

## Wood for Fuel: Kern biomass projects would throw a log on state's alternative fuels drive

By John Cox, Californian staff writer  
Bakersfield Californian, Sunday, Sept. 27, 2009

Something as simple yet subtle as burning wood to make heat is bringing together Kern's two biggest industries -- oil and agriculture -- at the leading edge of California's push for more renewable energy.

Two multimillion-dollar projects proposed in the area would generate steam for oil production by combusting biomass, in this case mostly waste wood and tree trimmings from local agriculture and urban sources. One of the plants would also produce enough electricity to power 47,000 average homes after its conversion from being coal-fired.

Companies involved boldly hope to make money in an endeavor researchers say has for decades proved uniquely challenging, particularly because renewable sources are often pricier and harder to get than coal and other nonrenewables.

Recently assistance has come from Sacramento in the form of emissions rules and requirements that electric utilities buy more of their power from plants that run on renewable resources.

Even if biomass plants like these do get special consideration in the energy marketplace, they earn it by diversifying utilities' fuel base and by generating power 24 hours a day, something wind and solar do not, said Mike Marelli, director of renewable contracts at Southern California Edison, the nation's leading utility in terms of the size of its renewables portfolio, which was 7 percent biomass last year.

He and others familiar with the technology said Kern's wealth of constantly rotating farmland is key to the projects' financial viability.

"If you have a fuel source and you need to get rid of it, it's a great combination: ... the ag waste issue (and) producing renewable energy," Marelli said.

The two projects would add to a very small number of California biomass generators of steam for oil production. They could solidify Kern's growing reputation as a place for innovation in alternative energy, when viewed in the context of other recent and proposed large investments in solar power, wind turbines and hydrogen energy in the county.

### Pricey plans

Mt. Poso Cogeneration Co. plans to spend \$50 million retooling its 20-year-old, 50-megawatt-per-hour plant near Bakersfield, which creates steam by burning coal and petroleum coke. The steam helps draw out thick Kern crude from oil wells owned by the same group of investors. As a "cogen" facility, the company also generates electricity, and Pacific Gas and Electric Co. announced last week it has signed a 15-year contract to buy Mt. Poso's biomass-powered energy once it converts to a 44-megawatt biomass plant, expected to be complete in 2012.

Mt. Poso partner Michael Hawkins said the company had little choice but to convert to biomass, since new emissions regulations would have almost certainly shut down the coal-fired operation. But as an ag waste burner, he said, the owners expect to recover their investment within 10 to 20 years.

Mt. Poso helps PG&E meet Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's executive order calling for 33 percent of the state's energy to come from renewable sources by 2020. PG&E finds the plant especially advantageous because it already exists, making it a good deal among renewable power sources.

"We would definitely like to see more" projects like Mt. Poso's, said PG&E's director of renewable energy policy and strategy, Aaron Johnson.

The other biomass project proposed in Kern is a \$5.5 million demonstration project that Vancouver-based Global Green Solutions Inc. is building in Kern's Belridge area for Aera Energy LLC, a large Bakersfield-based oil producer that also does steam injection. Aera is putting \$3 million into the pilot project, which is now under construction and is on track for completion next year. Aera plans to order 10 more plants if the first meets its requirements.

The chief operating officer of the Global subsidiary involved in the deal, Craig Harting, said Aera doesn't need the plants to produce electricity, and so the energy will be more efficiently directed toward producing steam. He said it will use a relatively clean process to burn waste from local growers of citrus, stone fruit and nuts.

"Our strategy is to find things that don't have much other use," he said.

Air pollution created by power plants burning ag waste is comparable to that of coal-fired plants permitted in California, San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District officials say. But they add that this kind of biomass is preferable to coal because it spews less sulphur oxide and certain other pollutants, and the carbon it releases into the air is captured in the plant's growth. Unlike fossil fuels, biomass does not reintroduce carbon buried long ago.

#### Getting the fuel

Farmers are generally happy to sell or give away biomass they used to incinerate out in the open, in many cases, before new regulations came along that the air district says have cut ag burning by 75 percent since 2004.

But farmers and energy producers have not always worked together well. Seasonal changes in agriculture have at times starved biomass generators. And farmers have sometimes had trouble competing with urban wood waste from Los Angeles, said the director of environmental affairs for the California Farm Bureau Federation, Cynthia Cory.

Harting at Global said the Belridge project would run on 100 percent ag waste. Hawkins at Mt. Poso said his company expects to get half its biomass fuel from agriculture and half from urban sources including commercial and residential wood scrap. These materials are typically gathered and sold by municipalities that are under regulatory pressure to keep the waste out of landfills by composting or turning them biomass fuel.

A big user of Kern's urban and ag wood waste these days is a 50-megawatt biomass power plant in Delano that generates enough electricity for 50,000 average homes, making it a little more powerful than the Mr. Poso project would be, except that the Delano plant produces no steam for oil production.

Owner AES Delano Energy Corporation Inc. says the plant consumes more than 580,000 tons of wood waste a year from Kern and Tulare counties, mostly from orchards. It also takes in tens of thousands of tons of urban wood waste, about 40 percent of the total generated in unincorporated Kern.

#### Looking forward

Despite the success in Delano, many of California's 30 or so commercial biomass plants have had a hard time, said Stephen Kaffka, director of the California Biomass Collaborative and an extension agronomist with the Department of Plant Sciences at the University of California, Davis.

"It's marginal," he said. "It's not like it's printing money." Kaffka added that there may be hope in new work being done now by one of the university's graduate students, who he said is working on the financing and engineering of conversion projects like Mt. Poso's.

Indeed, such conversions may hold particular promise, said Chris Zygarlicke, deputy associate director for research at the Energy and Environmental Research Center, a 340-person firm below the University of North Dakota. He agreed with Kaffka that simple combustion such as what's proposed in Kern seems to work best, but predicted that finding enough biomass fuel locally could yet become a challenge for a plant the size of Mt. Poso.

Zygarlicke also said nowhere across the country is biomass succeeding without some kind of government help. Given the state's framework of incentives and regulations, "if California can't do it, nobody'll be able to do it," he said.

The partner at Mt. Poso, Hawkins, voiced optimism for the industry's future. But he said the industry ultimately will have to survive without special government support.

"I think eventually the technology will drive costs down, and make renewable energy more competitive. I don't think we have a choice," he said. "If it doesn't, I don't think we can sustain this kind of (cost-benefit) disparity in the long run."

## **Valet parking debuts at Lincoln**

Taft Midway Driller, Friday, Sept. 25, 2009

Taft, Calif. - Valet parking at school sounds like something you'd find at an exclusive private academy.

But it's right here in Taft at Lincoln Junior High School.

It's not a luxury, though.

It's a solution to safety and traffic congestion problems along Sixth Street in the morning.

Students from Lincoln's leadership class do the actual work, guiding cars in from Sixth Street through the parking lot at the north end of the campus where parents drop their kids off then proceed east to Fourth Street.

The program started two weeks ago and is in effect each school day morning from 7:15 a.m. until 7:35 a.m.

The program has been in operation for several days and is a success already.

"What I'm hearing from the parents is they think it's a great idea," said Roland Maier, assistant principal.

Taft Police Officer Casey Ray, the school resource officer for the Taft City School District, said it is already making a big improvement on the flow of traffic in the morning.

"Everything is moving a lot smoother," Ray said. "It's going to alleviate a lot of congestion."

It's also cut down on the number of tickets Ray and other officers are writing.

"The number of citations for parking violations have gone way down," he said. "But we're still writing a lot of speeding tickets."

The students who do the work like it, too, Maier said.

Right now students in the leadership class are donning the bright orange vests to guide cars in and open doors, but other students have asked to take part.

"These kids have been real receptive and take it very seriously," Maier said. "We've got a real good group of kids here."

Ray brought the idea to the school after hearing about it from Shafter Police, who adopted the program from the Bakersfield Police Department.

## **100-degree high ties Fresno record for date Cooldown for the Valley expected to start next week.**

By Eddie Jimenez

The Fresno Bee, Sat., Sept. 26, 2009

Relief from the Valley's unseasonably high temperatures and poor air quality is on the way, but not before a weekend of highs near or above 100 degrees.

"We're still looking at dry, hot conditions," said Modesto Vasquez, meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Hanford.

Friday's high in Fresno was 100 degrees, he said, tying the record for Sept. 25 set in 1978. That is well above the average highs this time of the year, which are in the upper 80s.

Today and Sunday are expected to be even hotter, with 102 forecast for both days, he said, though records likely won't be challenged.

The record high for Sept. 26 is 107 set in 1963 and for Sept. 27 is 105 recorded in 1888.

Air quality will be unhealthy for sensitive groups today in Fresno, Madera and Tulare counties. Kings County will have moderate air quality.

Overnight lows this weekend will range in the 60s around the Valley.

Daytime highs will begin tumbling considerably Monday when a system off the Pacific Ocean moves into the Valley, Vasquez said.

Fresno residents can expect a 93 on Monday, 85 on Tuesday and 80 on Wednesday.

Breezes from the system should improve the Valley's air quality, Vasquez said.

A slight chance of showers in the Sierra is forecast for Monday afternoon and evening. Overnight lows early next week should dip into the 50s and lower 60s.

## **Calif. bans high-emission paint thinners, solvents**

By Samantha Young - Associated Press Writer

In the Modesto Bee, S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Friday, September 25, 2009

SACRAMENTO, Calif. -- California air regulators approved strict regulations Thursday for aerosol air fresheners, paint thinners and solvents as a way to lessen smog-forming emissions and reduce a health threat.

The state Air Resources Board voted 8-0 to ban the sale of products that emit high levels of so-called volatile organic compounds. The rules are the toughest state mandate in the nation and will take effect Dec. 31, 2013.

Regulators say the emissions from those household products increase ozone gas in the atmosphere, a main component of smog. The emissions also contribute to asthma and cancer cases, according to a report prepared by air board staff.

"Consumer products are not widely recognized as a source of air pollution," James Goldstene, the board's executive officer, said in a statement. "But the millions of times a day these are sprayed, poured and painted generate a large cloud of fumes that can create ozone and contribute to California's smog problem."

Industry representatives asked the board, which met in the Southern California city of Diamond Bar, to give them more time to meet the higher standards.

"Researching, developing new product formulas will take at least three years," said Joseph Yost, a director at the Consumer Specialty Products Association. "This is not a monolithic group of products."

Under the regulation, paint thinners and solvents could not contain more than 30 percent of their weight in volatile organic compounds by 2010. The industry would have another three years to get to the tougher standard of 3 percent.

Air fresheners could contain just 20 percent of the compounds by 2012.

In addition, any reformulated product could not emit large volumes of gases that contribute to global warming.

Doug Raymond, a consultant representing WM Barr & Co., a major supplier of solvents and paint thinners, said the requirements will force manufacturers to use acetone, which is highly flammable.

"Our first concern is the fire risk to the consumer," Raymond said.

Board staff said new labeling requirements would inform buyers about the products so they could store and use them appropriately.

In March, a regulatory body in Southern California enacted a similar rule that will take effect on a faster timetable - in January 2011. Environmental groups and public health advocates lobbied the air board unsuccessfully to match the earlier deadline.

Staff scientists at the Air Resources Board said they wanted to give manufacturers more time to make less costly and safer products.

Under the regulations, the cost of a gallon of paint thinner or solvent is expected to rise by \$1.50. Air fresheners would not increase in price, the board found.

## **Calif. OKs fee to pay for global warming program**

By Samantha Young, Associated Press Writer

In the Contra Costa Times, S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Friday, September 25, 2009

SACRAMENTO, Calif.—Despite industry objections and threats of lawsuits, California air regulators on Friday approved the nation's first statewide carbon fee on utilities, oil refineries and other polluting industries.

The money raised by the California Air Resources Board, which voted 9-0, is intended to pay for the bureaucratic expenses of carrying out the state's 2006 global warming law, which requires greenhouse gas emissions statewide to be reduced by 25 percent over the next decade.

"It's never pleasant to be in the position of asking consumers to pay," chairwoman Mary Nichols said at the board's meeting in the Southern California city of Diamond Bar. "While we asking for investments here, these are investments being made as our economy begins to come back from the worst recession since the Great Depression."

The fee will be imposed at the end of 2010 and raise \$63.1 million annually during its first three years. The amount will level off at \$36.2 million in the fifth year.

Oil companies, manufacturers and utilities complained regulators had unfairly singled them out, leveling the fee on just 350 businesses in the state. Some business leaders also questioned the timing of the fee, which is being imposed while California endures a 12.2 percent unemployment rate, the highest on record.

"Given the economic climate, we believe it is extremely unwise to ask businesses to pay more government fees," said Jacque McMillan, a member of the Valley Industry Commerce Association, which represents businesses in the San Fernando Valley.

Republican gubernatorial candidate Meg Whitman earlier this week drew the ire of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger when she described the 2006 law he signed as a "job-killing" regulation. She said would suspend it if elected governor until its effects on the economy are better understood.

Part of the fee would cover the salaries of 174 people hired to implement the law since Schwarzenegger signed it.

About 350 businesses in California that make, sell or import gasoline, diesel, natural gas and coal would be charged roughly 15 cents for every ton of carbon dioxide that they and their customers emit into the atmosphere.

The average refinery would pay about \$4.7 million and the average cement plant would pay about \$150,000 a year, said Jon Costantino, manager of the climate change planning section at the air board. Cement plants would be subject to the fee because the chemical process they use to make cement produces greenhouse gases.

The charge would drop to 9 cents per ton of carbon dioxide in 2014 because loans approved in past years by the Legislature to initially run the program would be paid.

Regulators say the industries asked to pay the fee represent the starting point for roughly 85 percent of California's greenhouse gas emissions. For example, refineries process the fuel that California drivers put into their cars, and utility plants generate the electricity used to cool and heat the homes of the state's 38 million people.

The approach won the endorsement of environmentalists and public health groups who have long blamed industry for making products that pollute the air and sicken residents.

"California taxpayers have already borne the burden of this economy," said Bill Haller, a volunteer with the Sierra Club of California. "It's time for the polluter to pay for the pollution. They created it, they profited from it, and they should pay for it."

Oil companies and several utilities argued the fee unfairly holds them accountable not just for their own emissions but also for those generated by people who use their products. They also warned that regulators were proposing a fee that violates federal commerce laws by assessing a state fee on gasoline and electricity exports.

"There will be potential federal court challenges on the Commerce Clause because you're assessing fees on fuels going to other states—Nevada, Arizona and Texas," said Catherine Reheis-Boyd, chief operating officer at the Western States Petroleum Association.

Regulators say industry could pass along the fee to consumers by raising their prices. For example, a family restaurant would see an increase of about \$17 a year in its electricity and natural gas costs. The extra cost to each Californian to fuel a car that gets 30 miles per gallon would be about 80 cents a year.

A few local government entities have adopted similar fees. Last year, air regulators in the San Francisco Bay area imposed a 4.4-cent-per-ton carbon fee on businesses that emit greenhouse gasses. In 2006, voters in Boulder, Colo., imposed a carbon tax on their own energy use.

## **Schwarzenegger backs strong state climate bill**

By Kelly Zito, staff writer

S.F. Chronicle, Friday, September 25, 2009

Despite calls to suspend California's aggressive plan to slash greenhouse gas emissions, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger Thursday insisted that the state's work to combat climate change must soldier on.

"No single issue threatens the health and prosperity of our nation (more) than climate change," Schwarzenegger said during an appearance at San Francisco's Commonwealth Club.

While a "stalemate goes on" in Washington, Schwarzenegger said California must "push forward to finish the job."

Since enacting the nation's first plan to curb emissions from cars, ships, landfills, power plants and other sources, state policy makers have already adopted programs that are expected to erase about 70 million tons of carbon dioxide and other gases by 2020. That equals 40 percent of the goal set out by AB32, the governor said Thursday.

Under the law, known as the Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006, the state must trim greenhouse gases by a total of 174 million tons over the next 11 years, essentially rolling emissions back to 1990 levels.

The remaining emissions controls are expected to include a cap-and-trade system, which sets an emissions limit and requires companies to buy credits that would allow them to pollute above the limit. The credits would pay for such carbon offsets as renewable energy and tree planting.

Schwarzenegger said the success of the economy and environment relies heavily on AB32.

"One hundred and fifty years ago, the Industrial Revolution ushered in a new era," he said. "Today, green technology will do the same."

Amid bruising budget cuts and legislative deadlock over an overhaul of California's water system, AB32 is also seen as a rare bright spot on the governor's recent track record. Next week, Schwarzenegger is co-hosting the second "Governors' Global Climate Summit" in Los Angeles - a lead-up to December's international climate talks in Copenhagen.

Even while the governor celebrated the third anniversary of California's climate bill, some took shots at the measure. Republican gubernatorial candidate Meg Whitman said Wednesday that if elected, she would immediately shelve AB32. Whitman, the former chief executive at Silicon Valley's eBay, joined other conservatives who say the law is having a chilling effect on the state's economy.

"We have too many overreaching environmental regulations that have left us at an economic disadvantage to our neighboring states and AB32 is a prime example," Whitman said.

Schwarzenegger, whose term ends in 2010, dismissed such remarks as "rhetoric."

"I'm sure she doesn't want to be counted as one of those Republicans who wants to move us back to the Stone Age," he said.

## **Top state emitters of greenhouse gases face fees**

By Wyatt Buchanan, staff writer

S.F. Chronicle, Saturday, September 26, 2009

Sacramento -- Companies that produce large amounts of greenhouse gases will have to pay new state fees under a decision made Friday - a key step in California's far-reaching program aimed at slowing global climate change.

Right now the fees affect only about 350 companies, but experts say they are an important move in averting some of the most catastrophic possible results of climate change.

The California Air Resources Board voted unanimously in favor of the fees, which will raise \$63 million next year for monitoring and regulating greenhouse gases as required by AB32, the Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006.

"This is a necessary step for California to continue its implementation of the nation's first-ever statewide cap on global warming pollution," said Bill Magavern, director of Sierra Club California.

The decision, made at a meeting in Los Angeles County, follows in the path of the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, which became the first in the country to put a fee on large greenhouse gas producers last year. Local air-quality officials use the money to monitor the gases.

The fee will apply to major utilities as well as producers or users of natural gas, gasoline and diesel fuels, electricity, coal and cement. It will cost some companies, such as PG&E, millions of dollars per year, while others will pay tens of thousands of dollars.

The air board expects the fees to be passed through to consumers, who will see minimal costs, including about 77 cents per year in increased electricity and natural gas expenses and 80 cents per year for fuel for a vehicle.

### **'Pay as you go'**

Yet owners of a restaurant, for example, should expect increased costs of about \$17 per year. An office with 100 employees will see about \$9 in increased costs over a year, and a full-service grocery store about \$120, according to the air board.

"If you're going to start a new program, I think it makes a lot of sense to be asking that it is a pay-as-you-go program, and that's what we're doing here," said Mary Nichols, chairwoman of the board, who added that the action is an acknowledgment that limiting greenhouse gases will come with a price. The Legislature had required the board to create such a fee.

Those affected by the fee, including large companies that are part of the Western States Petroleum Association, told the board that they did not necessarily oppose the fees.

### **Suit seeks records**

But that organization, along with 10 others, sued the air board for more documentation of how the staff calculated the cost for monitoring and regulating the gases.

"We believe that in order to adequately implement AB32, we need to know what the true costs are going to be," said Shelly Sullivan, executive director of the AB32 Implementation Group, a coalition made up of the organizations that filed suit. Sullivan said the group wants yearly audits and reviews of the fee program.

A judge ruled in favor of the air board last week, but an appeal is likely. Ellen Peter, the air board's chief counsel, called the complaints overstated.

### **State making progress**

AB32 calls for the state's emissions to drop to 1990 levels before 2020. On Thursday, the governor announced the state is 40 percent of the way to that goal, thanks to decisions such as implementing a low-carbon fuel standard.

There is still more to do. Regulators will eventually decide, for example, how to implement something like a cap-and-trade program, which would require companies to limit emissions at a certain level.

Companies that exceed those levels would have to buy credits.

## **Solo hybrid drivers may lose carpool lane privileges Stickers allowing them in HOV lanes expire Jan. 1, 2011, but only the most economical may get extensions.**

By Martin Zimmerman, staff writer  
L.A. Times, Monday, Sept. 28, 2009

The days may be numbered for hybrid car owners who have enjoyed traveling solo in California's carpool lanes.

The stickers granting that privilege to 85,000 hybrid owners are set to expire Jan. 1, 2011. There are proposals in Sacramento to extend the deadline, but they would exclude most of the vehicles that originally qualified for the program, such as the Toyota Prius, the Honda Civic hybrid and the original Honda Insight.

"We're bummed," said Cathy Margolin, president of the 250-member Orange County Prius Club. "I drive from Newport Beach to Torrance to teach four times a week, and it saves me an hour every day on the 405."

For hybrid owners, losing their stickers would be more than an inconvenience. The carpool lane exemption added \$1,000 to \$2,000 to the value of a used hybrid. Some used-car dealers say they are already seeing that premium shrink as the deadline gets closer.

"We've definitely seen those Priuses and Civic hybrids move back toward normal pricing," said Carey Caldwell, a local purchasing manager for CarMax, which operates a national chain of used-car dealerships.

The goal of the 2004 law that created the sticker program was to encourage the purchase of advanced-technology vehicles that delivered better fuel economy and produced lower emissions.

Gasoline-electric hybrids with combined city-highway mileage of 45 miles per gallon or better were eligible for a yellow sticker. The number of yellow stickers was capped at 85,000, and the last one was given out in February 2007.

White stickers granting the same carpool-lane exemption were authorized for electric cars and vehicles powered by alternative fuels such as natural gas. There was no limit placed on these stickers, and so far about 9,500 have been given out.

All the stickers were originally set to expire in 2008, but the Legislature extended that deadline to 2011.

Now, lawmakers want to up the ante. A bill by Assemblyman Ted Lieu (D-Torrance) that the Assembly passed this year would extend the carpool lane exemption to 2016 but limit it to drivers of vehicles powered by electricity, natural gas or some other alternative fuel.

A competing Senate bill included hybrids but only those that achieve city-highway fuel economy of 65 mpg or better -- well beyond the official ratings of the current crop of hybrids.

"What we're saying is that the hybrid isn't good enough anymore," said Adam Keigwin, chief of staff for Sen. Leland Yee (D-San Francisco), sponsor of the Senate bill.

He said the Senate also wants to examine the whole issue of carpool lane exemptions before deciding to grant another reprieve to sticker holders.

Many of the state's carpool lanes have become so clogged that California risks losing federal highway funding. Forcing thousands of driver-only hybrids back into the regular freeway lanes is seen as one way to reduce the congestion.

Even some hybrid owners acknowledge that the original intent of the law has clearly been achieved.

"I live in Santa Monica and you can't swing a dead cat here without hitting a Prius, so the bill served its purpose," said Will Kepper, who has a sticker on his 2001 Prius.

The issue isn't likely to be settled until the Legislature reconvenes next year.

Makers of alternative-fuel vehicles fret that failing to extend the deadline for the white stickers could remove an important incentive for potential buyers.

Fleet operators are important customers for the natural-gas-powered Honda GX, and the carpool lane stickers are a big part of the appeal, said Todd Mittleman, a spokesman for the Japanese automaker.

"Our customers are finding them indispensable in Southern California traffic," he said.

Sharon Delugach of Los Angeles, a 2003 Prius owner and chief of staff for an L.A. school board member, knows the feeling.

"I had no idea they were going to expire," she said of her stickers. "I thought I was set for life."

## **Ben & Jerry's, GE working on greener freezers**

By Alex Dominguez, Associated Press

In the USA Today, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Sunday, September 27, 2009

WASHINGTON — Think propane and butane are just for barbecuing? Think again: The common cooking fuels can also chill your drinks and ice cream with less energy and almost none of the global warming worries of current refrigerants.

Some of the world's largest consumer product companies are promoting freezers and refrigerators in the U.S. that use propane, butane and other coolants that don't trap heat in the atmosphere as much as Freon and other conventional refrigerants.

The new so-called hydrocarbon coolers — already popular in Europe — are being tested by Ben & Jerry's ice cream company at stores in the Washington and Boston areas. Meanwhile, General Electric is seeking approval to market a home refrigerator in the U.S. using a hydrocarbon refrigerant.

The new freezers take advantage of the way hydrocarbon gases absorb heat when they change from a liquid to a gas. It's the same process when a propane tank becomes cool to the touch when you're using it with a gas grill. The hydrocarbon refrigerant is compressed and expanded as it makes its way through the compressor and tubes surrounding the freezer.

Unlike car exhaust or power plant pollution that's spewed directly into the air, the coolants used in most U.S. refrigerators today only enter the atmosphere when their compressors leak, or when appliances are thrown out and their refrigerant eventually escapes.

If hydrocarbons are accidentally released into the atmosphere, their effect on trapping heat is about 1,400 times less than conventional refrigerants, said Pete Gosselin, director of engineering for Ben & Jerry's. The fuels are flammable, of course, but current models only use the amount contained in two or three cigarette lighters. Electronic components are designed to prevent igniting a possible leak.

"It's extremely potent," Gosselin said. "And as the world develops, especially in developing nations, refrigeration use is one of the first technologies that comes on board."

The appliances cost about the same as similar conventional freezers and use about 10 percent less electricity.

"And that turns out to be a huge gain in terms of your carbon footprint, that 10 percent gain in efficiency," Gosselin said. "Every kilowatt hour that comes in the wall, comes in with a certain amount of CO2 footprint with it and if you can knock 10 percent off that, that's huge."

Gosselin said Ben & Jerry's still hasn't determined whether hydrocarbon refrigerants can be used in larger applications. Coca-Cola spokeswoman Lisa Manley said the company decided on using carbon dioxide because their equipment requires more cooling capacity and would require using more hydrocarbon refrigerant, which they decided against partly out of safety concerns.

While carbon dioxide equipment is more costly, Coca-Cola is hoping to convince others to adopt the technology and drive the price down through increased demand, Manley said.

The U.S. will be playing catch-up. Unilever, which has more than 2 million ice cream cabinets worldwide, including 100,000 in the United States, now has more than 400,000 hydrocarbon-based units in Europe, Latin America and Asia, Gosselin said.

About 42,000 bottle vending machines using hydrocarbons or carbon dioxide as refrigerant also have been installed in China, Europe and Latin America by Coca-Cola, Carlsberg and PepsiCo.

And McDonald's has opened two pilot restaurants in Denmark that don't use traditional refrigerants, according to the Refrigerants, Naturally Web site.

The Environmental Protection Agency, which allowed Ben & Jerry's to test the new coolers, has already completed a preliminary review on the freezers, as well as the new GE refrigerator. It expects to make a proposed rule on the machines available for public comment later this year, and a final decision could be issued by early next year, said Drusilla Hufford, director of the EPA's Stratospheric Protection Division.

On a recent afternoon, Dominic Abruzzese, a senior at George Washington University, said he wasn't aware the freezer steps away from him at the university's Gallery Market was any different from others nearby.

"I knew Freon was bad, but I didn't know people were switching to propane freezers," Abruzzese said.

The Ridley Park, Pa., student said he would consider buying a propane-based refrigerator or freezer in the future.

"I guess I would be more likely to buy a freezer that was more environmentally friendly, for sure," he said.

Cathy Cerda, a mother of five from Herndon, Va., said she also wasn't aware the Ben & Jerry's freezer was different.

"If I had to make a decision between the two, well give me that one," she said. "But if it was a lot more expensive, because for me having five children, I think the expense would top my list."

## **Cara Peck: Tackling the Energy Crisis at a Grassroots Level**

From the Partnership for Public Service

Washington Post, Monday, September 28, 2009

Cara Peck is a young life scientist at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) confronting the nation's energy crisis, air quality and ecological balance at the grassroots level.

Peck, 28, helped shepherd an EPA pilot project in the San Francisco Bay area to convert 73,000 tons of organic food waste from restaurants into electricity per year, keeping the material out of landfills and limiting greenhouse gas emissions.

The project has since been replicated in Sacramento and Santa Monica, and has drawn interest around the country.

"My hope is that this concept will grow. It makes so much sense," Peck said. "In 2007, the United States generated 31 million tons of food waste that went into landfills. If that could be converted into electricity, it would power five million homes for a year."

Working at an EPA site in San Francisco, Peck conferred with the state of California, cities, composters, utilities and others to get the cutting-edge recycling and renewable energy projects off the ground.

She helped make the case for converting the food waste into energy, exploring the financial benefits, addressing permit issues and technological challenges, while working closely with the East Bay Municipal Utility District, a wastewater treatment facility in Oakland that implemented the project.

"Cara was an extraordinary catalyst, a bridge builder, and a persuader to advance the technology for the good of the environment," said Eileen Sheehan, an EPA manager who supervised Peck for more than two years. "Cara championed the issue and engaged others. She is enthusiastic, has a great presence and is a great diplomat."

Jeff Scott, an EPA regional waste management division director, said Peck latched onto the issue when no one else was focusing on it and then "took the initiative and pursued it." She helped bring along many "risk adverse" executives and "addressed a lot of concerns to move this project along," he said.

"What East Bay has done is a drop in the bucket, but it can be replicated and could play a significant role on a large scale," Scott said.

Taking advantage of the "green bin" recycling program in San Francisco for food waste, garbage haulers and recyclers pick up and then transport some of the available organic material to the East Bay treatment facility, where it is processed and put through a machine called an anaerobic digester.

This process, which is also used to treat wastewater sludge, reduces the volume of the waste and produces a methane and carbon dioxide biogas that East Bay then converts into electricity to help run the treatment facility. At the same time, it limits the amount of waste entering landfills and reduces the emission of pollutants into the atmosphere.

Many waste water treatment facilities around the country have the technology to convert food waste to energy, with large scale operations presenting the opportunity for some utilities to sell the energy back to the electrical grid.

"There exists today a great disconnect between the limits of our natural environment and the way we live our daily lives, Peck said. "People now understand that a soda can or a bottle has another purpose and can be recycled, but the same message is not out there for food waste. We are creating so much waste, harming the environment and losing all that energy that might be utilized."

This article was jointly prepared by the Partnership for Public Service, a group seeking to enhance the performance of the federal government, and [washingtonpost.com](http://washingtonpost.com). Visit [www.ourpublicservice.org](http://www.ourpublicservice.org) for more about the organization's work.

## **Montgomery Wants to Know: Will That Road Make You Sick?**

By Michael Laris, Staff Writer

Washington Post, Monday, September 28, 2009

Montgomery County officials want to know if that new road might make you wheeze.

Officials on Tuesday will propose requiring health studies before major roads are approved. They want to gauge how vehicle exhaust will affect minors, seniors, women who might have children, heart patients and others.

"If one lives close to a major highway, it can have real impacts on respiratory function and lung capacity," said council member Duchy Trachtenberg (D-At Large), who is introducing the idea with four of her colleagues. "If a project is going to have a negative impact on the population . . . we have an obligation as public servants to work with that information and make sure we protect the public's health and well-being."

The regulation would require predicting pollution levels near proposed roads and their effects decades into the future. Major state and county roads within 1,000 feet of parks, schools, day-care centers, retirement homes or hospitals would be affected. Federal highways would get a pass.

The county's Department of Health and Human Services would need to "quantify the cumulative public impacts of exposure to air pollutants from motor vehicles" and "quantify the potential risks to at-risk populations" in the sensitive areas, according to the draft regulations.

Officials at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have cited the benefits of such health impact assessments, saying they bring "public health issues to the attention of persons who make decisions about areas that fall outside of traditional public health arenas, such as transportation or land use."

Communities in California have studied the health impacts of development, and legislators in Washington state can request assessments in some cases, according to Brian Cole, a researcher at the UCLA School of Public Health.

Cole said a broad local effort such as the one envisioned in Montgomery "would be a big deal, because I think it will help more consistently get asthma considered, which has huge health disparities. It will get impacts on heart disease considered more consistently. Right now, for the elderly, that's the number one concern."

But just how Montgomery's proposal might fit into existing political struggles over growth remains to be seen. There already has been grumbling from some development advocates and others that Montgomery's traffic modeling rules are cumbersome and imprecise. A building industry group has pressed county officials to suspend those rules.

Trachtenberg said the proposal is not meant to block building.

"Of course not. This is a health board regulation that simply requires more information," she said, adding that mitigation is not required. "This is not about stopping projects."

She said that discussions have taken place about eventually taking health studies into consideration when making development decisions but that officials have decided to "start with roads."

### **EPA to reconsider Navajo power plant permit**

By Susan Montoya Bryan, Associated Press Writer

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Friday, September 25, 2009

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M.—The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will have to reconsider an air permit the agency issued last year for a proposed \$3 billion coal-fired power plant on the nation's largest American Indian reservation, a federal appeals board has ruled.

The decision by the Environmental Appeals Board in part grants a request by regional EPA officials who wanted to take another look at parts of the permit for the \$3 billion Desert Rock Energy Project on the Navajo Nation in northwestern New Mexico.

The board, in a ruling released Friday, also said the EPA abused its discretion by not considering integrated gasification combined cycle technology in its analysis of best available pollution control systems for the plant.

"The board concludes that remand of the permit in its entirety on this ground is warranted because reconsideration of the issue could have overarching impacts on the rest of the (agency's) analysis," the ruling states.

Desert Rock critics said Friday they were thrilled with the board's decision.

Environmentalists and the state of New Mexico have argued that Desert Rock—which would be the third coal-fired power plant in the Four Corners region—would further degrade air quality, harm the environment and impact human health.

"This is a coal plant that should never be built," said Mike Eisenfeld of the San Juan Citizens Alliance.

The Navajo Nation's Dine Power Authority and Houston-based Sithe Global LLC have partnered to build the 1,500-megawatt power plant south of Farmington. They have said Desert Rock would be one of the cleanest coal-burning plants in the nation and it would generate more than \$50 million in annual revenues and create jobs on a reservation where more than half of people are unemployed.

George Hardeen, a spokesman for Navajo President Joe Shirley Jr., said the tribe waited years for EPA to issue the air permit in the first place and now the reconsideration mandated by the board will push back economic self-sustainability for the Navajos even further.

"While the country has been experiencing economic hardships for past year, the Navajos have been experiencing it for the past many decades and we've been looking forward to getting started on Desert rock to put the people to work," Hardeen said. "This is more than just a project to sell electricity, it's to help jump start the Navajo economy."

At issue in the board's ruling is whether Desert Rock will be outfitted with the best technology to control emissions. Some critics have said developers should consider integrated gasification combined cycle technology, or IGCC, which turns coal into gas that can be used to generate lower-emission electricity. The success of the technology depends on the type of coal that's used and the location of the plant.

Jeff Homestead, a partner with Bracewell & Giuliani, a law firm that represents Desert Rock developers, said gasification technology just won't work in the high desert of northwestern New Mexico.

It could take many months and possibly another round of public comment for EPA to complete the required analysis on the air permit.

Aside from looking at coal gasification technology, the EPA plans to reassess the limits for particulate matter emissions, fully analyze methods for controlling hazardous emissions and finish consulting with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service about endangered species issues.

Amy Atwood, a senior attorney with the Center for Biological Diversity, one of the groups that opposes the plant, said federal wildlife officials have raised questions about the vitality of endangered fish in the nearby San Juan River.

"The existing conditions are so bad for these fish that this plant may actually put them over the edge," she said. "We'll have to see what happens, but it's at least theoretically possible that the plant may not be built because of those additional effects to already very struggling species."

## **What's the best green choice?**

By Tammy Webber, Associated Press

San Diego Union-Tribune, Saturday, September 26, 2009

Cloth vs. disposable diapers - The messages come from everywhere: Save the planet. Reduce your carbon footprint. Be eco-wise.

But how do consumers decide which product or action is healthier or more environmentally friendly? Sometimes the choices are clear; other times they're more murky. Here are some examples:

### **Paper**

Both can be made from recycled materials and are recyclable. Paper is made by cutting down trees — which help absorb greenhouse gases — but then again, they're renewable. Plastic bags are often made of polyethylene, produced from natural gas, which is abundant but not renewable.

But it takes more water and energy to make paper bags than it does to produce plastic bags. Neither breaks down particularly fast in a landfill, though paper can be composted; plastics don't biodegrade easily.

An alternative is taking your own reusable cloth or plastic bag to the store. But consumers shouldn't stress too much, as long as they're recycling or reusing store bags, whether by filling paper with newspapers for recycling or carrying their lunch in plastic, said Chris Newman, an environmental scientist with the Environmental Protection Agency.

### **Compact fluorescent light bulbs**

CFLs last longer and use less energy but also are more expensive and contain toxic mercury. That means consumers must be careful how they clean up the bulbs if they break and dispose of them properly.

But mercury also is a byproduct of burning coal. And the extra electricity needed to power incandescent bulbs often comes from coal-fired power plants. The toxin, which can cause neurological damage in children, can get into the food chain after settling into lakes and streams.

Eventually both CFLs and incandescent bulbs probably will be replaced by solid-state, or LED, lighting. Until then, environmental groups generally advocate that consumers use CFLs, though people with children will want to take extra caution.

### **Organic**

It's true that organic food, grown or raised without pesticides and herbicides, could be better for your health and the ecosystem. But if it is shipped from thousands of miles away, there is an environmental trade-off because of the pollution caused by trucks traveling cross-country.

Some experts say you might want to consider passing on organic produce, for example, if it has a thick skin, like bananas, or outer leaves, like corn. Or you could make a point of buying locally grown food.

#### Pesticides

Bugs in the house aren't just creepy and crawly. In the case of cockroaches, they can cause asthma in children. But spraying pesticides is not necessarily great for little lungs, either, and it's often just a matter of time before the critters return.

A better alternative is using baits — the roaches eat the poison, then take it back to their families, helping to end the roach life cycle, according to Tom Neltner, of the National Center for Healthy Housing and founder of Indianapolis-based group Improving Kids' Environment. But parents have to be careful that children and pets don't come into contact with the baits, he said.

Idling a car engine for more than 10 seconds emits more pollution than turning it off and back on again. So if you're able, environmentalists recommend that you park your car and walk into the fast-food restaurant or the bank. Many cities recommend that drivers avoid idling as much as possible, especially on days when alerts are issued because of ground-level ozone and soot.

Or better yet, walk to the restaurant. If you can safely walk or bicycle, there is no environmental or health downside. And riding the bus or train helps take cars and trucks off the road, cutting down on tailpipe emissions, which account for a large percentage of air pollution in most urban areas.

#### Cloth

Disposable diapers are convenient but can be costly over time and raise health concerns over absorbent chemicals used to keep infants dry, such as sodium polyacrylate (SAP).

But cloth diaper services can be harmful to the environment because of chemicals used in laundering and carbon emissions released in pickup and delivery. However, if laundering at home, cloth diapers can be a cost-effective option.

Also efficient are all-in-one or "hybrid" diapers that usually consist of a washable cotton pant and a disposable diaper refill that can be flushed or used as wet compost. Organic disposable diapers offer an eco-friendly alternative to plastic, non-biodegradable ones left in landfills indefinitely.

Many parents use a combination of cloth and disposable diapers, depending on the circumstance and time of day.

### **Philly plan uses green tech to reduce storm runoff**

The Associated Press

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Sunday, September 27, 2009

PHILADELPHIA—The city of Philadelphia is proposing a \$1.6 billion effort over the next two decades to use porous pavement, rain gardens, green roofs and thousands of new trees to absorb or at least delay billions of gallons of rainwater that overwhelms the urban sewer system each year.

The city Water Department says the plan's complex funding formula would raise rates somewhat but would also attract grants and encourage private investment. And, officials say, the plan would bring more jobs and higher property values and would also improve air quality, save energy and even reduce the number of heat deaths.

"This is the most significant use of green infrastructure I've seen in the country, the largest scale I've seen," said Jon Capacasa, regional director of water protection for the Environmental Protection Agency, which will have the final say on the plan.

Regulators and environmental officials are still evaluating the 3,369-page plan, a radical departure from the traditional urban approach of using highly engineered tunnels and sewage plant expansions.

In 60 percent of Philadelphia, a combined sewer system means that runoff from streets and wastewater from bathrooms and kitchens flows through the same pipes. The system can handle that in dry weather, but during rains it overflows and sends water laced with road oil, litter, and raw sewage into surrounding rivers and streams.

That makes bacteria levels skyrocket, and Philadelphia and other cities are under orders to reduce the overflows, which amount to 14 billion gallons a year. A dozen years ago, officials ruled out separating storm water and sanitary lines as was done in newer parts of the city, since that would mean reconfiguring 1,600 miles of pipes at huge expense.

Neither of the other traditional options—a huge expansion of the city's three sewage plants or building gigantic tunnels to hold the overflow—was efficient, and both were also expensive.

"Instead of figuring out how to manage this pollution, maybe we should be looking at how to prevent it in the first place," said Howard Neukrug, director of the Office of Watersheds in the Water Department. "Let's break down some of the barriers against nature and deal with rainwater where it lands."

So, officials came up with the idea of replacing concrete and asphalt with rain gardens, green roofs, heavily planted curb extensions, vegetated "swales" in parking lots, and mini-wetlands. Surfaces from streets to basketball courts would be replaced with paving made out of larger particles that let rainwater flow through.

"I believe it's the most significant investment in transforming the city that we'll see in our lifetimes," said Patrick Starr, senior vice president of the Pennsylvania Environmental Council. "It will change the way neighborhoods look, the way many streets and blocks look."

Even supporters, however, see flaws, such as the fact that the plan would reduce overflow by just 80 percent, not the 85 percent that the EPA wants to see. And the department estimates that it would add \$8 to the typical resident's monthly sewer bill over the next two decades.

But proponents say the plan could attract federal funding and grants, and officials say the neighborhood groups they have approached have been surprisingly enthusiastic about the ideas.

Ken Kirk, executive director of the National Association of Clean Water Agencies, an industry group, calls the plan "very compelling."

"It may take a little longer, but at the end of the day, they will be using a lot less energy, they will be using the water resources more efficiently, they will be capturing and recharging groundwater under the city, they'll have less pollution of the rivers. ... "That is the way we need to go," he said.

## **Pinole a leading skeptic of plans for county hydrogen pipeline project**

By Tom Lochner

Contra Costa Times, Saturday, September 26, 2009

As backers of the proposed Contra Costa Pipeline Project push for approval, Pinole is emerging as a leading skeptic among communities along the pipeline's path.

Officials, homeowners associations and individual residents there are questioning the adequacy of a draft environmental analysis of potential hazards and permanent impacts on aesthetics and biological resources in their city, as well as disruption during construction, including 24-hour-a-day noise for many weeks and the use of a section of an East Bay Regional Park District trail to move heavy equipment.

They question whether the pipeline really is a stand-alone project independent of a proposed Energy and Hydrogen Renewal Project at the Chevron refinery in Richmond.

And some say they share concerns, expressed in an expert report from a scientist for the group Communities for a Better Environment, that the proposed pipeline is part of what they say are plans to process more and heavier crude at Chevron and at refineries in Rodeo and Martinez, with an increase in air pollution that would carry into neighboring communities.

Praxair's pipeline would enter Pinole from the west through an existing natural gas pipeline along San Pablo Avenue that would be converted to hydrogen. Further east, that pipeline right of way runs through

residential areas. To avoid problems from that route, including potential damage to the line by third parties, Praxair wants to cut over to the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad's right of way via a piece of city-owned Walter Avenue where there is no utility right of way or easement; there also is no easement along a small stretch of the preferred route at Tennent Avenue.

Praxair spokeswoman Jacqueline Hunt said her company is "moving full-force ahead" and that the pipeline is independent of the Chevron upgrade that's been on hold since July, after a judge found that its environmental report was vague and inconsistent on whether heavier crude would be processed.

Chevron wants to replace its power plant, hydrogen plant and other equipment to refine a wider range of crude with higher sulfur content and to produce more California-grade gasoline. Praxair wants to develop a 21.3-mile hydrogen pipeline from Chevron Richmond to ConocoPhillips in Rodeo and Shell in Martinez.

The fact that the two projects are the subject of separate environmental reports commissioned by different lead agencies shows the two projects are independent of each other, Hunt said; Richmond is the lead agency for the Chevron environmental impact report, while Contra Costa County is the lead agency for Praxair's. Opponents say the very fact that the two projects are being evaluated as if they are not interdependent is flawed.

Asked if it would make sense to build a pipeline from Richmond to Rodeo and Martinez if Chevron's project were not to go forward or if it were substantially altered, Hunt said, "We'll cross that bridge when we get to it."

The CBE scientist, Greg Karras, states in his report that "California refineries use hydrogen primarily to process lower-quality oil streams," and he chastises the county's draft environmental report for not saying that the expansion of the Bay Area hydrogen supply "would likely be used to refine lower-quality oil."

"Refining heavier and more contaminated oil passes more pollutants into the environment, requires more intensive processing that increases pollution incident hazard and requires more energy that increases refinery fuel combustion emissions," Karras says.

He concludes that the Praxair pipeline is "part of a larger project to expand hydrogen-intensive processing and related processing of oil that would link all five major Bay Area refineries in a regional pipeline network."

Chevron has balked at a comprehensive cap on heavier crude, saying that enough regulations are in place and that its refinery lacks equipment to refine heavier crude.

County Supervisor John Gioia says he believes it is better to regulate what comes out of the refinery rather than restrict what goes in. He proposed getting Chevron and CBE to agree to more monitoring.

## **Mittal dismisses pollution claims in South Africa**

By Celean Jacobson, Associated Press Writer

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Saturday, September 26, 2009

VANDERBIJLPARK, South Africa—Strike Matsepe used his life savings to buy a small plot of land near the country's biggest steel mill, hoping it would become a thriving farm in his old age.

Now, weathered and sick, the 80 year old has had to abandon his dream—the land and ground water are so polluted his cattle have died and crops failed.

On Friday, ArcelorMittal SA, the world's largest steel maker, dismissed allegations of severe environmental damage and unethical business practices at the mill. In 2002, the company took over the 67-year-old plant that residents and environmental groups say has polluted their lives.

Company officials acknowledge there is air and water pollution but say that emissions comply with legislation and that clean-up operations are under way. They also say there are regular meetings with communities to address their concerns.

Nearly 500 families used to live on the farmlands known as Steel Valley, opposite the mill's mountainous waste dump. Only four families, including Matsepe's, continue to hold onto land.

A series of legal challenges and out-of-court settlements have resulted in buyouts of farms, and many people have moved away.

"This is a David and Goliath story," sociologist Jacklyn Cock said. "This is about the power of the corporation. ArcelorMittal has had an impact not only on air and water quality but people have lost their livelihoods and lives."

Matsepe, who bought the farm in 1992, has refused efforts by the steel mill to buy his land. He wants the polluters brought to justice and for him to be adequately compensated.

"If I die now, my wife will get nothing because my pension is gone and my cattle. Everything I worked for is gone now, and my children will get nothing of the labor of my hands," Matsepe said.

The 5,683 acre (2,300 hectare) Vanderbijlpark plant is situated in the country's industrial heartland about 45 miles (70 kilometers) south of Johannesburg. Smoke billows from its chimney stacks and fine black dust blows from the dump.

Environmental experts say ground water has been contaminated by toxins that cause disease and birth defects. The company has also faced charges of price-fixing, and a case relating to market collusion is pending.

Luxembourg-based ArcelorMittal is the target of a global campaign by environmental groups to ensure European multinationals are liable for the social and environmental impacts of their subsidiaries.

On Thursday about 20 former residents of the valley gathered in a makeshift shed on Matsepe's property to recount their experiences to a group of international journalists and environmental activists.

They spoke about how animals were born deformed and how tea would foam when they poured milk into it. Clothes would be bleached of their colors after washing; tins of food and even metal window frames would rust away.

"My oldest daughter has three different kinds of cancer. All my children are sick, and what is really frightening is that my grandchildren are also sick. This is from, I believe, where we stayed," said Joey Cock, 71.

At a later meeting, former employers spoke of terrible burns and injuries, and unresolved compensation and pension claims. Some have been retrenched and face eviction from their homes. Others stay without water or electricity in rundown hostels owned by the company.

Many spoke of intimidation and said they felt used—like a "tool."

The company denies it has neglected its employees and says many improvements have been made—and more are planned—to reduce pollution.

On a tour of the site Friday, reporters were shown where old dams storing effluent water and other waste disposal sites are being rehabilitated at a cost of about \$57 million. There also are plans to cap the slag heap and cover it with soil.

ArcelorMittal's chief executive, Nku Nyembezi-Heita, was quick to distance the company from any damage caused by activities of the mill before the new management took over. She acknowledged that Steel Valley is an emotional issue but said there are no immediate plans to rehabilitate the land.

"Where we have caused harm, our duty is to take responsibility," she said.

Observers charge that the government is reluctant to take action against the powerful multinational. The company's owner, Lakshmi Mittal, the world's third richest person, sits on a special presidential economic advisory committee.

## **E.U. Alone and Lonely on Carbon**

By James Kanter, staff writer  
N.Y. Times, Sunday, Sept. 27, 2009

BRUSSELS — Carbon trading put the European Union in the environmental vanguard.

Since 2005, the trade bloc has operated the world's only continentwide system that puts a cap on greenhouse gas emissions and that requires major polluters to hold tradable allowances.

But the system has also been the most "costly climate policy program in the world," according to Jürgen R. Thumann, the president of BusinessEurope, a powerful confederation of industry and employer groups.

Mr. Thumann said European business leaders are desperate to expand the system to the United States and eventually across the globe to reduce the "dangers to our ability to compete internationally."

But with talks on a new global climate treaty seemingly at a stalemate, and with climate legislation delayed in major polluting countries like the United States and Australia, those prospects look increasingly distant.

Meanwhile the E.U. shows no sign of abandoning the system, leaving business leaders like Mr. Thumann with little choice but to speak out at home and to press developed nations abroad to match Europe's efforts when they gather at the U.N. summit meeting on climate change in December in Copenhagen.

Carbon trading was supposed to be the least costly way for Europe to cut emissions. The idea is that industries buy allowances to emit greenhouse gases if they exceed a certain quota or sell them if they have too many.

But Europe's relationship with carbon trading goes much deeper than economics, and "is now rooted in the bloc's aspirations to global leadership," said Bernice Lee, an expert in energy and environment at Chatham House, a research institution in London.

After the United States declined to ratify the Kyoto Protocol in 2001, Europeans swung their weight behind the treaty, which was the first major attempt to limit emissions globally. As part of those efforts, Europe supported a bid by Russia to join the World Trade Organization.

Vladimir Putin, as Russian president, reciprocated by supporting Kyoto. The treaty required ratification by countries producing at least 55 percent of the world's greenhouse gases and support from Russia, with its large share of emissions, allowed the treaty to take effect.

More recently, the E.U. authorities have identified carbon trading as a way of raising huge sums of money demanded by developing nations as part of any new global climate treaty.

Ms. Lee of Chatham House said there was "a strong and growing appreciation by E.U. governments" that the revenues generated from selling pollution allowances could help them to balance their own budgets, as well as fund climate-related initiatives.

Even as European nations deepen their reliance on carbon trading, governments elsewhere still are struggling to put such systems in place.

In the United States, legislation to set up carbon trading is stuck in the Senate, which probably will not act until next year. In Australia, the government could call an election on the issue if the legislation fails to pass on its second attempt in November.

In Japan, a new government wants to introduce carbon trading but faces stiff resistance from industry as the country emerges from its deepest postwar recession.

Another factor that continues to muddy the prospects for carbon trading are reports of abuse and manipulation.

In August, it emerged that British customs officials had arrested seven people near London for dodging a value added tax, which should have been paid for selling large amounts of allowances.

In a bid to stop similar cases in the future, Britain, France and the Netherlands have exempted carbon trading from the levy.

Last week, an E.U. court ruled that Poland and Estonia could challenge the European Commission's assessment of how many allowances their industries were entitled to. That stoked fears among traders that those governments would take advantage of the ruling to issue larger numbers of allowances to favored industries than was originally permitted.

E.U. officials sought to quash speculation about the long-term stability of the carbon markets by saying governments would no longer have the same right to intervene after 2012. But prices of allowances still fell sharply on carbon markets.

Perhaps the thorniest problem for E.U. environment officials is how to make the system more palatable for business without entirely neutering its chances of cutting emissions.

Stavros Dimas, the E.U. environment commissioner, pushed forward this month with plans to continue giving large amounts of allowances away free to industry sectors most exposed to international competition.

The French president, Nicolas Sarkozy, said this month that he and Angela Merkel, the German chancellor, were proceeding with plans for a "border adjustment tax" on imports from countries without targets and trading systems comparable to those in Europe.

Mr. Sarkozy's approach is sure to stoke tensions with some of the Continent's major trading partners. Such taxes could even start a protectionist backlash – a prospect that compounds Mr. Thumann's concerns about the effects of carbon trading on European competitiveness.

"Climate protection is one of the saddest examples of a failure by leading nations to coordinate responses," said Mr. Thumann of BusinessEurope. "We've got to have closer international cooperation to reduce emissions cost-effectively," he said.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Friday, Sept. 25, 2009:](#)

### **Valley needs rail funding**

**State needs to look at project as an important investment.**

**High-speed rail planners seek federal funds**

SACRAMENTO -- California's bullet train planners are going after \$4.6 billion in federal stimulus money, including nearly \$1.3 billion to begin work on the route from Merced to Bakersfield through Fresno.

The California High-Speed Rail Authority is wisely seeking \$4.6 billion in federal stimulus funding to begin work on the system that one day will connect California through the San Joaquin Valley.

Under the plan, trains will zip through California's heartland at 220 mph on some segments. Part of the High Speed Rail Authority's request Wednesday is \$1.3 billion for the Valley portion of the project.

For the Fresno to Merced segment, \$466 million would be spent on right-of-way acquisition, grade separations, utility relocation, environmental mitigation, earthwork, guideway structures and track.

The cost of that same infrastructure on the Fresno/Bakersfield segment would be \$819.5 million.

We have long been enthusiastic supporters of high-speed rail and believe that it holds many benefits for Valley residents. It would offer quick and efficient transportation to the Bay Area and Southern California, help improve the region's terrible air quality, and take traffic off our already congested freeways.

It also would create high-paying construction jobs as the system is being built and long-term jobs to operate and maintain the rail segments through the Valley.

Rail authority officials say the Valley portion of the route is a priority because the many rural stretches can be used to test trains at their top speeds.

A high-speed rail system has been planned for the Golden State for many years, but it could never get the infusion of cash needed to get it started.

But California voters in 2008 approved a bond that includes \$9 billion to jump-start construction. The entire system is estimated to cost \$40 billion. The funding will come from state, federal and local sources and private donations.

A high-speed rail system is an investment in California's future. It will only get more expensive if we delay construction.

[N.Y. Times editorial, Friday, Sept. 25, 2009:](#)

## The Climate Improves

This week's speeches at the United Nations by President Obama and President Hu Jintao of China raised hopes that — with vision, political will and a lot more work — the world may eventually reach a new agreement to curb greenhouse gas emissions. Meanwhile, back in Washington, the struggle continued on a retail level.

The Senate's Democratic leadership managed to beat back an extraordinarily mischievous amendment to a spending bill offered by Senator Lisa Murkowski, an Alaska Republican. The amendment would have blocked the Environmental Protection Agency from using its authority under the Clean Air Act to regulate carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases from major sources like power plants and vehicles.

The amendment was in clear conflict with a landmark 2007 Supreme Court decision giving the agency explicit authority to regulate such gases from vehicles and implicit authority to regulate them from other sources. With a global climate summit in Copenhagen less than three months away, the move would also have sent a terrible signal about Washington's lack of commitment.

In another positive development, a federal appeals court ruled in favor of eight states, New York City and two conservation groups that had sued five big electric utilities to get them to curb their carbon dioxide emissions. The case, brought in 2004 and based on the common law of public nuisance, said the companies threatened health and welfare.

The ruling can be appealed, and will have no immediate impact on the companies' emissions. But it affirms that polluters can be held accountable in the federal courts, and provides another pathway to action against carbon pollution.

The preferred path, the one that will have the greatest impact on global negotiations and the atmosphere, would be a comprehensive bill committing this country to binding cuts in emissions. The House passed such a bill in June. The Senate must now follow suit.

[Sacramento Bee Commentary, Monday, September 28, 2009](#)

### **Alan Lowenthal: Quietly, legislators chip away at environmental integrity**

With a pair of votes in the predawn hours, state legislators last week took historic steps to dismantle California's premier environmental protection act, making it easier than at any time in the past 40 years for big developers to ride roughshod over "the little guy." A majority of lawmakers had joined a bizarre alliance of big business, labor unions and one of the state's preeminent clean-air agencies to undermine California's landmark Environmental Quality Act.

California's Environmental Quality Act, known by its acronym CEQA, has, ever since Gov. Ronald Reagan signed it into law, served as an impregnable bulwark against reckless development and rampant pollution.

CEQA's complex process of meetings and reports delivered a stunningly simple result: It put every citizen, neighborhood or town on an even footing with the most powerful forces in our society.

It was born with powerful enemies. It made it harder to bulldoze a forest or put a factory next to a school. It protected our rivers and mountains, our beaches and wetlands. While some hailed it as hope for the future, others saw it as a hindrance to business.

Despite all that, it withstood every effort to dismantle it. Californians, it turned out, had come to depend on its protections, even if they didn't fully understand them. And why not? CEQA worked.

Since its adoption, California's population more than doubled. But our air quality improved. Our economy grew threefold, but our impact on the environment actually softened. The poorest neighborhoods have a tool to protect themselves.

CEQA has helped a coalition of community groups to achieve a historic settlement with the Port of Los Angeles to reduce air pollution in surrounding neighborhoods. It empowered the Mothers of East L.A. to defeat a toxic waste incinerator to be built within 7,500 feet of homes, schools, churches and hospitals. It forced the developers of the massive Mission Bay project in San Francisco to reduce sewage outflow and to restore critical wetlands.

All of that seemed to count for nothing at the end of this year's legislative session. Legislators' resolve to protect the act had weakened, their commitment to the CEQA process melted like ice in the oven of the great recession. Nervous and unpopular, the Legislature fell prey to the canard that the only way to create jobs was to abandon the strictures of CEQA. The Assembly forgot it had never impeded the economy before, as they chucked it aside in a favor of a new football stadium in eastern Los Angeles County coveted by labor groups and a well-connected billionaire developer.

Meanwhile, in a more bizarre chapter, the South Coast Air Quality Management District turned its considerable stable of lobbyists (it had spent more than \$240,000 on lobbying in the first six months of this year alone) loose to overturn a lawsuit it lost in state court, and in doing so put CEQA in grave peril.

In that lawsuit the judge admonished the SCAQMD for failure to produce an environmental impact report on a new air credit system required under the Federal Clean Air Act.

Instead of going back to the drawing board and creating a rule that worked, SCAQMD decided to push through a bill that would allow them to do legislatively what they have been unwilling to do through the regulatory, rule making process. It is hard to understate the significance of this development.

For the first time in recent memory, the legislature passed Senate Bill 827 that for all intents and purposes, overturns an active court case and opens the flood gates to any business that chooses to not abide by the law. SCAQMD has lost three suits on this same issue and has been stalling for more than a year to develop a rule that works.

For the past 39 years, the Legislature has been successful in repelling many attacks on CEQA. First defended staunchly by past legislators such as Sen. Byron Sher and more recently by current senators, such as Joe Simitian and Fran Pavley, the Senate has stood pat on challenges to the act. Unfortunately, that all changed at the end of this legislative session.

The night before, the Assembly passed legislation that would have given a CEQA exemption to the City of Industry to build the stadium in Southern California. Assembly members, speaking against that bill on the floor, warned this would open the door to every business interest in the state to come to the Legislature when they can't get what they want by following the law.

Little did they know how prescient their fears were.

When will it end? Unfortunately, I am afraid it will only end with the complete dismantling of CEQA. If this happens, all Californians, the rich, the poor, the urban and the rural, will suffer the consequences of a system that no longer values the input of those who will be most affected.

[Tri-Valley Herald Commentary, Sunday, September 27, 2009:](#)

### **Tim Hunt: Pleasanton's housing cap finally gets its day in court**

THE CITY of Pleasanton's voter-approved but ill-advised housing cap will finally get its day in court.

A Superior Court judge rejected Pleasanton's request to dismiss a suit challenging the cap, so it likely will go to trial this fall. Urban Habitat, a nonprofit group, sued, arguing that the 29,000-unit cap violates state housing law.

State Attorney General Jerry Brown joined the case, arguing the cap shoves residential growth elsewhere (the city has no cap on jobs or retail establishments), creating traffic congestion, air pollution and urban sprawl.

Brown cited the state's global warming law and its requirement to reduce carbon emissions when he intervened. The left-leaning attorney general has used the same law to bludgeon other cities on their growth plans — the Pleasanton intervention balances his action on the other side.

Should the court rule to overturn the limit, the City Council will have the necessary political and legal cover to revise this damaging policy. The unit-cap currently is stifling any redevelopment within Hacienda Business Park where 25-year-old buildings are nearing the end of their useful life and the marketplace has changed dramatically.

The unexpected death of Danville Town Councilman Mike Shimansky points out how tenuous life can be. Mike went to San Diego to visit his grandchildren, contracted bacterial meningitis and passed on without leaving the hospital after a monthlong battle.

To see a person as vigorous as Mike struck down at 65 reminds us all again of what a gift this life is. Mike retired from PacBell very early and then devoted his life to public and nonprofit service. He was a member of the Danville Town Council for 20 years and volunteered for a number of nonprofit organizations. One of his priorities was the American Red Cross where he went to disaster scenes — whether after Hurricane Katrina in Louisiana or San Diego last year for the fires.

He also served on the board of Shepherd's Gate, a privilege I also have had. Mike's was a life well-lived that ended far sooner than anyone would have imagined.

Greater Northern California is midway through an amazing feast for fans of professional golf.

During Labor Day weekend, the Champions Tour joined with outstanding First Tee youth players from across the country at Pebble Beach for that annual stop.

Today, the outstanding women professionals will play the final round of the annual CVS/pharmacy LPGA Challenge at the Blackhawk Country Club. CVS bought Long's Drugs, the sponsor of the Blackhawk event, and fortunately has retained the sponsorship.

Looking just ahead, the men's tour brings the President's Cup, pitting the best of the United States against the best from the rest of the world excepting the European Community. It will be played at Harding Park in San Francisco from Oct. 6-11. Check out the daily blogs of former Herald golf writer and prep editor Dennis Miller, my partner in ACES magazine, at [www.acesgolfmagazine.com](http://www.acesgolfmagazine.com).

Finally, the Champions tour returns to Northern California for the season-ending Charles Schwab Cup Championship at the Sonoma Golf Club. Like the PGA Fed-Ex Cup that wraps up today in Atlanta, the Charles Schwab event brings together the top 30 Champions Tour players to determine the winner of the season-long points race as well as the individual tournament title.

*Tim Hunt is the principal with Hunt Enterprises, a communications and government affairs firm. He is the former editor and associate publisher of the Tri-Valley Herald.*

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Monday, Sept. 28, 2009:](#)

### **Need nuclear power**

China is expanding its wind energy to 100 gigawatts and nuclear capacity to 70-86 GW by 2020.

However, new American superior technology for small reactors meets important criteria for nuclear power plants. With no control rods to jam, they are far safer than the old models -- they may as well be called nuclear batteries. They minimize nuclear waste which can be transmuted and safely disposed.

As a Green Party member, I have written the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and Rep. George Radanovich to stop the NRC practice of charging contractors millions for new reactor designs.

The search for and the discovery of a source of abundant, cheap, clean, reliable electrons is the next great global industry.

We need clean nuclear energy before our CO2-polluted atmosphere completely dries up. If we wish to drink, wash, and flush we will need to enjoy rain.

*Mike Starry, Fresno*

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Sunday, Sept. 27, 2009:](#)

### **Don't strip EPA control**

Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska has proposed an amendment to the Environmental Protection Agency's fiscal 2010 spending bill that would strip EPA of the ability to regulate greenhouse gas emissions from coal plants and polluting industries.

This amendment — which blocks EPA from taking any action for the next year — is simply unacceptable. I urge our elected officials to vote “no” on the Murkowski amendment and any other cynical attempt to handcuff EPA during this time of climate crisis.

*Howard Clark, Clovis*

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses a demand for clean air in California. Dozens of families in Diamond Bar protested to demand stricter rules against air pollution that is created by companies that are responsible for over 2,000 deaths annually in Southern California. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at (559) 230-5851.

## **Exigen aire limpio en California**

### **Protestan contra las empresas ferroviarias del estado, a las que culpan de contaminar**

Claudia Núñez

La Opinión, Saturday, September 26, 2009

Decenas de familias protestaron ayer en Diamond Bar para exigir que se implementen reglas estrictas contra la contaminación que producen las empresas ferroviarias en la región, a las que responsabilizan de la muerte de más de 2,000 personas cada año en el Sur de California.

Portando pancartas y al grito de "¡Salud, sí. Diesel, no!", los manifestantes provenientes de norte y sur del estado tomaron la tribuna de la audiencia del Consejo de Recursos Atmosféricos y demandaron el derecho a respirar aire limpio ahora y no en 2015, fecha en que entrarán en vigor nuevas normas que habrán de disminuir en un 85% la contaminación emitida por las locomotoras estacionadas en los patios ferroviarios, zonas rodeadas por cientos de familias, la mayoría de origen hispano.

"Para 2015 más niños de nuestras comunidades tendrán asma. Más personas morirán de cáncer. ¿Qué están esperando? ¿Que las compañías se hagan más ricas a costa de nuestra salud?", indicó Martha Cota, dirigente de la Alianza de Long Beach para Niños con Asma.

Sólo en los condados de Riverside y San Bernardino ocurren más de 600 muertes al año a causa de la contaminación producida por el tráfico de trenes y camiones que transportan las cargas de los vagones entre terminales, según un estudio reciente de California Air Resource Board (ARB).

Robert Fletcher, jefe de división del ARB, indicó que estas compañías son reguladas por leyes federales, por lo que el estado se encuentra imposibilitado de implementar medidas más estrictas.

Fletcher informó que, gracias a un acuerdo de entendimiento desde 2005, las empresas ferroviarias Union Pacific (UP) y Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) han aceptado disminuir la emanación de contaminantes, y para 2015 la baja será de casi un 85%; sin embargo, reconoció que es urgente tomar otras acciones antes de esa fecha.

"Especialmente después de que científicamente hemos comprobado la muerte y el daño a la salud que estas locomotoras están provocando en la comunidad", dijo.

Frente esta disyuntiva de poder, decenas de familias y representantes políticos pidieron al estado y al gobierno federal tomar cartas en el asunto e implementar reglas más estrictas contra estas compañías.

"Necesitamos el gobierno federal intervenga para reforzar las reglas contra estas empresas. Nuestra comunidad está en riesgo", indicó Joe Aguilar, alcalde de la ciudad de Commerce donde se estima existen más de 1,200 personas afectadas por la polución ferroviaria.

Una a una, más de 70 personas tomaron el micrófono para exponer cómo sus familias han sido afectadas por la contaminación de la industria ferroviaria.

"Es realmente una tragedia lo que están haciendo a nuestras familias. Como madre me duele el corazón ver a mi hija enferma, tiene 16 años y su cuerpo apenas alcanzo el desarrollo de una niña de 12", dijo una madre residente de San Bernardino desde hace 18 años.

Martha Cota narró los episodios de ataque de asma de su hijo, sus uñas moradas, su rostro contraído de dolor por la falta de oxígeno durante cada episodio de asma que vive.

"En mi zona, cinco de cada 10 niños están enfermos de asma", indicó Cota, quien asistió a la audiencia desde Long Beach.

Cifras del Censo indican que entre los condados de Los Ángeles, Riverside y San Bernardino, poco menos de dos millones de personas viven a menos de 100 pies de distancia de las vías del ferrocarril, una zona por la que atraviesan cada día cerca de dos toneladas de productos químicos, armamento del Ejército y gases tóxicos.

Otros 2.5 millones de residentes habitan suficientemente cerca de las vías del tren como para poner en riesgo su salud por los contaminantes.

Por su parte, los portavoces de BNSF y UP indicaron que en menos de cinco años han invertido más de 250 millones de dólares en tecnología amigable con el medio ambiente y que están en la mejor disposición de trabajar por el bien de la comunidad.

Tras la audiencia que se extendió por más de cuatro horas, se propuso la implementación de tres nuevos estudios que analizan los niveles de contaminación del equipo que opera dentro de los patios ferroviarios y el impacto de éstos en la salud, así como un análisis de posibles reglas aplicables a las empresas ferroviarias.

"Nos sentimos decepcionados porque no se tomaron medidas inmediatas, pero al menos el que hayan mencionado la palabra 'reglas', nos da esperanza de que confían en dar pasos concretos en un futuro; desafortunadamente de momento sólo están 'gateando'", indicó Isela Rodríguez, portavoz de la organización East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice (EYCEJ), asociación que representa a los residentes de Commerce.

El consejo estableció un plazo de 120 días para que se presenten los estudios indicados y se tomen acuerdos.

"Es frustrante, 120 días es un gran impacto en una niña que vive a un lado de una patio de ferrocarril y que cada uno de esos días debe respirar un aire negro", afirmó Rodríguez.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses lead poisons 121 children in China. Medical studies have demonstrated that at least 121 children that live near a manufacturing company that make batteries suffer from lead poisoning.](#)

### **Plomo envenena a 121 niños en el oriente de China**

**Pruebas médicas han demostrado que por lo menos 121 niños que viven cerca de una planta de fabricación de pilas en el este de China sufren de envenamiento por plomo, en el más reciente episodio de una serie de casos de este tipo que han afectado a cientos de personas.**

Noticias Terra, Monday, September 23, 2009

Dos agencias médicas tomaron pruebas para detectar el nivel de toxicidad por plomo a 287 niños menores de 14 años de edad, y hallaron que 121 de ellos tenían niveles excesivamente altos de plomo en la sangre, dijo el sábado el gobierno del condado de Shanghang, en la provincia de Fujian, en un comunicado. Indicó que la investigación continúa.

El descubrimiento de grupos de personas afectadas por el plomo en las últimas semanas ha provocado protestas y una creciente indignación en China en torno a una serie de escándalos por falta de seguridad pública, siendo los niños las principales víctimas.

Al Partido Comunista, en el gobierno, le preocupa que las protestas multitudinarias puedan atentar contra la estabilidad social del país y considera que esta situación es un grave reto para su control del poder.

El gobierno dispuso que la Planta de Baterías Huaqiang fuera cerrada hace unos 10 días después que los pobladores de la localidad se presentaron a las autoridades con resultados de exámenes médicos que demostraban que algunos niños estaban intoxicados con plomo, dijeron los habitantes.

"Espero que la fábrica quede cerrada para siempre, de lo contrario me mudaré de lugar", destacó Yuan, que vive a unos 500 metros (550 yardas) de distancia de ésta. Su hijo de 11 años está intoxicado con plomo.

El envenenamiento con este metal puede provocar daños al sistema reproductivo y al nervioso, así como presión alta y pérdida de la memoria.

La falta de control de sustancias químicas letales es un problema crónico en China, donde hay fábricas y talleres en todo el país.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses Court of Appeals determined that the states have the right to sue energy corporations that create air pollution and contribute to climate change.](#)

### **Corte de apelaciones decidió que los estados pueden demandar a las corporaciones energéticas**

Manuel Ocaño, Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingue, Thursday, September 24, 2009

Una Corte Federal de Apelaciones determinó que los estados de la federación tienen derecho a demandar a las corporaciones energéticas cuando estas contaminan el aire y contribuyen al cambio climático. El fallo de la corte fue emitido sobre un caso que involucra a California, Connecticut, New Hampshire y otros estados. La decisión fue de un panel compuesto únicamente por dos jueces, luego de que la magistrada, Sonia Sotomayor, quien originalmente revisaría la apelación de las compañías energéticas fue confirmada para el tribunal supremo en el país. El procurador de California, Jerry Brown calificó de crítica la decisión de la corte, de permitir por primera vez a los estados demandar a las empresas por contribuir al cambio climático.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses President Obama invites world leaders of ONU to face the deterioration of the global environment and commit to reducing pollution and greenhouse emissions.](#)

### **Invita Obama al liderazgo mundial en la ONU a enfrentar seriamente el deterioro del medio ambiente**

Marco Vinicio González, Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingue, Wednesday, September 23, 2009

Hoy el presidente Obama habló en la Asamblea General de Naciones Unidas, que desde ayer celebra en la ciudad de Nueva York una Cumbre sobre el Cambio Climático, tras el llamado de este organismo internacional a los líderes del mundo para reducir la contaminación y la emisión de los llamados gases invernadero. La manera como nuestra generación responda a la crisis va a ser juzgada por la historia", dijo en su habitual tono pausado aunque enérgico el presidente, y agregó que Estados Unidos estaba comprometido con una nueva era de responsabilidades en diversos asuntos globales, pero que no podía hacer frente a esta crisis del cambio climático solo, o sin el concurso de las demás naciones del orbe. "Estados Unidos no puede ir sólo en esta lucha", sostuvo.

Y es que las preocupaciones sobre el deterioro del medio ambiente han ido en acelerado acenso en los últimos años, a partir de nuevas revelaciones sobre la materia. Por ejemplo, de acuerdo con la Agencia de Estudios Espaciales, la NASA, la temperatura promedio en el planeta se ha elevado en .8 grados centígrados desde 1980, y las últimas dos décadas han sido las más calurosas en varios siglos. Esto consigna el ex presidente cubano, Fidel Castro, en una de sus habituales columnas de opinión sobre temas globales diversos —en este caso sobre el calentamiento terrestre—, que ahora en su retiro ha venido entregando a la prensa de su país, y que son reproducidas por el periódico mexicano, La Jornada, entre otras publicaciones del Continente Americano.

Ante cientos de mandatarios del mundo Obama hizo un llamado a la cooperación mundial a enfrentar lo que denominó como una "irreversible catástrofe", para los más seis mil 500 millones de habitantes del planeta, por lo que conminó a los líderes del planeta a echar manos a la obra.

Enfático, Obama declaró que "si somos honestos con nosotros mismos, tenemos que admitir que no estamos cumpliendo con nuestra responsabilidad". Y que de cara a Copenhague no nos hagamos ilusiones y entendamos que la lucha está enfrente de nosotros", sostuvo el mandatario, en referencia a la Conferencia de Dinamarca, del 7 y el 18 de diciembre, para la que esta cumbre es sólo una preparación.

Uno de los primeros países que asumió el llamado a la cooperación fue nada menos que China, entre las naciones que presuntamente más contaminan el aire del planeta. En el pleno de la Asamblea General, el

mandatario chino, Hu Jintao declaró que su país cortará la emisión de gases contaminantes para finales de la próxima década, reduciéndolos al nivel que ostentaba a principios de este siglo. Es decir, en el año 2005.

En nota aparte, trascendió que la nueva administración de Obama ha hecho más –cualquier cosa que esto signifique- para combatir el deterioro del medio ambiente, que todo lo que hicieron las pasadas administraciones.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses China promises that their country who is the world leader in polluting the air will reduce their pollution by 2020. President Jintao said he is committing to reduce the carbon dioxide emission levels significantly from the levels in 2005.](#)

### **Promete China, el país que más contamina el aire en el mundo, bajar la contaminación para el 2020**

Manuel Ocaño, Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingue, Wednesday, September 23, 2009

En la Cumbre sobre Cambio Climático en Naciones Unidas, el gobierno de China sorprendió al plenario al comprometerse a reducir sus niveles de contaminación a lo largo de la próxima década. El presidente chino, Hu Jintao dijo que se comprometía a reducir los niveles de contaminación por dióxido de carbono, notablemente al nivel que había en el año 2005. China se considera el país con los mayores niveles de contaminación del aire en el mundo.

Por su parte el presidente, Barack Obama, quien había instado a una acción contra el cambio climático, destacó que la situación económica mundial no debe ser excusa para postergar un plan global contra el efecto invernadero.