

Scientist Doing Research at Tulare County Compost

Tulare Voice, Thursday, June 18, 2009

Tulare - A team of university researchers has set up a field laboratory at a Tulare business to determine the most effective ways to reduce the amount of volatile organic compounds (VOC) emitted during green waste composting.

Tulare County Compost & Biomass, 24478 Road 140, volunteered to participate in the study because the San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District is developing Rule 4566, which will establish VOC control requirements for composting businesses.

VOC are of concern because it is the chemical reaction between oxides of nitrogen and VOC in sunlight that creates ozone, according to the Environmental Protection Agency's web site.

"No one could say definitively that if you did this, you could capture 1, 2, or 3; or if you did that, you would capture 50 percent [of the emissions]," said John Jones, operations manager for Tulare County Compost.

Jim Swaney, permit manager for the air district and project manager for the San Joaquin Valleywide Air Pollution Study Agency, agreed, reporting one study looked at a couple mitigation measures but didn't provide the information the air district needs to formulate the rule.

"We wanted to look at multiple variables at the same time – with the same researcher and same samples – which makes it much easier to compare them, Swaney said.

The research team from San Diego State University is headed up by Dr. Fatih Buyuksonmez, director of the environmental engineering program at San Diego State, who Swaney said is nationally known for his research on compost operations.

The team arrived in Tulare on June 5 to set up for the study, which began June 8 and is expected to continue at the site through Sept. 14. A final report is due by the end of the year.

Five Windrows

Dr. Zhimang Gu, a team member doing post-doctoral research, explained the study is an attempt to correlate temperature, moisture and oxygen levels with emissions.

Those are all factors Jones can control in his business, said Robert Horowitz, a senior integrated waste management specialist with the California Integrated Waste Management Board who was observing the study last week.

The field work focuses on five windrows of compost that were formed with different characteristics, including one that is constructed and managed according to Tulare County Compost's normal operations.

A second windrow also mirrors the business' normal operations, but is smaller and has a reduced base width to determine if the size of a pile of compost might affect emissions.

A third windrow is interactively managed in that the compost is turned or watered according to real-time analysis.

The surface of a fourth windrow is kept at a high moisture level for at least several hours prior to the testing and the top of a fifth windrow is covered with four to six inches of finished compost to see if it might digest the emissions filtering up from the new material underneath.

The researchers brought with them high-tech equipment, including a thermal imaging camera, 3-D scanning camera and an RAE Plus hand held multi-gas analyzer.

Saeideh "Sid" Riseh, who is working on her master's degree in environmental engineering, is in charge of the thermal imaging camera, which she operates from a platform lift.

"What I'm supposed to do is find the coldest and hottest point of a pile," Riseh said. After doing this, she guides a second person to mark the emission sampling spots.

With that work done, the team does a 3-D scan of the windrows to determine a number of factors, including the entire surface area and volume.

'Cutting Edge'

The equipment has been used in surveying work but never applied to this type of research, Swaney said, adding its use will tell researchers exactly how big a compost pile is.

"It's going to increase the accuracy of that calculation tremendously," he said.

A probe is used to take the inner temperatures of the windrows at six different points and the multi-gas analyzer determines the oxygen, nitric oxide, hydrogen sulfide and methane concentrations in the interactive windrow.

When compost samples are collected, they are packed in ice and sent to the university, where they undergo further analysis.

Jones said Tulare County Compost always intended to do what needs to be done to help clean the air, but he feels much better knowing the board will rely on this study to find out the most efficient way to do this.

"They're not talking out the side of their neck about something they don't know about," he said.

Horowitz called the research "cutting edge" and praised the team members.

"I hope we can get something we can use to help people like John to reduce the emissions without spending a fortune," he said.

Compost is the cornerstone of sustainable agriculture, Horowitz said. "If the vision for agriculture in this Valley is sustainability, we have to have more compost, not less."

The air district has promoted green waste composting for about 20 years to reduce the amount of methane generated by landfills that use to receive the organic materials, he said.

The San Joaquin Valleywide Air Pollution Study Agency, a joint powers agency that includes the air district, California Air Resources Board and other agencies, has contributed \$200,000 toward the composting study, Swaney said.

The air district has contributed \$30,000, Alameda County Waste Management Authority \$15,000, and the Merced County Regional Waste Management Authority \$5,000.

The California Integrated Waste Management Board approved a \$30,000 contribution to the study in January, but before the contract was executed the governor issued an executive order barring new contracts.

"But the loss of that money doesn't jeopardize that study," Swaney said.

'Cool' auto glass is hot idea

By Jim Downing

Sacramento Bee, Wednesday, June 24, 2009

The state Air Resources Board wants your car to stay a little cooler in the summer sun.

Thursday, the air board is scheduled to vote on its "cool" car rules, which call for newfangled windows to be installed on new passenger vehicles starting with 2012 models. Compared with today's standard windows, the technology would cut the inside temperature of a car parked in the sun by about 12 degrees, federal studies suggest.

Set to roll out in stages, the plan would be another small advance in the state's war on global warming. By keeping vehicle interiors cooler, drivers should save fuel by running their air conditioners less. In addition, automakers may opt to install smaller air-conditioning units in new vehicles.

About 5.5 percent of the fuel burned in the nation's passenger vehicles – 7 billion gallons a year – goes to staying cool.

The new windows would eventually deliver a roughly 1 percent cut in vehicle fuel consumption, air board staff estimate. The board is looking for every reduction it can get as it tries to cut climate-warming emissions back to 1990 levels by 2020, as required under a 2006 state law.

The windshields required under the air board's plan take advantage of the fact that the sun's energy comes to us in two main forms: as visible light waves and as invisible "near-infrared" waves.

Both types of energy can heat up the inside of a car. Blocking a significant amount of the visible light is impractical, because the driver wouldn't be able to see out. But with new technologies – such as incorporating an ultra-thin layer of silver and other metals into the windshield – it's possible to reflect nearly all of the near-infrared waves, cooling the vehicle interior.

The cool cars plan was among the more controversial pieces of the air board's global-warming strategy when first suggested two years ago.

The concept shot into headlines after Robert Sawyer, then chairman of the air board, was fired after he pushed to fast-track the regulation against the wishes of the Schwarzenegger administration.

Early versions of the plan called for paint as well as windows to meet certain solar reflectance standards.

Like the reflective windshields, "cool" paints can turn back near-infrared waves while still absorbing visible light, so it's possible to make even black paint "cooler."

But cool paint technology isn't perfect yet, and automakers chafed at the idea of the air board tinkering with their palettes. The idea was also an easy target for talk-radio hosts and other critics, who lambasted it – unfairly – as a state ban on black-colored cars.

Ultimately, the air board decided that mandating cool paint would be too expensive and require too much of a technological leap to be practical, at least for now.

The latest proposal would require the most advanced window technology only for windshields. Other windows in a vehicle could meet a lower standard that lets in more of the sun's energy.

The regulations would increase car owners' costs by an average of \$111 per new vehicle, according to an air board report. For the average driver, accumulated savings on fuel should exceed those costs after a few years, the report said.

Opponents of the current plan, including some automakers and windshield producers, argue that the air board should delay the implementation of the program to give industry more time to adjust. They also say carmakers should be free to meet the air board's fuel-efficiency objective by means other than cooler windows.

The new windows would be required only on cars sold in California. But there's a good chance automakers would eventually make them standard nationally, in part to comply with new federal fuel-efficiency standards.

The air board will hold a public hearing on the regulation at its meeting at 9 a.m. Thursday in the California Environmental Protection Agency building at 1001 I St.

Debate rages over climate bill's cost, but will it actually work?

By RENEE SCHOOF - McClatchy Newspapers
Modesto Bee, Wednesday, June 24, 2009

WASHINGTON -- How much will it cost the average American household to reduce the U.S. share of global warming pollution and shift to cleaner sources of energy produced at home?

If Congress passes a law that puts the country on a path to that outcome, the answer on costs will depend on what kind of consumer protections are part of the new policy. The House of Representatives could vote on a bill produced by Reps. Henry Waxman, D-Calif., and Ed Markey, D-Mass., this week or after lawmakers return from their July 4 holiday break.

Backers of action to protect the climate are divided on how to do it in the smartest and cheapest way - and especially on what policies will best protect consumers from a loss of spending power as fossil fuel prices rise.

The question of costs is just one slice of the debate. The broader question is whether the bill goes far enough to reduce the share of global warming pollution from the U.S. - the world's biggest emitter on a

per capita basis - and whether this and other U.S. efforts on climate protection will make it more likely that other countries - particularly China, the world's biggest greenhouse gas source - make reductions commitments of their own in international negotiations coming up this December on a global accord.

The bill would reduce U.S. emissions by 17 percent below 2005 levels by 2020 - or about 4 percent below 1990 levels, far short of the 25 percent or more cut by industrialized nations that international scientists recommend. In 2050, the bill would cut emissions by 83 percent below 2005 levels.

The bill's backers say that other parts of the legislation, such as investments to protect forests, would reduce emissions further, and that the Obama administration has gotten a jump on reductions through such separate measures as tighter fuel efficiency and tailpipe emissions standards.

However, some critics said the bill wouldn't reduce emissions of heat-trapping gases because it would let power plants or large factories buy permits to pollute. Some environmental groups said the bill's renewable energy standard, a national requirement for electricity supplies to depend more on renewable energy and efficiency, is too weak. The final negotiations were with rural lawmakers.

If the House passes the bill, the Senate will start putting together its version of climate protection and energy legislation this summer.

The bill would set a mandatory limit on emissions that would be lowered each year. Large sources of emissions such as power plants would have to buy permits for each ton of emissions. Companies could buy and sell the permits as needed, and the market would set the price.

"It's the preferred approach now, it's safe to say, by the private sector and the major environmental groups," said Vicki Arroyo, the executive director of the Georgetown State and Federal Climate Resource Center at Georgetown University.

The Environmental Protection Agency has estimated the allowances prices and figures the total amount would start at \$60 billion in 2012 and increase.

"This is the biggest creation and allocation of property rights since the Homestead Act," a distribution of government lands signed by President Abraham Lincoln in 1862, said James Boyce, an economist at the University of Massachusetts.

Instead of territory, the new property is the right to emit greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, and the question is who owns this right, Boyce said. "People do need to pay attention to this, because if they're asleep when this all gets carved up, they're going to be left paying the prices without getting their share of the revenue."

House Republicans claim it would cost households \$3,100 a year. Their energy proposal wouldn't limit emissions, but would expand nuclear energy and the use of oil and coal.

The independent Congressional Budget Office reported the cost of mandatory emissions cuts in the bill per household would be much less than the Republicans' estimate - \$175 a year in 2020. It also said that households in the lowest 20 percent of income earners would come out ahead by \$40.

The CBO considered both the energy costs households would pay and the benefits they'd get from sharing in the value of emissions permits.

The bill includes policies that would distribute about 55 percent of the value from the sale of permits to consumers indirectly through the regulated utilities that distribute electricity and natural gas and the states.

An alternative approach would require the federal government to sell all the permits and return the proceeds to all Americans on a per capita basis.

Proponents of that approach said the safeguards in the bill before the House are inadequate.

The bill divides up the money to many players, and the last-minute negotiations could result in some changes.

The consumer portions of the spending include:

- The federal government would sell 15 percent of the permits and distribute the revenue to low- and moderate-income consumers through tax credits and electronic payments.
- The value of 32 percent of the pollution permits would go to the regulated utilities that distribute electricity, based on a formula that gives more to utilities with greater dependence on coal. These public utilities would be directed to use the allowances to keep electricity rates low.

Smaller amounts would go to regulated utilities that distribute natural gas and to states to help hold down home heating oil costs.

The non-consumer parts include:

- Money for preventing deforestation and making investments in renewable energy, efficiency and research on how to capture and store greenhouse gas emissions from coal-fired power plants.
- About 20 percent of the permits would go to businesses at no charge. These include industries such as steel that would be harmed by trade with countries that don't have emissions reduction requirements, and businesses such as oil refineries that have appealed for help.

Some critics who favor lump-sum rebates over the system in the bill said they doubt the regulated utilities in all 50 states would manage billions of dollars from permit sales in ways that benefit consumers and not energy companies' shareholders.

Peter Barnes, an environmental entrepreneur who favors direct rebates, said the chances that utility commissions would hold rates down were "not that great." And if they succeeded and rates stayed low, there would still be a downside - people would have no incentive to save electricity, he said.

Barnes prefers government sales of all permits and wiring the money into bank accounts for all Americans with Social Security numbers.

Boyce, the University of Massachusetts economist, also supports that approach. He said that people would only be happy to pay higher prices if they knew money from the climate program was going back to them.

Staffers on the House Energy and Commerce Committee have argued that turning most of the permits' value back to the public would create a transfer of wealth away from coal-dependent regions and that it wouldn't help small-business owners pay for clean energy research or protect jobs.

Deal could lead to passage of greenhouse gas bill

Key Democrats reach agreement that could result in House passage of an environmental bill aimed at slowing the heating of the planet.

Associated Press

in the L.A. Times, Wed., June 24, 2009

Washington -- Key Democrats reached a deal Tuesday that its supporters hope will lead to House passage of the biggest environmental bill in decades, one aimed at slowing the heating of the planet.

Farm-state Democrats won concessions that will delay the Environmental Protection Agency from drafting regulations that could hamper the ethanol industry and will hand the Agriculture Department oversight of potentially lucrative projects to reduce greenhouse gases on farms.

The House is expected to take up the legislation Friday, the first time the chamber will vote on a bill to impose nationwide limits on the gases blamed for global warming emitted from power plants, factories and automobiles.

The breakthrough came hours after President Obama at a news conference called on the House to pass the legislation, and a new EPA analysis showed that it would raise household energy costs on average \$80 to \$111 a year.

The deal concludes weeks of negotiations between the bill's sponsor, Rep. Henry A. Waxman (D-Beverly Hills), and farm-state Democrats, led by Rep. Collin C. Peterson (D-Minn.), who had expressed concern that the bill would cost farmers too much.

Peterson said Tuesday that the agreement secured his vote.

The deal will bar the EPA for five years from including the conversion of forests to crop land when it calculates how ethanol production will contribute to global warming. During that time, the agency will have to conduct a study.

Waxman agreed that the USDA, not the EPA, would oversee efforts to reduce greenhouse emissions on farms.

Jatropha tree examined as a biofuel alternative

By HILARY LEHMAN Hilary Lehman - Associated Press Writer

In the Merced Sun-Star, Wednesday, June 24, 2009

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- What some see as the biofuel of the future starts out as short, thick stems with a few leaves sticking out at sharp angles. But in just a few years, they will be tall, leafy trees with bright green spherical pods spilling their seeds all over the ground.

The jatropha tree doesn't have the name recognition or lobbying clout of corn-based ethanol, but the energy industry is increasingly spending development dollars and examining it as a potentially better biofuel source: It is easier to grow than corn, untied to the food market and free from any carbon dioxide or sulfur emissions.

Biodiesel from jatropha has powered test flights on Air New Zealand and Continental Airlines. It has prompted oil giant BP PLC to partner on jatropha projects in India and Africa.

And here on Florida's Gulf Coast, one jatropha company believes in the trees with such fervor that it calls them the eventual solution to the country's oil problems. But skeptics consider that hyperbole, saying there are still too many questions.

"Jatropha is a perfect crop," said Dave Wolfley, a distribution manager for Fort Myers-based My Dream Fuel. "We have the resources to do away with importing foreign oil."

The numbers, Wolfley believes, are telling: The trees cost \$6 to \$7 each, can be grown 400 to an acre, and produce more than two gallons of oil apiece each season at maturity. Still, it would take a farm about the size of Rhode Island to produce a billion gallons - and the U.S. economy uses more than 50 billion gallons of diesel annually.

My Dream Fuel said it is in negotiations to sell trees to growers in the Big Cypress National Preserve, and environmentalist efforts to reduce cargo ship emissions could open up Florida's maritime market through the Port of Miami. Wolfley even runs his truck on jatropha.

But the company has had trouble convincing Florida growers of the viability and profitability of its vision. Wolfley said even citrus farmers, who have lost much of their crop to disease and cold, aren't willing to take the risk on something new. Jatropha is a low-maintenance, fast-growing plant that doesn't require much watering, he said.

"I thought it would be the easiest thing I've ever done," he said.

The resistance Wolfley faces reflects skepticism within the fuel industry and academia whether jatropha is the savior its growers claim.

Jennifer Holmgren, general manager of renewable energy and chemicals for energy technology firm UOP, which provided the fuel for the airlines' test flights, said jatropha may be the latest biofuel buzzword, but the energy industry must remain objective and look at multiple fuel sources.

It's important to find a fuel source that works with the current infrastructure, Holmgren said. For anything, including jatropha, to be widely used, it needs to work in the current pipeline system, which ethanol does not. And jatropha is only usable in diesel engines.

It will take some time for jatropha to hit the same price point as conventional diesel, UOP spokeswoman Susan Gross said.

Biofuel today usually costs about 80 percent for the feedstock and about 15 percent for refining, Gross said. Jatropha prices are currently high because of its low supply, but in two or three years with more farms growing it, it could reach the same cost as conventional diesel.

Jatropha shows promise, Holmgren said, but so do other biofuel sources such as algae.

"It's not a bad feedstock," she said. "It's just that it's not the answer to all of our prayers."

So far, jatropha has grown mostly overseas in India and Africa. Sham Goyal, an agronomy scientist at the University of California, Davis, said the plant has "very good potential" but that it would take at least five years to determine its commercial viability in the U.S., especially since jatropha can only grow in warmer climates.

Roy Beckford, who studies jatropha as a University of Florida researcher, said the plant can yield more oil than soy or corn. But because it is still essentially a wild plant, yields vary widely, making it an unpredictable commercial crop.

"Not all jatropha is going to perform the same," he said.

Still, some see dollar signs in jatropha's bright green seeds.

Teri Gevinson, owner of the Boca Raton real estate development firm Ascot Development, put 9,500 jatropha plants on parcels of Delray Beach land left vacant by pepper and tomato farmers who could no longer afford rent. She hopes to turn her newest venture, Ag-Oil, into a biofuel provider in six to nine months.

"I think we're going to give farmers a way to make money again," she said.

Air has elevated cancer risk in 600 neighborhoods

By Dina Cappiello, Associated Press

In the S.F. Chronicle, N.Y. Times, Modesto Bee and other papers, Tuesday, June 23, 2009

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Millions of people living in nearly 600 neighborhoods across the country are breathing concentrations of toxic air pollutants that put them at a much greater risk of contracting cancer, according to new data from the Environmental Protection Agency.

The levels of 80 cancer-causing substances released by automobiles, factories and other sources in these areas exceed a 100 in 1 million cancer risk. That means that if 1 million people breathed air with similar concentrations over their lifetime, about 100 additional people would be expected to develop cancer because of their exposure to the pollution.

The average cancer risk across the country is 36 in 1 million, according to the National-Scale Air Toxics Assessment, which will be released by the EPA on Wednesday.

That's a decline from the 41.5 in 1 million cancer risk the EPA found when it released the last analysis in 2006. That data covered 1999 emissions.

"If we are in between 10 in 1 million and 100 in 1 million we want to look more deeply at that. If the risk is greater than 100 in 1 million, we don't like that at all ... we want to investigate that risk and do something about it," said Kelly Rimer, an environmental scientist with the EPA, in an interview with The Associated Press on Tuesday.

Parts of Los Angeles, Calif., and Madison County, Ill., had the highest cancer risks in the nation — 1200 in 1 million and 1100 in 1 million, according to the EPA data. They were followed by two neighborhoods in Allegheny County, Pa., and one in Tuscaloosa County, Ala.

People living in parts of Coconino County, Ariz., and Lyon County, Nev., had the lowest cancer risk from air toxics. The counties with the least toxic air are Kalawao County, Hawaii, and Golden Valley County, Mont.

"Air toxic risks are local. They are a function of the sources nearest to you," said Dave Guinnup, who leads the groups that perform the risk assessments for toxic air pollutants at EPA. "If you are out in the

Rocky Mountains, you are going to be closer to 2 in a million. If you are in an industrial area with a lot of traffic, you are going to be closer to 1100 in 1 million."

The analysis predicts the concentrations of 124 different hazardous air pollutants, which are known to cause cancer, respiratory problems and other health effects by coupling estimates of emissions from a variety of sources with models that attempt to simulate how the pollution will disperse in the air. Only 80 of the chemicals evaluated are known to cause cancer, EPA officials said.

The information is used by federal, state and local agencies to identify areas in need of more monitoring and attention.

The data to be released Wednesday covers pollution released in 2002.

EPA study: 2.2M live in areas where air poses cancer risk

By Brad Heath and Blake Morrison
USA Today, Wednesday, June 24, 2009

The government's latest snapshot of air pollution across the nation shows residents of New York, Oregon and California faced the highest risk of developing cancer from breathing toxic chemicals.

The results, compiled by the Environmental Protection Agency, represent the most sweeping analysis to date of the state of the nation's air. The analysis is based on emissions from 2002, the latest year for which the EPA had detailed estimates of pollution from across the nation.

Called the National-Scale Air Toxics Assessment, or NATA, the study is used by the EPA to identify parts of the country where residents could face the greatest health threats from air pollution.

The assessment found air pollution generally presented high health risks around major cities such as New York and Los Angeles — although some of the counties where the air was even worse were in rural areas of Mississippi and Kentucky.

Almost 2.2 million people lived in neighborhoods where pollution raised the risk of developing cancer to levels the government generally considers to be unacceptable. There, toxic chemicals were significant enough that people who breathed the air throughout their lives faced an extra 100-in-1 million risk of getting cancer.

Many of those people — about 847,000 — lived in New York City. The worst single neighborhood lay between two freeways in Cerritos, Calif., outside Los Angeles. There, the EPA estimated an excess cancer risk of more than 1,200 in 1 million, 34 times the national average.

Pollution threats are still less pronounced than risks such as smoking, says John Walke, clean air director for the Natural Resources Defense Council. Even so, the assessment "shows we have a problem we should expect government to solve by reducing toxic air pollution, because it makes a lot of people sick."

US nixes 40 percent cuts at climate change talks

By Mark Stevenson - Associated Press Writer
in the Merced Sun-Star, Wednesday, June 24, 2009

MEXICO CITY -- President Barack Obama's climate envoy dismissed recommendations that the United States and other developed countries reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases 40 percent by 2020.

"The 40 percent below 1990 (levels) is something which in our judgment is not necessary, and not feasible given where we're starting from, so it's not in the cards," Todd Stern said Tuesday at a conference on global warming.

Stern spoke at the end of the two-day meeting of the Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate, a gathering of 19 nations and the European Union that together produce 80 percent of the world's greenhouse gases. The group, called together by Obama, is trying to build a replacement climate change treaty for the expiring Kyoto Protocol.

A panel of U.N. scientists has recommended that industrial countries cut carbon emissions by 25 percent to 40 percent by 2020 to avoid a catastrophic rise in sea levels, harsher storms and droughts and climate disruptions. Some poorer and island countries are pushing for reductions of as much as 45 percent.

After rejecting that idea, Stern pointed to progress on legislation before the U.S. Congress that would require lesser reductions. He said the Waxman-Markey bill is expected to move to the floor of the U.S. House this week for debate, which he said is "quite good news."

The bill calls for a 17 percent cut in U.S. emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases by 2020 from 2005 levels, and an 83 percent reduction by mid-century. Carbon dioxide, produced by burning coal and other fossil fuels, is the leading manmade greenhouse gas that scientists have linked to global warming.

"That's a very important piece of the overall picture for the United States," Stern said. "The proposal that is reflected in the Waxman-Markey bill is an enormously ambitious proposal for the United States."

Such measures may not be enough to bring agreement on a climate change accord, which the United Nations hopes will be agreed on at a conference in Copenhagen next December.

Stern said that "there are still significant differences between the parties" on emissions levels at the talks that were held just south of Mexico City.

"There's not final agreement on anything yet, but I think we've made some progress," he said. "I do think we'll have a successful agreement in Copenhagen."

But the final document from the Mexico talks indicated only that "many leaders' representatives expressed support for agreeing to a long-term goal by 2050," indicating there wasn't even complete agreement on the idea of emission caps by that late date.

Somewhat more progress was made on financing for emissions reduction, technology and adaptation to climate change.

Mexico's proposal for a "green fund" to which all but the very poorest countries would contribute - and then receive funding for clean energy and environmental projects - appeared to be gaining traction.

Stern voiced support for the proposal, adding that "there are a number of countries that sat around the table that also think it's an interesting idea."

Unlike the current, largely private carbon credit market in which polluting companies pay to offset their emissions, the new, \$10 billion fund would be financed through government contributions and run by a multilateral agency, possibly the World Bank.

Mexico's government said Tuesday that it was open to including carbon credits in the framework of the proposed fund, to make more money available to poor countries to develop cleaner technologies and prepare for climate change phenomena like floods and droughts.

"Mexico's proposals for the 'Green Fund' could be compatible with a link to the carbon credits market, which would allow a significant increase in the amount of funds available," said Adrian Fernandez, head of Mexico's National Ecology Institute.

Environmental activists said that while Mexico's proposal lacks compliance mechanisms to ensure that wealthy countries contribute, it is preferable to the current carbon credits market.

"If the market is what is regulating which activities should be funded, our forests and Antarctic would disappear," said Gustavo Ampugnani of Greenpeace International.

Stern agreed there will be a need for "some sort of mechanism for a more regular provision and a more dependable provision of funding to poor countries."

Norway has suggested a fund financed by proceeds from auctioning emission permits, but Stern said that proposal was "more amenable to some countries than others," without offering any specifics.

State to Monitor Air Pollution From Old Plants Program Could Become National Model, Environmentalist Says

By Rosalind S. Helderman
Washington Post, Wednesday, June 24, 2009

CHESTER, Va., June 23 -- Virginia officials announced Tuesday a groundbreaking initiative to monitor pollution spewed from power plants and other facilities built before passage of the 1970 Clean Air Act.

Gov. Timothy M. Kaine said the pilot program is believed to be the first of its kind in the country. He said the state Department of Environmental Quality will start an in-depth analysis of air quality near three aged plants and plans to survey 15 in all over the next five years.

State officials said the 15 were chosen based on size and proximity to population centers and not because of any suspected problems.

States are required under the law to monitor pollution and crack down on facilities that violate national ambient air quality standards. But only plants built or modified since 1970 are required to install top-notch pollution control equipment, state officials said.

Without proactive monitoring, it has been rare for state officials to find violations at older plants. They estimated it has occurred only a handful of times in the past decade. They said Virginia has 300 air pollution sources older than the federal law; some industrial plants contain more than one such source.

"In the past, if we became aware that someone was violating these national standards, then we would take action," Kaine (D) said. "But there has not been a proactive and systematic effort to go out and identify these grandfathered sources and then work with them to make sure they are complying with all appropriate federal laws."

State officials announced the initiative at Dominion Virginia Power's Chesterfield Power Station, south of Richmond, the company's largest plant in Virginia and one of the first three to be examined. Dominion officials said they plan to cooperate with the new monitoring and were confident it would show that equipment now installed ensures that their older plants are not violating air quality standards.

The other two facilities listed for immediate new monitoring are an American Electric Power plant in Giles County and a MeadWestvaco paper mill in Covington. Executives with those companies said they welcome the scrutiny and have been monitoring some of the data the state will track.

The state will check air quality near the facilities for emissions of sulfur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide and particulates.

Frank O'Donnell, president of the national group Clean Air Watch, called the initiative a positive step toward finding overlooked pollution. He said it could become a national model.

Frank Rambo, a senior attorney with the Southern Environmental Law Center, based in Charlottesville, said Kaine's successor -- to be elected in November -- should continue the initiative.

"Pollution that's emitted in Virginia largely stays in Virginia," Rambo said. "It's our own back yard, and we need to clean it up."

FACT CHECK: Obama's words about Iran get tougher

By Robert Burns, Associated Press Writer

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Wednesday, June 24, 2009

WASHINGTON—President Barack Obama described himself on Tuesday as being "entirely consistent" in his expressions of concern about the disputed Iranian election and the government crackdown that followed street protests. But his language clearly has gotten tougher since his first statement that the suppression of dissent was "of concern to me."

In Tuesday's news conference, Obama was asked whether he had soft-pedaled his public reactions to postelection unrest in Iran. The president correctly recalled that he had initially expressed deep concern about the election. And he has consistently made the point that he would not allow the Iranians to use the American government as a foil to undermine the legitimacy of the protesters.

Obama shifted some of his emphasis to condemnation of the violence. In a June 16 statement, for example, he said suppression of peaceful dissent "is of concern to me." On Tuesday he was more

forceful, saying the U.S. is "appalled and outraged by the threats, beatings and imprisonments" of protesters. And he cited the "searing image" shown on TV of a female Iranian protester "bleeding to death on the streets."

A look at some of Obama's other claims Tuesday:

OBAMA: Speaking about a climate bill coming up for action in the House this week, he said: "At a time of great fiscal challenges, this legislation is paid for by the polluters who currently emit the dangerous carbon emissions that contaminate the water we drink and pollute the air that we breathe."

THE FACTS: Carbon dioxide is not directly harmful to humans' air and water in the way of traditional pollutants, such as sulfur dioxide or mercury. Carbon dioxide has no direct effect on drinking-water quality, but is likely to affect how much is available. Carbon dioxide in itself is not harmful when inhaled in normal amounts, but increased warming from carbon dioxide increases harmful smog.

The gas that is exhaled every time a person breathes, and released by the burning of fossil fuels, is primarily considered a pollutant because as it builds up in the atmosphere it raises the temperature of the planet.

Research has shown that the warmer temperatures caused by the buildup of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases can reduce the amount of oxygen in lakes, rivers and reservoirs making it difficult for fish and other living things to survive. The increased rainfall expected to come with global warming could also wash more pollutants into waterways, but more rain could also dilute pollution such as pesticides, sediment and fertilizer.

When it comes to air pollution, warmer temperatures can worsen smog and other air-quality problems.

But carbon dioxide itself does not taint water or pollute the air. It is the warming it contributes to that can.

OBAMA: "We must preserve what's best" in overhauling the current health care system, and that means "allowing Americans who like their doctor and their health care plan to keep them." He added: "If your employer is providing you good health insurance, we're not going to mess with it."

THE FACTS: This is a pledge that's beyond the president's power to keep. Health care coverage for 160 million people is provided by employers, and Obama's plan leaves companies free to change their health plans in ways that workers may not like, or to drop insurance altogether. In addition, his health care plan is only that—an idea proposed by the administration—and is subject to reworking by Congress. A preliminary analysis by the Congressional Budget Office estimates that a Democratic plan being worked on in the Senate would force 10 million Americans to seek new coverage because their employers would no longer offer it.

Obama acknowledged employers would be free to change what they offer employees, and said his pledge is limited to what the government would do if a health care overhaul is enacted. But he added that leaving the health care system untouched would lead to ever-escalating costs and the likelihood that employers would drop coverage. "That's exactly why health reform is so important," he said.

OBAMA: Taxpayers would not have had to bear the burden of bailing out companies such as insurance giant American International Group Inc. if the federal government had the legal ability to unwind large failing companies in the same way that the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. can use banking industry money to pay the costs of intervening in failing banks. "We want that power to be available so that taxpayers aren't on the hook," he said.

FACT: The administration has indeed proposed a plan to take over and either liquidate or restructure large interconnected companies whose failure could damage the economy. Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner said the costs of such an action would be recouped over time by assessing a fee to other large institutions. But as Sen. Mark Warner, D-Va., pointed out last week, taxpayers would still have to cover

the costs of such an expensive intervention until the industry fees are collected. During that period, taxpayers would be on the hook.

OBAMA: Speaking about his struggle to kick smoking, the president said: "Have I fallen off the wagon sometimes? Yes." But he added, "Am I a daily smoker, a constant smoker? No. I don't do it in front of my family. And, you know, I would say that I am 95 percent cured."

THE FACTS: It's hard to say how "cured" someone is when they're still trying to kick the habit. Obama promised to quit his one-time five-smoke-a-day average during the campaign, at the urging of his wife.

Brain research proves nicotine is powerfully addicting. Seventy percent of smokers say they want to stop, but only about 35 percent try in any given year. The National Institute on Drug Abuse says three-quarters who try relapse within six months. It usually takes repeated attempts to completely quit long-term and using various treatments such as nicotine patches or gum can work better than going it alone. NIDA cites research that shows extended smoking cessation care can help half of quitters stay cigarette-free at one year.

Court rejects power plant permit for SW Arkansas

By Chuck Bartels, AP Business Writer

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Wednesday, June 24, 2009

LITTLE ROCK, Ark.—The Arkansas Court of Appeals ruled Wednesday that state regulators didn't adequately review plans for a \$1.6 billion coal-fired power plant in Hempstead County and rejected a permit allowing its construction.

If the Southwestern Electric Power Co. wants to reapply for a permit, the Arkansas Public Service Commission must conduct a new hearing on whether the plant is necessary and meets other regulatory requirements, the court said.

Preliminary construction has been going on for months at the plant site near Fulton in Hempstead County.

Writing for the court, Judge Karen Baker said the commission failed to comply with requirements for issuing a certificate of environmental compatibility and public need. The court also said the PSC "erred by failing to resolve conflicts in the testimony, that its decision was arbitrary, and is not supported by substantial evidence."

It said a study that SWEPCO cited when deciding where to place the plant provided "little if any support." According to the court, the study ranked the area as seventh-best on a list of 10 potential sites.

Nearby landowners, including the Hempstead County Hunting Club Inc., argued among other things that the John W. Turk Jr. plant would damage the environment.

Paul Suskie, the chairman of the state's Public Service Commission, did not immediately respond to a call for comment Wednesday. An official with SWEPCO said he hadn't yet seen the opinion. SWEPCO is a subsidiary of Columbus, Ohio-based American Electric Power, among the largest electric utilities in the country. It has 111,000 customers in Arkansas and 340,000 more in Louisiana and Texas. Regulators in those states had already approved the plant, which would affect ratepayers there.

A concurring opinion by Judge Josephine Linker Hart said SWEPCO failed to demonstrate need for the plant. She also wrote that the PSC was wrong to have not allowed Entegra Power Group LLC to have a role in the proceeding. Entegra has a "large, highly efficient combined gas-fired plant" in El Dorado that could be used as a power source for SWEPCO customers.

"It defies understanding that the APSC could not find good cause to allow Entegra to intervene in the Turk Plant proceeding to determine the viability of SWEPCO purchasing power from Entegra and thereby eliminating SWEPCO's need to build a coal-fired generating facility in Hempstead County," Hart wrote.

Hart noted that the cost of the plant, which is about 15 miles from the Texas border, would be borne by ratepayers "because the profit (from selling power to other utilities) is not shared with ratepayers."

A separate decision that's pending for the plant is one from the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality on an appeal of its grant of an air-quality permit.

Wasilla, Houston sue to halt Knik bridge delay

The Associated Press

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Wednesday, June 24, 2009

ANCHORAGE, Alaska—The cities of Wasilla and Houston have sued to block an Anchorage policy committee from considering a proposal to delay a bridge across Knik Arm.

A technical committee has suggested a delay in construction until after 2018.

A policy committee, part of Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation Solutions, the official transportation and air quality planning organization, is scheduled to take up the question Thursday.

The mayors of the two Matanuska-Susitna Borough cities say the bridge has regional significance.

The lawsuit seeks a restraining order preventing the decision-making policy committee from acting on the recommendations for 10 days.

[The Bakersfield Californian, Commentary, Wednesday, June 24, 2009:](#)

Idiots blowing it on 4th of July

By Lois Henry, Californian columnist

Last summer I called for a ban on personal fireworks.

Hoo boy! The reaction was swift and furious.

I was called a Nazi, hysterical, told I should move out of Kern County and likened to a "sheeple."

You'd think I would have learned from that experience, but no. I'm hard-headed that way.

We absolutely must BAN ALL PERSONAL FIREWORKS.

Perhaps you feel that would impinge on your freedom.

Yes, it would.

And that's too bad.

But we've gone well past the tipping point where "safe and sane" fireworks are used responsibly versus morons endangering large swaths of the community so they can make things go boom.

In other words: Your freedom to explode stuff shouldn't trump my freedom NOT to have my house burn down.

Other communities have banned personal fireworks and their worlds did not collapse. The charities that relied on proceeds from fireworks sales found other ways to make money, people found other ways to celebrate, enforcement against illegal fireworks became easier and so on.

Rest assured, however, the political landscape on this issue hasn't changed over the last year.

The only local politician who supports a ban is Councilwoman Sue Benham (her main issue is [air quality](#)).

Councilman Harold Hanson continues to support the use of personal fireworks on the grounds of tradition.

"It's a patriotic deal for me," Hanson said.

Even if the city did ban personal fireworks, it wouldn't work without the county joining in, Councilman David Couch reminded me.

Nope, I got no takers over at the county either.

"I'm for fireworks," Kern County Supervisor Mike Rubio told me. "It's one of the greatest celebrations we have as a nation."

Supervisor Mike Maggard said the focus should be on curbing illegal fireworks and Supervisor Don Maben said he would only support a ban if the Fire Chief told him it was absolutely necessary for the sake of safety.

Fire Chief Nick Dunn wasn't ready to go there.

"If they're used as intended, I don't think fireworks are a hazard," he said.

That's the problem (well, that and the unbelievable number of illegal fireworks brought in for the "festivities).

Bakersfield City Fire Chief Ron Frazee has unapologetically led the crusade to ban personal fireworks here.

"Yup, I've been singing the same song for about 11 years now," he said. Frazee and I both believe the professionally run shows should continue. Perhaps we could even have more and make them more cost-friendly for families.

But we have to get incendiary devices out of the hands of the masses, who might be the nicest folks you'll ever meet in broad daylight but whose "brains fly out their backsides," as Bakersfield Fire Capt. Ed Watts cogently noted, when the sun goes down and they get ahold of a little cardboard and gunpowder.

Last year, 30 teams of firefighters and law enforcement spent the 4th of July racing around metro Bakersfield responding to hundreds of calls and scanning the skies for tell-tale streaks from bottle rockets and Roman candles.

Watts expects this year will be much like last, when the following happened:

- More than 60 citations were written (that doesn't include those issued by regular engine crews).
- Six people were arrested.
- More than 1,000 pounds of illegal fireworks were seized.
- There were five fireworks-related fires (including two houses).
- At least one person suffered a severe eye injury.
- And there was one armed robbery of a fireworks stand.

Happy Birthday, America!