Inc., which has invested in ways to make renewable energy cheaper than coal, said that every state could meet the requirements of a renewable-energy standard. Reicher said that geothermal energy was widely available and that it would become economical to tap the Earth's heat for power as drilling technology improved.

- David Crane, the president and chief executive officer of NRG Energy Inc., an energy company that uses coal, natural gas and other fuels, acknowledged that his company is a major emitter of greenhouse gases but nonetheless saw growth ahead:

"For us, being capitalists and believing in free-market solutions, the opportunity to change the society we live in and change the electric industry, this is a high-growth opportunity for us," he said. Demand for his company's product - electricity - will stay high, he added, predicting that the electric car will be "the air conditioner of the 21st century."

- Meg McDonald, the director of global issues for Alcoa Inc., said that recycling and energy efficiency measures already had helped the company cut costs. More aluminum will be used in future lighter vehicles and in more energy-efficient buildings, she predicted. "It will be good for us long term."

Congress also must decide how to set up a system for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The draft bill calls for the government to sell permits to companies for limited amounts of greenhouse gas pollution. An overall limit would be reduced each year. Companies that needed more permits could buy them from those with higher efficiency that needed fewer. Still unanswered is what the government would do with the money from the permit sales. One proposal is to give a large portion back to consumers as rebates. Another is to give some permits free to businesses that

depend heavily on fossil fuels and could be put at a trade disadvantage. Executives from Alcoa, Duke Energy, NRG Energy and other companies told lawmakers they'd drop their support for the bill unless they got free permits.

Rep. Fred Upton, R-Mich., said he wanted to see greenhouse gas emissions reduced and incentives put in place for cleaner energy, but he didn't want U.S. businesses put at a disadvantage compared with those in countries such as China that aren't expected to put similarly tough rules in place soon.

Rep. Edward Markey, D-Mass., a co-author of the early version of the climate bill, said he also was concerned about protecting competitiveness.

Congress will be debating parts of the legislation, such as rebates and tariffs, that are designed to protect businesses from such losses.

Many businesspeople told lawmakers that what they really needed are the rules of the game for the long term. Higher fossil-fuel prices would be an incentive for investments in renewable energy, for example.

A carbon cap would "be one of the biggest growth engines this country has ever seen," said Jack Oswald, the chief executive officer of SynGest of San Francisco, who didn't testify but was in Washington to speak privately with lawmakers.

Oswald's company plans to make fuel and nitrogen fertilizer from crop wastes such as corncobs, using renewable feedstocks instead of fossil fuels. Oswald foresees 200 plants, each employing 200 people, that would produce U.S.-made fertilizer, reducing the need to buy it from abroad.

He said it was important for the United States to be first with clean-energy innovations so that the products were made here, not imported.

Asian and European countries already have government policies in place that provide incentives for using renewable energy.

Without supportive policies here, the United States will lose leadership to other countries, said Nicole Lederer, a co-founder of Environmental Entrepreneurs, a business group.

In separate testimony, Energy Secretary Steven Chu told lawmakers at one of the hearings that he worried about the same thing.

Chu said two dangers could weaken the United States. One is that the world could fail to reduce global emissions in time to avoid dangerous climate shifts, and the other is that "we fail to seize the opportunity to lead, and clean energy jobs will be created elsewhere."

Fuels must clean up act

By Kevin Yamamura

Sacramento Bee, Friday, April 24, 2009

California became the first state in the nation Thursday to mandate carbon-based reductions in transportation fuels in an attempt to cut the state's overall greenhouse gas emissions.

The California Air Resources Board approved a phased-in reduction starting in 2011, with a goal of shrinking carbon impacts 10 percent by 2020. Fuel producers can comply in different ways, such as providing a cleaner fuel portfolio, blending low-carbon ethanol with gasoline or purchasing credits from other clean-energy producers.

California's low-carbon fuel standard could lead to a national measure under President Barack Obama, as well as shape how the transportation sector evolves. But businesses and oil industry critics warned that more research is necessary and that its action would lead to higher costs for consumers in a recessionary economy.

Board Chairwoman Mary Nichols hailed the low-carbon fuel standard as a major step in moving the nation away from oil dependence and toward alternative fuels that generate lower greenhouse-gas emissions.

"By changing the way we think about fuels and requiring them all to be lower carbon, I think we are now finally creating an opportunity for other types of advanced transportation to compete on a level playing field," Nichols said.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger asked the air board in 2007 to consider a low-carbon fuel standard as a way to meet the state's overall goal of cutting greenhouse gases 25 percent by 2020, as mandated by a 2006 law.

The air board looked at the entire carbon "intensity" of fuels, rather than the impact of emissions from use alone. That meant considering the emissions from the start of production to lasting impacts not directly related to fuel supply.

That led to some controversy over the air board's regulations dealing with corn-based ethanol producers.

A staff analysis assigned additional greenhouse-gas consequences to their fuels alone based on the potential impacts that ethanol production has on forests and green space. The theory is that increased ethanol production reduces the existing amount of farmland for food crops, which in turn leads to cultivation of untouched land that previously captured carbon.

Ethanol advocates challenged the report's findings, disputing that their corn-based production had a significant impact on greenhouse-gas increases elsewhere. But they also suggested that petroleum and other fuels were not given the same treatment.

Gen. Wesley Clark, a former Democratic presidential candidate, testified on behalf of Growth Energy, an ethanol advocacy group. He said that greenhouse-gas emissions related to the U.S. military in the Middle East should be considered as part of oil's calculation.

"There are indirect effects for many fuels, but the only indirect effects that have been looked at are the indirect effects in land use for biofuels," Clark said. "So if we're going to look at indirect effects, and I think we should, you have to take a broader look and roll in more."

The air board promised to work with ethanol producers to update formulas related to the indirect effects of fuels as warranted by future research. But it stood by its findings that other fuels did not have significant indirect impacts.

"The preliminary analysis is there is no other fossil fuel option that has any direct land-use effect that comes anywhere near any of the biofuels," said Daniel Sperling, an air board member and a UC Davis transportation studies expert. "We will be looking carefully to make sure that initial assessment is correct. But I do want to make it clear there was no effort just to focus on the biofuels."

Environmentalists and health organizations praised the low-carbon fuel standard as a significant step toward shrinking the state's carbon footprint and providing cleaner air for residents.

Roland Hwang, transportation program director for the National Resources Defense Council, said the ethanol regulation is appropriate because it will force ethanol producers to seek cleaner and more sustainable forms of fuel production.

Bonnie Holmes-Gen, senior policy director for the American Lung Association of California, testified that the new fuel standard would help "reverse the legacy of negative air quality, public health and environmental impacts from petroleum fuels."

But oil producers said too many uncertainties surrounded the new regulation and could lead to unintended consequences, such as supply problems.

"We know that when (consumers) want fuel, they want it when they want it and where they want it, and they want it to be affordable," said Catherine Reheis-Boyd of the Western States Petroleum Association. "And if they don't have that, they're usually pretty expressive about how unhappy they may be."

Small-business groups also testified in opposition Thursday, some noting that California could hurt its businesses by forcing them to pay higher costs to comply.

"We're doing this alone, and what concerns us is that we might really put ourselves at a competitive disadvantage," said Mark Martinez, CEO of the San Joaquin County Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. "So I want to caution you to really evaluate the concerns of the economy and our small businesses."

Air Resources Board moves to cut carbon use

Wyatt Buchanan, Chronicle Staff Writer

S.F. Chronicle, Friday, April 24, 2009

Sacramento -- California's Air Resources Board on Thursday approved a first-in-the-world regulation to minimize the amount of carbon in fuel, putting California on the cutting edge of promoting alternative fuels in a bid to combat global warming.

The regulation will require fuel manufacturers to cut the so-called carbon intensity of fuels sold in the state 10 percent by 2020 - lowering the amount of greenhouse gases released for every unit of energy produced. If the regulation's goal is reached, it will account for 10 percent of the state's overall goal for reducing greenhouse gases by 2020.

Air board Chairwoman Mary Nichols said the rule, called the low carbon fuel standard, will create a global framework for automotive fuels. The board approved the proposal, 9-1.

"Now, finally, we are creating the opportunity for other types of transportation fuels to compete on a level playing field," Nichols said.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger praised the regulation immediately after the vote.

"California's first-in-the-world low carbon fuel standard will not only reduce global warming pollution - it will reward innovation, expand consumer choice and encourage the private investment we need to transform our energy infrastructure," Schwarzenegger said in a statement.

The governor initiated the process for the standard with an executive order in 2007.

It requires, beginning in 2011, that manufacturers start cutting the carbon intensity of fuel sold in the state. The standard applies to a manufacturer's overall mix of fuel and is not a per-gallon requirement. The regulation takes effect incrementally but increases significantly beginning in 2015.

Manufacturers can meet the standard by selling a mix of fuels, selling all low-carbon fuels or using credits that can be both bought and earned from the state if they exceed the limitations. Alternative fuels include electricity, natural gas, biofuel from food products and fuel from algae, among others.

Some business groups opposed the regulation while others strongly supported it.

At the all-day public hearing before the vote, backers of corn-based ethanol criticized the regulation because it counts - as part of the carbon intensity - the indirect effects of manufacturing the fuel. With corn-based ethanol, that means counting the impact of creating new crop land when existing land is converted to growing corn for fuel instead of food.

The board staff determined that other fuels are not subject to that evaluation, which puts corn-based ethanol grown in the Midwest at a higher carbon intensity level than gasoline made in California.

Retired Gen. Wesley Clark, co-chairman of an ethanol lobbying group called Growth Energy, said the board could consider the war in Iraq as an indirect effect of petroleum.

"You have to take a broader look at the effects," Clark said. "The model doesn't reflect common sense."

Nichols called the debate over the issue "a rehearsal for what we're likely to hear in Washington," as Congress debates a proposal to cut greenhouse gases.

The board intends to review the indirect land-use effects of various fuels in 2011.

Representatives of big oil companies were split on the proposal, with Chevron supporting, BP neutral and Tesoro opposing. Large utilities, including PG&E and Southern California Edison, expressed strong support, along with scientific, health and environmental advocacy organizations.

Backers of the regulation applauded in the auditorium after the vote.

Some business leaders, though, expressed concern that the board underestimated the cost of the regulation and needed to conduct a more thorough analysis. The air board staff concluded the standard will save Californians up to \$11 billion by 2020 while critics say it could cost Californians \$3.7 billion a year.

"We need more than high hopes and incomplete research to justify the program," Ruben Jauregui, who spoke on behalf of the Latino Business Association.

Congress warned about new climate change plan

Jennifer A. Dlouhy, Hearst Newspapers
In the S.F. Chronicle, Friday, April 24, 2009

Washington - -- Leaders from Dow Chemical Co. and other U.S. manufacturers joined labor unions Thursday in pleading with Congress to insulate U.S. jobs and industry when the lawmakers write new climate change rules.

At issue is the energy proposal advanced by Democratic Reps. Henry Waxman of Los Angeles and Ed Markey of Massachusetts, which is designed to spur renewable energy production and combat climate change. Its centerpiece is a cap-and-trade program, under which power plants and other businesses could comply with new limits on carbon dioxide emissions by buying allowances to spew the pollutant blamed for global warming.

Rich Wells, Dow's vice president for energy, told lawmakers that they must carefully design any cap-and-trade program to ensure that U.S. manufacturers are not put at a disadvantage against competitors in countries without similar emissions limits. If lawmakers aren't careful, they "will fail to protect American jobs in the manufacturing sector," Wells told the House Energy and Commerce Committee.

Tom Conway, the international vice president of the United Steel Workers, said lawmakers must "ensure that the jobs that exist today in energy-intensive industries are not lost," either because U.S. companies move manufacturing operations overseas to less restrictive countries or because the American firms lose business to international competitors.

There is a "critical need to mitigate the competitive disadvantage that will be placed on these industries," Conway said.

Energy-intensive industries that could face higher costs under any cap-and-trade plan include paper mills in the Pacific Northwest, oil refiners in Texas, and Rust Belt steel and chemical companies.

Dow and other manufacturers are asking lawmakers to give away pollution permits to heavily affected industries that rely on fossil fuels for power and for other products - at least when the United States is "in transition" to lower-carbon energy options and other countries haven't imposed similar emissions limits.

That conflicts with President Obama's preference for auctioning all of the allowances, an idea favored by environmental advocates.

The 648-page Waxman-Markey draft bill dodges details on distributing the allowances and how to use any money raised from their sale.

To win support for their legislation, Waxman and Markey will have to find the middle ground between freely distributing allowances and selling the pollution permits. If their legislation ultimately tilts too far in favor of free distribution, they risk alienating environmental advocates.

If the measure requires most of the allowances to be sold, Waxman and Markey are sure to lose support from lawmakers whose districts include hard-hit industries.

"You've got this great tension between the auction system that the president supports and the free allowances system that (industry) supports," said Rep. Joe Barton of Texas, the top Republican on the Energy and Commerce Committee.

On the energy panel, Democratic Reps. Jay Inslee of Washington and Mike Doyle of Pennsylvania are developing a plan that would give allowances - or allowance rebates - to heavily affected, energy-intensive industries.

Wells said a cap-and-trade program could require chemical manufacturers to pay for allowances to emit carbon dioxide, encounter higher electricity bills, and spend more to procure petroleum used as a feedstock for other products.

He noted that globally, Dow uses "the energy equivalent of 850,000 barrels of oil every day" - an amount that exceeds oil consumption in some countries, such as Australia and the Netherlands.

Wells urged lawmakers to give away pollution allowances to hard-hit sectors until other countries agree to similar carbon caps as part of an international accord.

Environmental advocates caution that if the federal government gives away too many allowances - or for too long - any new carbon dioxide cap would be undermined.

Why do businesses leave California?

At Reno hearing, businessmen blame fees, taxes and regulators. One calls it "death of a 1,000 cuts."

By Brian Joseph

The Orange County Register, Friday, April 24, 2009

RENO, Nev. – With the economy shrinking in California, a dozen GOP state lawmakers met here Friday to hear why former California businesses have relocated to Nevada.

"We think we know (why), but we want to hear it from the horse's mouth," said Orange County Assemblywoman Diane Harkey, R-Dana Point, referring to California's high taxes and stringent regulations. "I think that businesses are an endangered species (in California)."

Joining them was Nevada's Republican Lt. Gov. Brian Krolicki and at least one Nevada Republican lawmaker, who were said to be there because they wanted to learn what drives businesses out of California and how to avoid doing it themselves.

"I have great respect for you people in California," said Krolicki, who is also chairman of the Nevada Commission on Economic Development, "but you make my job easy sometimes."

Attendees heard from more than a dozen businesspeople who complained of high workman's compensation insurance, "predatory" regulators, an unfriendly business climate, a "never ending paper trail of business forms," exorbitant utility expenses, fees, taxes, quality of life and overpriced overhead.

Randy York said he moved his polyurethane manufacturing business from Huntington Beach to Reno, Nev. in 1987 because he was tired of being "hammered" with regulatory fees from the fire department, the health department, the state Environmental Protection Agency, the California Division of Occupational Safety and Health and the South Coast Air Quality Management District.

He said it got to the point where he was paying \$2,000 or \$3,000 a quarter on fees – for company of 20 employees.

"They were killing us with fees," he said. "Fees, fees, fees."

Alan Jurkonis, president of a company that makes fire hydrant and gate valves, described the "death by thousand cuts" that led his business to leave Fresno for Minden, Nev. in 2007. Shipping to Southern California was cheaper from Nevada than Fresno, land was cheaper too. There wasn't a reason to stay, he said.

Steven Patmont, president of the company that manufactures "California Go-Ped" motorized scooters, said his company left California for Nevada because California doesn't appreciate business. He described how California regulators hit him with hundreds of thousands of dollars of small fines even though his company has a stellar safety record.

"Leave me alone," said Bill Miller, who manufactures racecar parts. Miller told the panel he moved his company from Harbor City to Carson City, Nev. in 1993 to avoid the hassles of California's regulators, who he said sided with disgruntled employees rather than honest businesspeople.

"I shouldn't have to fight these things," he said. "I'm a truthful person."

Much of the hearing was devoted to bashing state regulators like the California Air Resources Board and CalOSHA, but speakers also said they were glad to be rid of California's traffic and crime. The complaints, however, were largely about the business climate.

"I think it's overwhelmingly the business stuff and not the quality of life," said Assembly Republican Leader Mike Villines of Clovis when asked why he thought businesses leave California.

Villines said he was disturbed to hear so many speakers say that no one from California tried to convince them to stay while Nevada officials have helped businesses scout potential factory sites and have generally made themselves available to business people. Villines said the testimony clearly indicates California isn't business friendly.

"I've heard this over and over again," said Orange County Assemblyman Jim Silva, R-Huntington Beach. The Assemblyman said Friday's testimony didn't come as a surprise, but it was important nonetheless because it gives lawmakers ammunition to argue against higher taxes and more stringent regulation.

"I think this will be referred to in committees and on the (Assembly) Floor in arguments (for some time)," Silva said.

Living Next to a Gas Station

El Observador, Friday, April 24, 2009

Despite all the modern health and safety guidelines they must follow, gas stations can still pose significant hazards to neighbors, especially children. Some of the perils include ground-level ozone caused in part by gasoline fumes, groundwater hazards from petroleum products leaking into the ground, and exposure hazards from other chemicals that might be used at the station if it's also a repair shop.

Ozone pollution is caused by a mixture of volatile organic compounds, some of which are found in gasoline vapors, and others, like carbon monoxide, that come from car exhaust. Most gas pumps today must have government-regulated vapor-recovery boots on their nozzles, which limit the release of gas vapors while you're refueling your car. A similar system is used by the station when a tanker arrives to refill the underground tanks. But if those boots aren't working properly, the nearly odorless hydrocarbon fumes, which contain harmful chemicals like benzene, can be released into the air.

Higher ozone levels can lead to respiratory problems and asthma, while benzene is a known cancer-causing chemical, according to the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The quest to reduce ozone levels has led the state of California to implement a more stringent vapor-recovery law, effective April 1, 2009, which requires that all gasoline pumps have a new, more effective vapor-recovery nozzle.

Underground gasoline storage tanks can also be a problem. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that there are some 660,000 of them from coast-to-coast. Many a lawsuit has been filed against oil firms in communities across the country by people whose soil and groundwater were fouled by a gas station's leaking underground storage tank. In the past, most tanks were made of uncoated steel, which will rust over time. Also, pipes leading to the tanks can be accidentally ruptured.

When thousands of gallons of gasoline enter the soil, chemicals travel to groundwater, which the EPA says is the source of drinking water for nearly half the U.S. If buying a home, consider its potential loss in value if a nearby underground storage tank were to leak. Gasoline additives such

as methyl tertiary-butyl ether (MTBE), which has been outlawed in some states, make the water undrinkable-and that is only one of 150 chemicals in gasoline. Repeated high exposure to gasoline, whether in liquid or vapor form, can cause lung, brain and kidney damage, according to the NIH's National Library of Medicine.

Spilled or vaporized gasoline is not the only chemical hazard if the station is also a repair shop. Mechanics use solvents, antifreeze and lead products, and may work on vehicles that have asbestos in brakes or clutches. Auto refinishers and paint shops use even more potentially harmful chemicals.

In today's car-centric world, we can't escape exposure completely, because these chemicals are in our air just about everywhere. But by choosing where we live, keeping an eye out for spills, and pressuring the oil companies to do the right thing for the communities they occupy, we can minimize our exposures.

Bart Installs Enough Solar Panels To Lift a Train Car

El Observador, Friday, April 24, 2009

OAKLAND, CA - BART is celebrating Earth Day by giving its Richmond maintenance shop a massive green make over. Starting today, crews will install 912 photovoltaic solar energy panels on the Richmond maintenanceshop roof-enough panels to generate the power to lift a 25-ton BART car.

The system is estimated to avoid more than 4.4 million pounds of carbon dioxide emissions over 20 years. "Not only will BART host a clean renewable solar energy system, it's replacing the shop's old, outdated lamps with high-efficiency florescent lighting," BART Board President Thomas Blalock said. "Both conservation efforts will save energy and taxpayers money along with reducing our carbon footprint."

"The lighting upgrade will reduce energy use at the shop by one third and result in cost savings of \$107,000 a year," BART Board member Bob Franklin said. Franklin chairs the Board's first Sustainability/Green Committee. "BART's green make over is good for the environment and it's great for local jobs," BART Board Member Lynette Sweet said. Sweet represents District 7, which includes the City of Richmond.

FIRST OF THREE SOLAR PROJECTS

We selected the Richmond maintenance shop because its roof is angled in such a way to catch the best light. In the afternoon when there's peak solar energy, two-thirds of the shop's power will be from the sun. The solar installation in Richmond is the first of three sustainable energy projects that will be installed by Beltsville, Maryland based SunEdison,BART avoided all upfront capital investments and will purchase electricity from SunEdison North America's largest solar energy services provider, at long-term predictably priced rates. "Under a solar power services agreement with SunEdison, the company will also install a solar energy system on the roof of the Hayward maintenance shop and a solar panel canopy in a portion of the Orinda Station's parking lot," BART Board Member Gail Murray said.

Murray represents District 1, which includes the Orinda Station. "During the daylight hours, SunEdison will supply Orinda Station with nearly all its electrical needs." The trains, however, run off a separate power source and will not use the solar-generated electricity.

\$3.4 MILLION SAVINGS

BART projects over the next 20 years it will be able to shave approximately \$3.4 million off its energy costs. That's because this agreement will implement significant ways to reduce energy costs at the maintenance shops. BART Board Member Franklin said, "To BART, everyday is Earth Day. This solar initiative is another example of BART diversifying its power supply from cost-effective, environmentally-sound sources.

People know when they ride BART they are bettering their environment and this initiative underscores our mission to provide an energy efficient way to travel around the Bay Area."

Shell Settles Air Pollution Accusations

By Jad Mouawad, staff writer

N.Y. Times, Thursday, April 23, 2009

The oil company Royal Dutch Shell said Thursday that it had reached a \$5.8 million settlement over claims of air pollution at its Deer Park refinery near Houston.

The proposed settlement would require Shell to reduce emissions from air pollutants from its plant by 80 percent within three years, upgrade chemical units and reduce gas flaring.

The agreement is subject to review by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Justice Department. It must also be approved by the United States District Court for the Southern District of Texas, where the complaint was filed.

Shell was sued last year by Environment Texas Citizen Lobby and the Sierra Club, claiming violations of the Clean Air Act. The suit contended there had been more than a thousand instances of illegal pollution at the plant since 2003, releasing a total of five million pounds of air pollutants into the atmosphere, including toxic chemicals like benzene and 1,3-butadiene, as well as sulfur dioxide and oxides of nitrogen.

The agreement focuses on reducing "upset emissions," which are defined as excess emissions occurring outside of routine operations, like equipment breaking down or malfunctioning, and which are not authorized by permit. Shell said the terms of the settlement were "consistent with Shell Deer Park's objectives and prior activities to reduce upset emissions at the site."

The Deer Park refinery, a 1,500-acre complex on the Houston Ship Channel, about 20 miles from downtown Houston, is the nation's eighth-largest oil refinery and one of the world's largest producers of petrochemicals.

The facility is also the third-largest stationary source of air pollution in Harris County, which ranks among the worst in the nation in several measures of air quality, according to the environmental groups.

Luke Metzger, director of Environment Texas, said the settlement could provide a new benchmark for operations in the petroleum and refining sector. "Shell will set an example for the rest of the industry that you can control these emissions," Mr. Metzger said. "We can exert some pressure for the rest of the industry to similarly start to comply."

The penalty will be used to finance environmental, public health and education projects in Harris County, including a project to reduce diesel emissions from school buses, and another to install solar panels on public buildings, according to a copy of the settlement.

"We urge other oil and chemical companies in the region to take note of Shell's willingness to work constructively with us in developing solutions to the problems at the Deer Park facility — problems that are not unique to Shell," Neil Carman, a clean air specialist at the Sierra Club, said in a statement.

[Sacramento Bee Guest Commentary, Saturday, April 25, 2009:](#)

John DiStasio: SMUD's rate hike means brighter future

By John DiStasio

Nobody likes a rate increase, especially during challenging economic times. Customers of the Sacramento Municipal Utility District are understandably frustrated in light of current financial pressures. It is with this understanding that I feel compelled to offer this perspective.

While the poor economy is certainly a contributing factor, it's not the most significant financial challenge faced by electric utilities such as SMUD. Since SMUD is a not-for-profit utility, we don't need financial margins to generate profits for shareholders, but we do need enough revenue to cover the costs of power and the infrastructure to deliver it. We must be able to pay the debt service on any bonds issued to build the power plants, poles and wires essential to providing

reliable electricity. It's essential that we maintain a strong credit rating to maintain our long-term health in such a capitalintensive business.

We are in midst of a transition to a low-carbon future that will cost money in the near term. State and federal legislation and regulations related to climate change and energy security are creating a path to a greener and energy-independent future.

Electric utilities contribute about 25 percent of California's carbon emissions. Most proposals involve a greater than 80 percent reduction in those emissions by 2050. SMUD is the 17th-cleanest utility in the United States, but nearly 60 percent of our supply is generated from fossil fuels, primarily natural gas.

Reducing our reliance on fossil fuels represents a huge challenge. In the short term, it costs more. But moving toward environmental sustainability and energy independence is the right thing to do.

SMUD needs to find alternative sources of supply that are cleaner while offering the same level of reliability. This transition is creating cost pressures on all utilities since the proven alternatives today are intermittent resources such as wind and solar. The sun shines and wind blows according to nature's schedule. This energy is not necessarily available at the time needed to meet peak demand when energy prices are the highest. These resources are often located long distances from population centers. Transmission lines must be built to transport the power, and the intermittency must be stabilized through storage or backup supplies.

Making the transition now will keep SMUD customers' bills lower in the long term and avoid larger rate increases in the future when the declining fossil fuel supply causes even more market volatility. Fossil fuels have served our community well for decades, but they are a finite resource and carry a serious environmental cost.

Global warming, or climate change, is one impact. Here at home, Sacramento faces a more pressing regional consequence. Sacramento is consistently ranked among the 10 dirtiest air basins in the United States. Power plants are a large contributor to air pollution, and poor air quality affects public health.

SMUD has taken a long view in addressing these challenges incrementally. Coupled with our existing hydroelectric resources, our early investments in renewable resources represent a substantial down payment on a low-carbon future.

In the short term, costs could be artificially suppressed by ignoring pending legislation that will surely add cost to fossil fuels. This approach would defer the problem to a future date when options would likely be limited.

When the leaders of SMUD built the upper American River hydroelectric project more than 50 years ago, they took the long view. They invested in resources that were more expensive at the time. Those resources are now about one-fifth the cost of market power and are clean and sustainable. Had our predecessors focused on the short term, we would not have benefited as a community with some of the lowest electric rates in the state.

Though the proposed rate increase will add about \$8 to the average residential bill, SMUD's rates will remain among the lowest in the state. We will also have made significant progress toward a low-carbon future. We will have addressed our credit rating by improving cash flow.

This is my community, and I want the best balance of reliability, affordability and environmental sustainability. I believe that this can be best be accomplished by taking a long view.

[N.Y. Times commentary, Friday, April 24, 2009:](#)

Don't Waste Time Cutting Emissions

By Bjorn Lomborg

Copenhagen -- We are often told that tackling global warming should be the defining task of our age — that we must cut emissions immediately and drastically. But people are not buying the idea that, unless we act, the planet is doomed. Several recent polls have revealed Americans' growing skepticism. Solving global warming has become their lowest policy priority, according to a new Pew survey.

Moreover, strategies to reduce carbon have failed. Meeting in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, politicians from wealthy countries promised to cut emissions by 2000, but did no such thing. In Kyoto in

1997, leaders promised even stricter reductions by 2010, yet emissions have kept increasing unabated. Still, the leaders plan to meet in Copenhagen this December to agree to even more of the same — drastic reductions in emissions that no one will live up to. Another decade will be wasted.

Fortunately, there is a better option: to make low-carbon alternatives like solar and wind energy competitive with old carbon sources. This requires much more spending on research and development of low-carbon energy technology. We might have assumed that investment in this research would have increased when the Kyoto Protocol made fossil fuel use more expensive, but it has not.

Economic estimates that assign value to the long-term benefits that would come from reducing warming — things like fewer deaths from heat and less flooding — show that every dollar invested in quickly making low-carbon energy cheaper can do \$16 worth of good. If the Kyoto agreement were fully obeyed through 2099, it would cut temperatures by only 0.3 degrees Fahrenheit. Each dollar would do only about 30 cents worth of good.

The Copenhagen agreement should instead call for every country to spend one-twentieth of a percent of its gross domestic product on low-carbon energy research and development. That would increase the amount of such spending 15-fold to \$30 billion, yet the total cost would be only a sixth of the estimated \$180 billion worth of lost growth that would result from the Kyoto restrictions.

Kyoto-style emissions cuts can only ever be an expensive distraction from the real business of weaning ourselves off fossil fuels. The fact is, carbon remains the only way for developing countries to work their way out of poverty. Coal burning provides half of the world's electricity, and fully 80 percent of it in China and India, where laborers now enjoy a quality of life that their parents could barely imagine.

No green energy source is inexpensive enough to replace coal now. Given substantially more research, however, green energy could be cheaper than fossil fuels by mid-century.

Sadly, the old-style agreement planned for Copenhagen this December will have a negligible effect on temperatures. This renders meaningless any declarations of “success” that might be made after the conference.

We must challenge the orthodoxy of Kyoto and create a smarter, more realistic strategy.

Bjorn Lomborg is the director of the Copenhagen Consensus Center at Copenhagen Business School and the author of “Cool It: The Skeptical Environmentalist's Guide to Global Warming.”

[Fresno Bee Smog Blog, Friday, April 24, 2009:](#)

Valley ranks high for dirty air, but not news conferences

By Mark Grossi

The American Lung Association's annual report on air pollution will be available to the public on Wednesday.

I'm asking for the embargoed report, but I have a feeling it will not contain many surprises about the San Joaquin Valley.

Usually, several Valley counties and cities rank among the country's worst 10 for ozone. The particulate matter rankings are just about as bad in some years.

Yet, when the American Lung Association holds its California news conferences, they will be in Los Angeles and San Jose -- not anywhere in the Valley.

[Letter to Valley Times, Friday, April 24, 2009:](#)

Cap and trade

The April 21 letter from your reader claiming that CO2 cap and trade will save the planet has all the usual rhetoric, but no facts. Since the EPA tells us that our air and water quality are better

today than in the 1970s it is not clear that increasing CO2 levels are causing their damage. Over the last 2 million years, CO2 levels usually were more than twice as much as today and the planet survived. Increased CO2 stimulates most types of plant growth while using less water.

Cap and trade, used in Europe, has not reduced CO2 emissions. Only France has done a decent job of controlling CO2 emissions because 80 percent of their electricity comes from nuclear energy.

Cap and trade will make energy for all Americans more expensive, increase the cost of all products made in the USA and take money away from the American people in a stealth tax. The idea that "green jobs" will help our economy is not supported by European studies. They found the loss of 2.2 jobs for every one new "green job" created, at a government cost of \$1 million per job.

If we really care about our children's future we have to think beyond CO2. Chemical pollutants and land use changes are likely to be more important for the environment. Our children will need to have jobs and we need to protect those jobs. Leaving our children with higher prices for everything and an unsupportable national debt is the wrong thing to do.

Gary Peer, Danville

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses assembly member John Perez urges constituents to help take care of California's environment. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Insta el asambleísta, John Pérez a cuidar el medio ambiente californiano

Manuel Ocaño, Noticiero Latino
Radio Bilingüe, Monday, April 27, 2009

Un asambleísta latino de California, el demócrata John Pérez dijo este fin de semana que mientras la legislatura estatal avanza con las mejores iniciativas para proteger el medio ambiente, los californianos pueden contribuir con medidas cotidianas. El legislador dijo también que hay actos que parecen pequeños pero que se convierten en buenas participaciones. California ha impulsado la ley más estricta en el país contra la contaminación del aire, la AB 32, que otros estados toman como ejemplo, y la administración del presidente Barack Obama analiza si la podría tomar como ejemplo también para un reglamento nacional.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses South Asia faces economic disaster due to global warming.](#)

Sudeste Asiático se enfrenta a desastre económico por el calentamiento global

El Diario, Sunday, April 26, 2009

Manila— El Sudeste Asiático, una de las regiones más vulnerables al cambio climático, padecerá graves pérdidas económicas si no frena los efectos del calentamiento global, reveló hoy un informe del Banco Asiático de Desarrollo (BAD).

Si continúa la actual inacción respecto al fenómeno, las pérdidas podrían suponer hasta el seis por ciento del Producto Interior Bruto (PIB) de países como Filipinas, Indonesia, Tailandia o Vietnam.

La seguridad alimentaria se verá amenazada por la caída en la producción de arroz, el aumento del nivel del mar obligará a desplazar a miles de residentes de islas y zonas costeras, y cada vez más personas serán vulnerables a enfermedades como el dengue o la malaria, según la institución multilateral.

"El cambio climático amenaza a las familias, los alimentos y la prosperidad económica del Sudeste Asiático, y lo peor está todavía por llegar", dijo en un comunicado la vicepresidenta para Desarrollo Sostenible del BAD, Ursula Schaefer-Preuss.

Los gobiernos de la zona deben luchar contra el calentamiento global y la actual crisis económica a través de programas de estímulo que también tenga en cuenta la reducción de emisiones contaminantes y la pobreza.

El informe del BAD cita como sectores claves la mejora de los sistemas de tratamiento de agua e irrigación, optimización de cultivos, ahorro energético, protección de bosques y preservación de los arrecifes de coral para garantizar las actividades de pesca.

De llevar a cabo éstas y otras medidas, los países del Sudeste Asiático serán capaces de reducir el nivel de sus emisiones en un 40 por ciento antes de 2020.

"Tienen mucho que ganar y nada que perder si invierten en estas políticas", indicó Schaefer-Preuss.