

Air district's commute plan drops fines Valley air officials won't penalize businesses.

By Mark Grossi

The Fresno Bee, Wednesday, Dec. 16, 2009

Valley air officials have softened a proposal aimed at thinning out daily commute traffic by eliminating fines for business owners who can't persuade employees to leave their cars at home.

Officials decided they could not legally enforce the fines, even though the South Coast Air Quality Management District in Southern California has used similar sanctions for more than 20 years.

Environmental activists say the Valley's proposed rule is weak, and they oppose it.

Businesses aren't enthusiastic either, saying the rule -- even with the weakened enforcement -- would cost too much during hard economic times. They also question whether it would accomplish the goal, said Jan Ennenga of the Modesto-based Manufacturers Council of Central Valley, representing food processors, packaging manufacturers and power generators.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District board is scheduled to vote today on the proposal, which encourages up to 5,000 companies and governmental agencies to help workers choose alternatives to driving alone, including carpools, buses and telecommuting.

The rule would require employers with more than 100 eligible workers to register with the air district, provide options for employees to stop using their cars and perform yearly surveys to gauge success.

Businesses that are unsuccessful at getting employees to reduce their commutes would not be fined. But eligible business owners who refuse to participate in the program at all could be fined under existing air-quality rules.

There are exemptions in the commute-reduction rule. For instance, employees who do not go to work between 6 and 10 a.m. would not be counted toward the 100 eligible workers.

The Valley averages about 1.1 people per vehicle during commute hours, officials say. The goal of the rule is to raise that number to 1.4 or 1.5 over the next four years, they say.

That would trim more than half a ton per day of ozone-making emissions and a half a ton of tiny particle pollution, called PM-2.5. By some federal measures, the Valley has the nation's worst ozone and PM-2.5 pollution.

District officials say they would like to change the work culture among larger firms and public agencies. They say this commute-reduction program already has worked for air district employees, about half of whom have made changes to reduce driving to the job.

"We believe the changes will improve employee morale and productivity, and save a lot of money in gas costs and vehicle maintenance," district Executive Director Seyed Sadredin.

Earlier this year, officials considered fines connected to commute-reduction goals, but officials decided they did not want to force businesses to control how employees get to work.

The South Coast district gives large businesses the choice between entering the trip-reduction program or paying \$60 per employee to avoid the program. If the business chooses the trip-reduction program, penalties are assessed if there is not a good-faith effort to reach goals.

Such fines are legal, and the district has had no trouble over them, South Coast officials said.

But Valley air officials said the fines create possible legal problems and costs for employers.

If there was an accident, the employer could be held liable for requiring the employee to share a ride with another employee, Sadredin said. The employee driving also would be entitled to be paid for the trip, he said.

"In our view, we were not willing to put employers in that position," Sadredin said. "We did not want to add liability and labor costs to businesses."

Even without the fines, the Valley rule would cost employers money, business representatives say. They say businesses must pay for educating employees, conducting annual surveys to see how many workers are participating and providing trip-saving services, such as banking at the job place.

Business owners would have lists of options they can choose from to reduce reliance on vehicles.

The Manufacturers Council estimates the annual cost would be nearly \$2 million, spread out among its 236 members. The council's analysis shows the investment would translate to a cost of about \$60,000 per ton of air pollution reduced -- roughly five times the air district's estimate.

On the other hand, the Coalition for Clean Air, a statewide organization with a Fresno office, says the district needs to spell out fines for companies that refuse to participate. District officials said the sanctions are part of all air rules and need not be repeated in the proposed rule.

The coalition took no position on the idea of fines connected to goals in the rule. An organization representative said its members did not want businesses to have the option of simply paying money instead of complying with the rule, as businesses do in South Coast.

The activists also want a baseline survey to find out before the rule is passed how many people are driving to work and how many have other means of transportation.

"We hope there are amendments made in the rule so we can support it," said coalition representative Laura Fultz Stout.

Update: Air quality forecast and woodburning rules

By Merced Sun-Star Staff

Merced Sun-Star, late Wednesday, December 16, 2009

MERCED

AQI Forecast for 12/16/2009: 74 Moderate (PM2.5)

AQI Forecast for 12/17/2009: 80 Moderate (PM2.5) School Flag color for 12/17/2009: Yellow

Fireplace/Wood Stove Burning Status for 12/16/2009: Please burn cleanly

Fireplace/Wood Stove Burning Status for 12/17/2009: Wood burning prohibited

San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District

Daily Air Quality Forecast

More information about the Daily Air Quality Forecast can be found at:
<http://www.valleyair.org/aqinfo/forecast.htm>.

More information about the Fireplace/Wood Stove Burning Status can be found at:
<http://www.valleyair.org/aqinfo/WoodBurnPage.htm>.

Target hit with \$500,000 air-pollution fine

OC Register, Thursday, December 16th, 2009

Target Corp. has been fined \$500,000 after being accused of selling products in its California stores that violate [air-pollution](#) rules, including portable fuel containers sold in Westminster.

The fine, announced Wednesday by the state Air Resources Board, was imposed after enforcement officers from the state agency found that the retail chain had also sold portable generators, windshield washer fluid, liquid air fresheners and reed-diffuser air fresheners that failed to meet state regulations.

The fuel containers emitted volatile organic compounds, which contribute to smog formation, while the portable generators did not meet requirements meant to control exhaust, the agency said in its announcement.

The products were sold between 2006 and 2008.

According to the air board, Target continued selling the products even after receiving a warning of a pending enforcement action by the agency.

The case eventually was resolved with a "stipulated settlement" in October, the agency said.

Target representatives could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

China is willing to detail emission efforts

The Associated Press

In the Modesto Bee, Thursday, December 17, 2009

COPENHAGEN -- China says it is willing to provide details about its actions to control carbon emissions, moving to meet a key U.S. demand for verification of China's promises to fight global warming.

Vice Foreign Minister He Yafei said China is ready for "dialogue and cooperation that is not intrusive, that does not infringe on China's sovereignty."

His remarks Thursday came after U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said the U.S. would join others in raising \$100 billion a year to help developing countries fight climate change.

The financing of climate aid for poor nations and the verification of China's voluntary actions to reduce the growth of its emissions address two key issues blocking an agreement at the Copenhagen summit.

U.S. to keep Bush administration rule on polar bears

Erika Bolstad - McClatchy Newspapers

Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, December 17, 2009

WASHINGTON — Global warming will lead to declining polar-bear populations, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar acknowledged Friday, but the Interior Department will let stand a Bush administration rule that proposes to manage the threatened animals without taking into account greenhouse gases that heat the planet and threaten their sea ice habitat.

Salazar announced Friday that he'll keep in place the Bush administration rule limiting government scientists from looking at anything other than the Alaska habitat of polar bears as they develop wildlife management plans.

Environmentalists had sought a change to the rule, which effectively limited federal regulators from considering the effects of greenhouse gas emissions as they worked to address the bears' loss of habitat in Alaska.

The rule was announced last May when former Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne determined that under the Endangered Species Act, the bears are threatened. However, Kempthorne warned at the time that the Bush administration didn't want polar bears to be used as a "back door" for setting climate-change policy and issued the rule to keep greenhouse gas emissions from consideration.

On Friday, President Barack Obama's Interior Department reluctantly agreed with the Bush administration, saying it's scientifically impossible to use the Endangered Species Act to regulate the greenhouse gases that contribute to the destruction of the bears' habitat. The emissions from a cement plant in Georgia, for example, can't be tied directly to the precipitous decline of sea ice, Salazar said.

Slowing global warming by capping greenhouse gas emissions will have to be addressed with comprehensive climate-change legislation supported by the administration, said Tom Strickland, the assistant interior secretary for fish and wildlife and parks.

"On a parallel track, this administration, in contrast to (the) previous administration, is actively engaged in trying to get a comprehensive climate-change bill passed," Strickland said.

Environmentalists who've been instrumental in seeing the polar bear listed as a threatened species said they were disappointed with the decision. Obama's new administration lacked the courage to address global warming using the framework of the Endangered Species Act, said Bill Snape, a lawyer for the Center for Biological Diversity, which has an ongoing lawsuit to overturn the rule.

"It sweeps under the rug the number one cause of the species decline in the first place, which is greenhouse gases from the Lower 48," Snape said.

"I think that it's disturbing he has taken a position that is Bush-like in that he's decided he doesn't even want to ask the question, he doesn't even want his scientists to examine the question: To what extent are greenhouse gases in the Lower 48 contributing to the melt of Arctic ice?" Snape said.

Congressional Democrats also criticized the decision.

"I disagree with the Department of Interior's decision to limit the tools we have available under the Endangered Species Act to save the polar bear from extinction," said Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., the chairwoman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee.

Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin applauded the decision, saying the state also wants to "preserve and protect the polar bear using the best possible tools" but didn't think that greenhouse gas emissions should be a factor.

Palin's administration fought the designation from the beginning. It argued while the Interior Department was considering listing the bears that federal government scientists went too far using climate models to predict declines in habitat and population.

"This is a clear victory for Alaska," Palin said.

Salazar's announcement also elicited praise from oil and gas interests, who feared that taking greenhouse gas emissions into consideration would introduce more regulatory hurdles for development in Alaska and potentially elsewhere in the United States.

The Endangered Species Act simply isn't the proper mechanism for controlling carbon emissions, said Jack Gerard, the president of the American Petroleum Institute.

"Instead, we need a comprehensive, integrated energy and climate strategy to address this complex, global challenge," Gerard said. "This decision serves to protect the polar bear while providing greater regulatory certainty not only to the oil and natural gas industry but also to all U.S. manufacturers."

Salazar emphasized Friday that the Interior Department wasn't turning its back on polar bears or the question of global warming.

"To see the polar bear's habitat melting and an iconic species threatened is an environmental tragedy of the modern age," Salazar said. "This administration is fully committed to the protection and recovery of the polar bear."

Salazar said he'd reviewed the current rule, received the recommendations of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and decided that the best course of action for protecting the polar bear under the Endangered Species Act is to "wisely implement the current rule, monitor its effectiveness and evaluate our options for improving the recovery of the species."

Salazar also noted that the White House budget released Thursday includes an increase of \$7.4 million for polar bear conservation. Of that, \$3.2 million will go to the Fish and Wildlife Service. The money includes a \$1.5 million increase for the agencies that must be consulted before oil

and gas projects proceed in polar bear territory. It also helps prepare for a Polar Bear Conservation Plan to guide U.S. and international work to conserve and improve the status of the species, Salazar said.

Alaska coal exports up in 2009

The Associated Press

In the Tri-Valley Herald and Contra Costa Times, Thursday, December 17, 2009

FAIRBANKS, Alaska—Alaska's coal exports have increased following a two-year slump, and the state's sole producer is optimistic they will remain strong despite international efforts to regulate fossil fuel use.

Shipments to Asia and Chile by Usibelli Coal Mine should reach 817,000 tons this year, more than the previous two years combined, company vice president Steve Denton said during a Wednesday night panel discussion about the state's coal industry.

Usibelli produces roughly 1.5 million tons of coal per year. The bulk goes either to cogeneration power plants, which produce both electricity and feed underground district heating networks, or is exported.

Denton said various factors make Alaska coal attractive to international buyers. Shipping costs across the Pacific Ocean fell last year, he said, making it cheaper to sell coal overseas and increasing profit at home.

"When price goes down on shipping, it's generally good for us," Denton said.

The presentation drew roughly 50 people a Fairbanks library. Some questioned Alaska coal's prospects given domestic and international efforts to reduce carbon emissions and state and federal subsidies for alternative energy. Denton said he expects coal markets to remain strong because it stands as one of the cheapest sources of power. Alaska has an estimated 5 trillion tons of undeveloped coal reserves, so it's a major potential supplier.

resource," Denton said. Rajive Ganguli, a mining engineer at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, said much of Alaska's coal reserves hold relatively low sulfur and mercury levels, making it environmentally cleaner than coal from many regions.

Clinton: US ready to join \$100B climate aid fund

The Associated Press

In the Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, December 17, 2009

COPENHAGEN -- U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has announced that the United States is prepared to join other rich countries in raising \$100 billion in yearly climate financing for poor countries by 2020.

The announcement could give a boost to deadlocked climate talks which have faltered over disputes between rich and poor countries over emissions cuts and climate financing.

Clinton says that the financing is contingent on world leaders reaching a broader climate pact at the U.N. talks in Copenhagen.

She says the deal must include all major economies, meaningful actions to cut greenhouse gas emissions and a system to ensure all parties' actions are transparent.

Clinton says "\$100 billion is a lot. It can have tangible effects."

Merkel calls on US for deeper emissions cuts

The Associated Press

In the Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, December 17, 2009

BERLIN -- Germany's chancellor has called on the United States to cut back even more on emissions of carbon dioxide and other global-warming gasses.

Angela Merkel told parliament ahead of her departure for the climate talks in Copenhagen on Thursday that the current U.S. offer of a 4 percent cut "is not ambitious enough."

All industrialized nations are under pressure to make even deeper cuts, while developing countries such as China and India are being pressured to rein in emissions growth as part of efforts to reach an international agreement.

The EU has pledged a 20 percent cut that could increase to a 30 percent cut if other nations also make far-reaching pledges.

NASA, Google offer more precise emissions tracking

By Seth Borenstein and Michael Casey, Associated Press Writers
In the S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Thursday, December 17, 2009

COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP) -- The question is a potential deal-killer: If nations ever agree to slash greenhouse gas emissions, how will the world know if they live up to their pledges?

The answer is in space, experts say — both outer space and cyberspace.

NASA, the wonder agency of the 1960s, and Google, the go-to company of the early 21st Century, are trying to give the world the ability to monitor both the carbon dioxide pollution and the levels of forest destruction that contribute to global warming.

"Just having the thing flying around there imaging would just about make everybody act differently," said professor Steve Pacala, director of the Princeton Environmental Institute. "The idea that you could pull a fast one would be different."

Google, meanwhile, has rolled out a new program call Earth Engine which essentially is a massive storehouse for satellite and other data that forest countries will be able to access for free by the time of the next U.N. climate conference in Mexico next year.

Deforestation is the biggest climate change culprit in much of the developing world, and industrial countries plan to pay billions of dollars to poor countries to stop deforestation. The Google system could help everyone keep track of what forests are saved.

"The science is out there, but the ability to run it on large numbers of machines by countries in previous years who couldn't afford it is now possible," said Brian McClen, vice president of engineering for the Google Geo Group, who demonstrated the new program in Copenhagen.

But technology alone cannot solve the problem, because there must be cooperation between countries like China and the U.S. about how to ensure that greenhouse gas emissions cuts are enforced, said U.S. Sen.

John Kerry, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee.

Kerry told The Associated Press that talks with Chinese officials Wednesday made progress on the problem of monitoring emissions, which were a sticking point earlier. It's an especially big problem in the view of the U.S. Congress, which has demanded that China and India back up their commitments with verifiable action.

China, meanwhile, acknowledged "positive exchanges" with Kerry but brushed aside suggestions that China should be part of any international verification system.

"We have always followed a principle of openness and transparency regarding information of China's national measures taken to address climate change and greenhouse gases," said Su

Wei, China's lead negotiator at the Copenhagen talks. "I don't see the necessity for others to worry about the sincerity of China's efforts in addressing climate change."

The monitoring problem "is a big one because we don't know what we're counting," said Melinda Kimball, senior vice president of the U.N. Foundation and a former top U.S. climate negotiator. "It reminds me of arms control."

Part of the problem is that so many new coal-fired plants are being built in China — many of them so small they are hard to keep track of — that it is difficult for international energy experts to have a good handle on precise carbon dioxide output.

That's where a relaunch of the NASA satellite comes in. The decision is awaiting White House approval and is going through the budget process for next year.

"I'm optimistic," White House science adviser John Holdren told reporters at climate talks Wednesday.

Until another satellite actually gets into the air, the way the world knows about carbon dioxide involves a lot of guesswork, math and monitoring machines — and a good amount of trust.

Experts' estimates of carbon dioxide emissions are based on fuel going into power plants and complex formulas based on power plant efficiency. But those estimates are also dependent on reliable information about fuel and efficiency, so they could be skewed by inaccurate input. In the United States and some other places, there are monitors on many power plants, which mean better accuracy.

An individual coal-fired power plant produces "a dome of carbon dioxide" and a satellite like NASA's could measure the emissions, said Princeton's Pacala, who also chaired a study by the U.S. National Research Council on what NASA should do after the launch failure.

Another satellite is a must, Pacala said.

Being able to tell what individual power plants spew is crucial to the cap-and-trade programs to reduce carbon emissions, like the one being proposed in the United States. Under that, companies buy credits — essentially the right to pollute — from companies that cut pollution. To carry that out, you need good international figures, Kimball said.

Because NASA already designed the original satellite, a new one could be up in the air only 28 months after White House approval, NASA's Freilich said.

Measuring carbon is also crucial to a forest plan being negotiated at the U.N. talks. It calls for rich nations to pay poor ones for reducing their deforestation. That's a challenge because most of the deforestation is in countries with wide corruption and few systems to monitor the loss of forests.

U.S. says it could help raise \$100 billion to fight climate change **The money would help the world's poorest countries and limit logging, Clinton says. But it's contingent on a broader agreement that is still uncertain.**

By Jim Tankersley, staff writer
L.A. Times, Thursday, Dec. 17, 2009

Reporting from Copenhagen - Attempting to revive climate negotiations that appear dangerously close to flat-lining, the Obama administration announced today that it would join allies in raising \$100 billion by 2020 to help the world's poorest countries adapt to climate change.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said in a press conference here that the unspecified

American share of the money would come from public and private sources, would fund measures such as protecting carbon-heavy forests from logging and would be contingent upon nations reaching a broad agreement here that would lay the groundwork for a new treaty to combat global warming.

Echoing the most insistent American demand throughout the talks, she said that agreement must make clear that developing nations such as China and India will limit their greenhouse gas emissions as their economies grow, and that those limits must be subject to some form of outside verification.

"If there is not even a commitment to pursue transparency, that's kind of a deal-breaker for us," Clinton said.

The announcement came after Chinese officials warned other nations during overnight talks that China was doubtful that any broad agreement could be reached in Copenhagen, according to multiple sources close to the Chinese delegation.

Some of those sources said China was backing away from that rhetoric this morning, even before Clinton's funding announcement. In recent days, Chinese officials had cited a lack of long-term financing commitment from the United States and other wealthy nations as a major stumbling block to a deal.

Environmental groups and other nonprofits working closely with the negotiators here said the U.S. announcement --which follows major commitments from Japan, France and other developed nations -- could break what has been a nearly two-week deadlock on key issues.

Carl Pope, executive director of the Sierra Club, called it "truly a bombshell."

Andrew Deutz, director of international government relations for the Nature Conservancy, called it "a huge step forward toward common ground" and "the type of high-level political offer that we've been looking for world leaders to bring to Copenhagen to reach a global deal."

More strident groups said the money fell short.

"Climate change is already killing people in Africa, and this commitment is simply insufficient to tackle the climate crisis," Mithika Mwenda, coordinator of the Pan-African Climate Justice Alliance, said in a press release.

Government officials and observers involved with the talks said in recent days that a major U.S. funding announcement could trigger a chain-reaction leading to a broad agreement.

The long-term money offer, those sources said, could win over African and island-nation delegates who have long complained that wealthy nations are not offering deep enough reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

The African and island-nation delegates could then pressure China and India to compromise with the United States on transparency provisions, thereby clearing the two largest hurdles to an accord.

All sides in the negotiations acknowledge that time is running short, with heads of state beginning to arrive en masse today. President Obama lands here early Friday, the day the conference is scheduled to end.

On Upper East Side (Gasp!), Some of the City's Dirtiest Air

By Cara Buckely, staff writer

N.Y. Times, Wed., Dec. 16, 2009

No rarefied air here: A newly released study of street-level airborne pollution has found that the Upper East Side is home to some of the dirtiest air in the five boroughs.

Filth is not the first image associated with the neighborhood, which has some of the country's richest ZIP codes, but for residents and visitors on Wednesday, the notion took only a moment or two to click into place.

"Look at the cars, look at the limos, all these big shots' cars idling," said Maureen De Marinis, 59, who was tucking into a light lunch of poached eggs with her husband, Ted De Marinis, 60, at EJ's Luncheonette on Third Avenue and 73rd Street.

The De Marinises live in Mill Basin, Brooklyn, one of the cleaner precincts, and were on the East Side because Mrs. De Marinis had just gotten an endoscopy at her doctor's office nearby. "Have you ever seen taxis like this?" she said.

Taxis and, yes, limos are culprits. But one cannot blame the rich for all the Upper East Side's air problems. One can blame the boilers of the rich, too, which, like other boilers used in older buildings, burn a heavier oil than newer boilers. But there also are the thousands of cars and trucks belched out by the Queensboro Bridge and Franklin D. Roosevelt Drive every day.

The Community Air Survey used sensors to test levels of four air pollutants — fine particles, elemental carbon, nitrogen oxides and sulfur dioxide, which have been linked to heart and lung problems, including asthma, and premature death — at 150 sites citywide last winter.

Community District Eight in Manhattan, which stretches from Fifth Avenue to Roosevelt Island, and from 59th Street to 96th Street, showed especially high levels of sulfur dioxide, which is generated by burning heavy heating oil, and particulate matter, another unwanted byproduct of burning fuel.

"I wouldn't want anyone to get the impression that we're happy with air quality anywhere in the city," said Dr. Thomas Matte, director of environmental research at the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

While the Upper West Side, for example, showed slightly lower air pollutant levels, Dr. Matte noted that it still had a high concentration of big buildings and cars. It was just that the Upper East Side, he said, "has somewhat more."

Still, there are no indications that frequent trips to Barneys will heighten one's risk of contracting black lung. High asthma rates in the city are found in its poorer pockets — the South Bronx and parts of Harlem and Brooklyn — Dr. Matte said, because of contributing factors like access to health care, the home environment and stress.

Several Upper East Side locals said that while they were surprised their area had relatively higher levels of airborne pollutants, they were well aware of the neighborhood's persistent grit.

"We do get a lot of dust and soot, and have to dust quite a lot," Barbara Waitman, a lawyer, said as she walked her 11-month-old longhaired dachshund, Coco, along Park Avenue near 72nd Street. Over on Lexington Avenue, a woman who had lived on the East Side since the 1950s said she had come to expect a certain heaviness in the air each winter.

"I don't ever underestimate the amount of soot that comes into New York City, but it's one of the things we accept about New York because it's such a great place," said the woman, who would give only her first name, Ellie. ("It's just the way we are in the Upper East Side," she said.)

Still, Jennifer Hanks, 23, a dog walker out with six dogs, said she was rather shocked at the news, not least because the East Side seemed so pristine.

She and her fiancé just moved to 62nd Street and First Avenue from the somewhat polluted but comparatively clean neighborhood of Williamsburg, Brooklyn. "It just seems like more of an upper-class area than what I moved from," she said.

Student analysis of Morrow Mountain

Reedley Exponent & Orange Cove & Mountain Times Wed., December 16, 2009

An analysis by California State University, Fresno students of the Jesse Morrow Mountain Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) details concerns about degraded air quality, protection of Native American remains and lack of funding for infrastructure support.

Students in an "Environmental Learning" class reviewed and analyzed the report, which was released by Fresno County in September. The class is under the direction of Dr. Mark Somma, a professor of political science in the university's College of Social Sciences.

The county's report addresses a proposal by CEMEX, a construction materials firm, to mine Jesse Morrow Mountain, just outside Sanger. CEMEX intends to mine the mountain for aggregate to produce concrete.

Jesse Morrow Mountain is a landmark along California Highway 180, which leads to Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks.

The DEIR was developed by a consultant, Resource Design Technology Inc., hired by the county Department of Public Works and Planning to assess the project's various impacts.

The students' analysis of the report concluded that there are several key areas of concern, including:

- The project will create levels of nitrogen oxide (NOx) from vehicle exhaust beyond what is acceptable, despite all proposed mitigation procedures, harming air quality.
- The protection of Native American remains could be jeopardized by blasting during the mining process.
- Plans for infrastructure support intended to mitigate traffic issues is on hold due to a lack of funds.

The student analysis also raises questions about DEIR findings on erosion, groundwater quantity, farmland preservation and wildlife protection.

Students Rafe Hodgson, Rudy Placencia, Janell Anderson, Brandon Hill, Jarod Hardman, Sarah Rutherford and James Cobern conducted the analysis and review.

A copy of the students' review is available by e-mailing Somma at markso@csufresno.edu.

Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald, Letter to the Editor, Thursday, December 17, 2009 No-burn forecasts not accurate

On Thanksgiving morning, like hundreds of other Bay Area residents, I was fully expecting to enjoy a warm toasty fire along with our holiday dinner. However, after calling the no-burn number, I disappointedly avoided striking the match.

Puzzled and a little angry by a no-burn proclamation on Thanksgiving Day, which appeared to be just like any other day, I contacted the Bay Area Air Quality Management District. After a polite but unsatisfying conversation with the agent on duty, I went to their Web site, www.baaqmd.gov. It's a bounty of information complete with colorful charts and graphs, although not easy to decipher.

Still with questions, I e-mailed the BAAQMD. Their response: "When our forecasts project that PM 2.5 levels will exceed the federal health-based standard of 35 micrograms per cubic meter... at any of our monitoring stations in the Bay Area, we will issue a Winter Spare the Air Alert." The response continues with, "on Thanksgiving we did not end up having the expected exceedance, with the high reaching 29 micrograms per cubic meter in Vallejo."

Avoiding all the science, the magic number appears to be 35 and we were notably below that with the Vallejo high of 29. Admittedly, they miscalculated it. Additionally, since the no-burn is determined the day prior, by 1:15 p.m., the alert is clearly limited to a projection.

Added to these troubling forecasts, no consideration was given to the expected decrease of micro air particulates due to the absence of autos, trucks and manufacturing because of the long holiday weekend.

David E. Mix, Oakland

[Letter to USA Today Thurs., Dec. 17, 2009](#)

Impose speed limit to help save planet

Impose speed limit to help save planet British Prime Minister Gordon Brown has written about the need for action on climate change. This week, Brown and President Obama join other world leaders in Copenhagen in an attempt to forge a new international agreement ("U.S. booth sets tone for change at climate talks," News, Tuesday).

I hope these leaders succeed in promoting the use of new technologies, such as solar and wind, to conserve fossil fuels. But these efforts will take time and billions of dollars.

In the meantime, the United Nations should consider an agreement to impose the equivalent of a 55 mph speed limit on highways while developing other air pollution reducers and energy savers. For every mile per hour over 55 mph that a car travels, it uses more fuel and creates more pollution.

[Sacramento Bee, Guest Commentary, Thursday, December 17, 2009](#)

Viewpoints: Transformative measures begin at home

Excerpts from Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's speech Tuesday to the U.N. climate conference in Copenhagen:

In the harbor there is the "Little Mermaid," the statue based on the Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale. When I was a boy in Austria, the Andersen fairy tale that I always liked best was "The Ugly Duckling." And looking back, I think the reason that I liked it was because it was a tale of transformation and that spoke to me inside. I have always believed in the tremendous power of personal transformation.

The desire, the hope, the desperate need for planetary transformation is what brought us together here. And the question is: Is this also a fairy tale? Is it a dream? Is it a false hope? And if it is not, how do we make it real? Is that something that we ought to discuss? And this is something that I do want to discuss here while I'm here with you. Look around this carbon-conscious city and you should feel hope. Copenhagen is often voted as one of the most livable cities in the world.

So the question really is how do we make the world itself livable and sustainable? Certainly, it would be terrific if the world's governments reached an agreement and put hard caps on greenhouse gases while generously helping poor nations, who are least responsible for and least able to respond to climate change. Attempting to reach such an agreement is good and is actually very, very important.

But why do we put so many hopes and eggs into the big international agreement basket when, according to the U.N. itself, up to 80 percent of greenhouse gas mitigation will be done at the subnational level?

In recent weeks, the prospects for this gathering here have gone up and down, up and down, like a roller-coaster ride. And everyone was in fear, of like what will the U.S. do? What will China do, or not do? Is it going to be 20 percent reductions or 17 percent reductions? Is the base 1990 or 2005? Should it be 350 parts per million or 450 parts per million?

But what if I said that international agreements, as critical as they are, will never do enough? What if we took that as a given? Wouldn't that expand the possibilities and approaches for progress we would consider?

I mean, my late mother-in-law, Eunice Kennedy Shriver, the remarkable woman who started Special Olympics, an organization that dedicates itself to people with intellectual disabilities, gave me an insight on this. She was the sister of John F. Kennedy and Robert Kennedy and Teddy Kennedy, and she knew everyone in American power and politics.

But she once told me that while the federal government was important for policies related to Special Olympics – such as health care, equal rights, job creation, dental care and so on – she never would have relied on the federal government to build Special Olympics. She said you need all kinds of different elements and entities like local government, state government, volunteers, corporate sponsors, coaches, celebrities and, of course, the families.

She said that no one from government is going to be there at the sports events and hug those kids when they come through the finish line, or organize the competition so there is a finish line in the first place. No one from government trains those kids so they don't hurt themselves or so they know how to perform those sports. She said, no, that is up to many of us, many different entities. And she built a movement, a worldwide movement that has spread to 180-plus countries.

So history tells us that movements began with the people, not with government and then, when they became powerful enough, government responds. In the U.S. the labor movement, the women's suffrage movement, the civil rights movement, the Vietnam anti-war movement – they did not begin in the corridors of power in Washington.

So there's a lesson in this for our cause. While national governments have been fighting over emission targets, subnational governments have been adopting their own targets and laws and policies. While national governments have been trying for years to define what Kyoto means, businesses are pursuing cutting-edge technologies to solve energy and environmental problems. While national governments debate how carbon caps will affect their economies compared to others, many of their citizens are seeking greener lifestyles on their own.

Government clearly has a major role, there are no two ways about that. But I also believe in the power of the iconoclast and the entrepreneur and the individualist. I believe in the power of the scientists, the capitalists and the activists. I believe in the power of the cities and the states and the provinces to be laboratories for new ideas, which the national governments then can go and study and adopt. ...

Kyoto brought the world's focus to what must be done. It brought the focus to that whole subject. We didn't know then what we know now. We didn't have as much experience with the science that we would research or the hurdles we would face. But Kyoto made us think differently about the world.

And perhaps the real success of Copenhagen is to give us the opportunity to think differently again. Perhaps the success comes in realizing that something different needs to be done and in fact is already being done.

[In the Stockton Record, Guest Commentary, Thursday, December 17, 2009](#)

Palin's looked at climate change from both sides now

By Eugene Robinson, The Washington Post

Sarah Palin is such a cold-eyed skeptic about the Copenhagen summit on climate change that it's no surprise she would call on President Barack Obama not to attend. After all, Obama might join other leaders in acknowledging that climate change is a "global challenge." He might entertain

"opportunities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions." He might even explore ways to "participate in carbon-trading markets."

Oh, wait. Those quotes aren't from some smug Euro-socialist manifesto. They're from an administrative order Palin signed in September 2007 as governor of Alaska, establishing a "sub-Cabinet" of top state officials to develop a strategy for dealing with climate change.

Back then, Palin was governor of a state where "coastal erosion, thawing permafrost, retreating sea ice, record forest fires and other changes are affecting and will continue to affect the lifestyles and livelihoods of Alaskans," as she wrote. Faced with that reality, she sensibly formed the high-level working group to chart a course of action.

"Climate change is not just an environmental issue," Palin wrote. "It is also a social, cultural and economic issue important to all Alaskans."

Palin mentioned having created the climate change unit in an op-ed piece she wrote last week for The Washington Post. What she didn't acknowledge was the contrast between what she says about climate change now and what she said - and did - about it as governor of our most at-risk state. When she was in office, Palin treated the issue as serious, complex and worthy of urgent attention. Now that she's the iconic leader of a populist movement that reacts with anger at the slightest whiff of pointy-headed, "one world" intellectualism, she writes as if the whole idea of seeking ways to mitigate climate change is a crock.

"Alaska's climate is warming," Palin wrote to Alaskans in a July 2008 newsletter. "While there have been warming and cooling trends before, climatologists tell us that the current rate of warming is unprecedented within the time of human civilization. Many experts predict that Alaska, along with our northern-latitude neighbors, will warm at a faster pace than any other areas, and the warming will continue for decades."

But in her op-ed last week, Palin - while acknowledging "natural, cyclical environmental trends" and the possibility that human activity might be contributing to warming - stated flatly that "any potential benefits of proposed emissions reduction policies are far outweighed by their economic costs."

Palin cites the "Climate-gate" e-mail scandal as reason enough for the president to skip the Copenhagen meeting. I've written previously about those e-mails and why, despite what skeptics say, they do not begin to prove that climate science is fraudulent, politicized or fundamentally flawed. The most compelling evidence for climate change is found in the Arctic, and Palin has seen it firsthand.

In her 2008 newsletter, Palin mentioned one coastal village, Newtok, that would have to be relocated because of flooding due to the effects of higher temperatures.

Since then, relocation plans have been developed for two more towns, Shishmaref and Kivalina. The Army Corps of Engineers has identified more than 160 villages that are threatened, according to a recent newsletter from Palin's successor, Gov. Sean Parnell. At least 31 are judged to be in "imminent" peril.

The chairman of the Cabinet working group Palin assembled to develop a climate change strategy, Larry Hartig, is scheduled to deliver a presentation at the Copenhagen summit.

Posted in advance on the Internet, the presentation shows that Alaskans aren't just fretting about the abstract possibility of impacts from warming. They're dealing with a real, live situation.

I predict we'll see more artful dodges of this kind from Palin. She made any number of pragmatic, reasonable, smart decisions as governor - and now, it seems, will be obliged to renounce them all.

Her tea-party legions have one answer - a shouted "No!" - for every question.

Palin knows better, but she has to fiddle her followers' chosen tune - not while Rome burns, but while Nome melts.

[L.A. Times commentary, Thursday, Dec. 17, 2009:](#)

The wrong way to cut greenhouse gases

A U.S. promise to unilaterally reduce CO2 will do nothing to spur developing economies to do the same. Vows from the big non-Western carbon emitters must be secured first for real change to occur.

By David B. Rivkin Jr. and Lee A. Casey

To help justify its commitments to dramatically cut U.S. fossil fuel use, Obama administration officials have contended that our national security is at stake. The president argued in his Nobel Peace Prize speech in Oslo that vast changes in the Earth's climate triggered by global warming will lead to widespread economic and social dislocation, instability and more wars. In the hope that setting a good example will spur other nations into similar action, he will announce in Copenhagen a U.S. goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 83% below 2005 levels by 2050. But foreign policy isn't accomplished by acting unilaterally and hoping others follow.

The U.S. alone -- or even the developed world as a whole -- cannot stabilize, much less reduce, global CO2 concentrations. On this point, there is universal agreement. Indeed, Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson told the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee recently that "U.S. action alone will not impact world CO2 levels."

U.S. leadership may well be necessary, but America's moral example in reducing its carbon output will have little impact on the developing world, where uncontrolled carbon emissions are growing the fastest.

The biggest carbon emitters among developing nations -- Brazil, China, India and Russia -- have already made clear that, while they are prepared to improve the energy efficiencies of their economies (thereby reducing the carbon intensity per unit of GNP), they have no interest in capping their carbon emissions. Given the genuine economic hardship that would result from abandoning the Industrial Age's carbon-based economies, it is doubtful that even our European allies will follow President Obama's lead. Indeed, many of them already have failed to meet past emission reduction obligations.

This is hardly surprising. In the George W. Bush years, proponents of unilateral U.S. carbon reductions obscured these enduring geopolitical realities by contending that Bush's refusal to accept mandatory limits on U.S. carbon emissions was preventing global progress. However, the results of all climate-change-related international conferences held on Obama's watch make clear the problem was not Bush. Any solution must include the major developing economies, and their opposition to mandatory emission limitations has actually grown since the Obama administration began talking about dramatic unilateral U.S. actions setting an example.

The problem is as basic as human nature. The U.S. cannot obtain the developing world's participation in painful economic sacrifices without leverage, which it won't have if it has already committed to reducing its own emissions for the next 40-plus years regardless of what other countries do. The Obama administration is consigning the U.S. to the worst of all possible bargaining positions. If climate change is to be treated as a serious foreign policy concern, lessons should be drawn from other diplomatic contexts in which such unilateral action has proved a resounding failure.

This has been especially true in the area of international trade, where the fundamental principle of reciprocity reigns supreme. No country eliminates its trade barriers without reciprocal and meaningful concessions from trading partners. The United States has advocated free-trade policies for decades, but it also has spent considerable effort and diplomatic capital in creating both global and regional trade regimes -- the World Trade Organization and the North American Free Trade Agreement -- based on the acceptance and implementation of trade policies by other members. These detailed and comprehensive mutual agreements are, of course, backed by appropriate verification and compliance mechanisms.

The same is true of arms control. All of the major arms limitation agreements of the last 50 years were founded on the reciprocity principle. This applied to every conceivable aspect of controlling the development, manufacture and deployment of weapons systems, whether involving ships, tanks, infantry forces or nuclear missiles, whether offensive or defensive. This principle also governed agreements that limited the permissible types of military activities. Carefully negotiated undertakings that detailed how all parties were to proceed -- backed by robust verification mechanisms -- invariably proved the only fruitful approach.

These general negotiating principles were reflected with particular clarity in nuclear arms control endeavors, which have long been the centerpiece of U.S. foreign and defense policy. Both Democrat and Republican presidents understood that unilateral disarmament was a bad option because it would leave the U.S. with nothing to trade for the Soviet concessions. Modern history is replete with instances of governments holding on to weapon systems they did not really want so they could be traded away at the opportune moment.

Finally, perhaps the most telling example of unilateral environmental U.S. action failing to achieve a desired foreign policy result is the long and difficult battle to address stratospheric ozone depletion. Initially, the United States led the way with unilateral cuts in ozone-depleting substances, and got nowhere. Our decreases, in fact, were matched by increases from other countries. Genuine ozone layer protection was achieved only after both developed and developing nations agreed to controls as part of the Montreal Protocol in 1987.

There is a further problem. Unilateral U.S. emission reductions would be a massive subsidy to carbon-intensive imports from developing countries, which would be cheaper than the products of carbon-constrained economies. Because developing countries would be loath to relinquish this advantage, and because some of them believe they are fated to replace the United States in world leadership, America's unilateral sacrifice would make it more difficult to obtain their commitment to carbon controls.

Unilateral action may well be the right option in cases in which the United States itself, given sufficient commitment and will, can achieve a particular goal. In the case of global climate change, however, the United States can do nothing that is in the least effective without the agreement and participation of all of the other major carbon-emitting economies, including Europe, India and China. Until all are on board, unilateral cuts will simply make the American people poorer, with no benefit to anyone but our foreign competitors.

David B. Rivkin Jr. and Lee A. Casey are partners in the Washington law office of Baker Hostettler. Both served in the Reagan and George H.W. Bush administrations.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses a climate change proposal presented to Mexico during the summit, which includes the request to generate incentives and public policy affecting transportation, energy and biodiversity. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Proponen a México temas para cumbre climática

El Universal, Thursday, December 17, 2009

Distrito Federal— Varias organizaciones de la sociedad civil como Greenpeace México, Centro Mexicano de Derecho Ambiental, OXFAM México, Heinrich Böll Stiftung, Iniciativa 350 México y Presencia Ciudadana aseguran que la Convención Marco de Naciones Unidas sobre Cambio Climático realizada en Copenhague presenta un momento crítico en negociaciones para decidir sobre el futuro del planeta.

A su vez, lamentan la exclusión de la sociedad en temas tan importantes como lo es el calentamiento global.

Dichas organizaciones hacen una serie de propuestas sobre lo que México debe hacer para frenar el calentamiento global:

"1. Destinar al menos 1% del PIB anual para la adaptación y mitigación del cambio climático dentro del Presupuesto de egresos aprobados por el Congreso. Así como reducir y retirar paulatinamente aquellos subsidios que propicien el aumento de las emisiones (combustibles fósiles).

2. Generar incentivos e instrumentos de política pública, adecuados y eficaces, para la reducción de emisiones en los principales sectores contaminantes como: el transporte, la generación de energía, establecimiento de programas de ahorro energético, y la pérdida de los bosques, selvas y biodiversidad.

3. Desarrollar un Plan Nacional de Adaptación que supere la visión sectorial y que considere no sólo la reducción del riesgo de los impactos del cambio climático sino también la erradicación de la pobreza, la equidad de género, el empleo justo, el respeto a los derechos y tradiciones de los pueblos indígenas, y la reducción del deterioro de la biodiversidad del país como parte integral de la política de adaptación.

Así como prohibir la producción de agrocombustibles cuando compitan -financieramente o por recursos naturales- con la dinámica de producción de alimentos.

4. Modificar la actual política forestal con el fin de acabar con la deforestación antes del 2020; considerando los derechos de los actores involucrados -pueblos indígenas y comunidades- en su mayoría, así como no privilegiar la reforestación sobre el manejo forestal comunitario. Esto, implica que la Iniciativa REDD (y otros instrumentos internacionales) contengan mecanismos de consulta con las comunidades que implementen los programas."

La cumbre de Copenhague no ha logrado acuerdos reales para lograr la disminución de temperatura en la Tierra. Las organizaciones de la sociedad civil que presentan los puntos anteriores señalan que México debe comprometerse para lograr un cambio real y que es necesario hacer políticas locales y mundiales que tengan un mismo objetivo.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses US will contribute funds to underdeveloped countries to assist with the adaption of climate change principals.](#)

EEUU contribuirá al fondo de 100.000 millones dólares para los países pobres

HOY, Thursday, December 17, 2009

La secretaria norteamericana de Estado, Hillary Clinton, anunció hoy que EEUU contribuirá al "esfuerzo global" de los países ricos de destinar 100.000 millones de dólares anuales a partir de 2020 a los "países más pobres y vulnerables" al cambio climático.

Clinton compareció ante la prensa a su llegada a la Cumbre de la ONU de Cambio Climático de Copenhague, que hasta mañana recibirá a 119 jefes de Estado y de Gobierno, entre ellos el presidente estadounidense, Barack Obama.

Explicó que esos fondos procederán de aportaciones públicas, privadas "y de otras fuentes alternativas", que no precisó, y añadió que se destinarán principalmente a la adaptación de esos países al cambio climático y a la protección de los bosques.