

Air regulators looking at cracking down on charbroiler eateries

By Mark Grossi, The Fresno Bee

In the Merced Sun-Star, Sunday, Aug. 23, 2009

Air officials are proposing a rule to curb tiny specks in charbroiler exhaust that threaten the health of those living near restaurants. But the measure misses most of the pollution.

The rule would apply to chain-driven charbroilers that cook meat on a conveyor with burners above and below. Those charbroilers, used by such restaurants as Carl's Jr. and Burger King, account for 25 percent of charbroiler exhaust.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District backed away from a much broader rule that would have regulated all charbroiler exhaust after restaurants complained in June.

The rule has been revised after the district staff concluded expensive pollution control devices for some types of charbroilers might not work.

Staffers now recommend a delay in regulating those charbroilers that produce most of the emissions. Called under-fire charbroilers, they cook with flame or heat from below the meat, similar to a home barbecue. They are used in restaurants such as El Pollo Loco.

Under-fire charbroilers won't come back for possible regulation until 2011, which worries air activists.

"We can't afford to delay this part of the rule," said Laura Fultz Stout of the Coalition for Clean Air in Fresno. "They say 75 percent? We think it's more like 80 percent or 90 percent of the emissions have been left out of this rule." Air officials said there is not enough proof yet that control devices would be effective with under-fire charbroilers. And the devices -- complex particle filtering systems -- could cost the industry up to \$60 million. The more limited rule would cost industry \$7 million.

"When we looked closer at the numbers, the controls would have cost 20 percent to 30 percent of the net profit for some restaurants," said district executive director Seyed Sadredin. "We need more time to study the technology." District staffers recommend offering grants to restaurants with under-fired charbroilers to help buy the control devices. Then, the district can research the effectiveness of the devices.

Industry officials say they supported the district's decision to delay action.

"The cost for requiring restaurants to install control emissions equipment for under-fired charbroilers would have been astronomical and devastating to businesses trying to stay above water in this economy," said Amalia Chamorro of the Sacramento-based California Restaurant Association.

A board vote on the revised rule can't take place until next month because the public needs time to comment on the changes. Activists said they will make comments.

If the rule is approved, 64 restaurants would be required to install the devices by Jan. 1, 2011. It would apply only to restaurants that each week charbroil more than 400 pounds of beef, lamb, poultry, pork and fish.

Officials said charbroilers are not among the largest contributors of particle pollution, amounting to about 1 percent of the Valley's PM-2.5 problem.

But there is a growing body of evidence suggesting they are a health threat to people living in surrounding neighborhoods.

When grease from meat falls on coals or flames, various chemical specks are formed and sent into the air through the exhaust, which can later enter the lungs of people, according to the latest research.

"I think it might be a little deceptive to just look at the regional numbers for charbroiling," said Scott Nester, district planning director. "The effects are at the neighborhood level."

Turlock Journal

Staff Reports

Turlock Journal, Saturday, Aug. 22, 2009

On Friday, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency proposed to grant the state of California's request to reclassify four areas due to the 1997 8-hour ozone air quality standard. The San Joaquin Valley area will be reclassified from serious to extreme; the South Coast area from severe to extreme; and both Coachella Valley and Sacramento Metro areas from serious to severe. Under the Clean Air Act, the EPA is required to grant a state's request to reclassify an ozone nonattainment area.

If finalized, the reclassifications will require the state to incorporate more stringent requirements, such as lower permitting thresholds and implementing reasonably available control technologies at more sources. It will also give the state more time to meet the federal ozone standard.

The EPA is also proposing a schedule for the state to submit revisions to its clean air plan that show how the area will meet the additional requirements resulting from the reclassifications. The EPA will continue to work with the state and tribes to address the federal Clean Air Act requirements.

Ozone is a gas that occurs naturally in the upper atmosphere to protect earth from the sun's harmful ultraviolet rays. At ground level, ozone is created by a chemical reaction involving sunlight and pollutants such as car exhaust, oil and gas vapors, and paint and hairspray fumes.

Ozone pollution at ground level aggravates respiratory illnesses such as asthma, bronchitis and emphysema. Healthy people who are active outdoors on high ozone days may experience coughing, nasal congestion and itchy eyes.

The EPA is encouraging the public to comment during a 30-day comment period that will be identified once the proposed rule is published in the Federal Register. A copy of the proposed rulemaking will soon be available on the EPA Pacific Southwest region's Web site at: <http://www.epa.gov/region09/air/actions/ca.html>.

EPA to reclassify Central Valley for ozone air pollution

Central Valley Business Times, Friday, Aug. 21, 2009

The Central Valley would get under 2024 to clean up the ozone pollution of the air under a reclassification of the problem proposed Friday by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The EPA move is seen as "signing off on a formality," by Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The air district had made the request in 2007 to have the region's ozone pollution classified as among the worst in the nation to gain time to find ways to lessen it to meet federal standards.

Attainment of the cleaner air standards by 2013, the earlier deadline, was impossible, says Mr. Sadredin. But attainment by 2024 is also impossible since there is no known technology to do it, he says.

"Even if money were not an issue, the technology does not exist" to rid the air of the ozone problem, Mr. Sadredin says.

"It's a tough, tough federal standard to meet," he says.

Mr. Sadredin says the Valley hopes to lessen ozone pollution – a major component of smog – by such things as the proposed bullet train, which is thought to take some intercity traffic off the Valley's highways.

Without attainment, businesses that emit significant pollution in the eight counties covered by the air district might find themselves saddled with stiff federal fines, he says.

In total, four areas affected by the 1997 8-hour ozone air quality standard are being reclassified: the San Joaquin Valley area from serious to extreme; the South Coast area from severe to extreme; and both Coachella Valley and Sacramento Metro areas from serious to severe.

Under the Clean Air Act, the EPA is required to grant a state's request to reclassify an ozone nonattainment area.

If finalized, the reclassifications will require the state to incorporate more stringent requirements, such as lower permitting thresholds and implementing reasonably available control technologies at more sources. It will also give the state more time to meet the federal ozone standard.

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Allergies: Time to harvest nuts means more dust in the air

By Hillary S. Meeks

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Monday, Aug. 24, 2009

Since almonds and walnuts are in the top 13 profitable crops in Tulare County, it's no surprise that there are groves everywhere.

And since Visalia and its surrounding communities have grown, they've also grown around these trees. Which means that residents nearby have to contend with pollen in the spring, and dust from the fall harvest. For those who have allergies or asthma, the dust can be a health hazard.

"I think growers are very sensitive and aware that they're making dust, but unfortunately, for the [groves] near more urban areas, it's just a reality," said Tricia Stever, executive director of the Tulare County Farm Bureau.

The dust is generated when shaker machines shake the trees to make the nuts fall, and then sweeper machines come through and sweep up the nuts.

Stever said growers try to minimize dust during the harvest by keeping the orchard floor clean and spraying a mist of water on it. But too much water makes it muddy for the shaker and sweeper machines to drive through. Besides, she said, a lot of the dust has been sitting on the trees all summer and no amount of cleaning the floor will help.

Some growers, such as Bryan Yahnian with Sevan Farms in Visalia, have purchased harvesting machines that are designed to create less dust. But he said that there will always be dust, and he himself has had to battle allergies in the past.

"When I was younger, it would bother me. I've been doing this all my life, and the last five or six years, it hasn't bothered me anymore," Yahnian said. "I used to get an allergy attack once a week and I would take over-the-counter medication, antihistamines, but they didn't really work."

The best rule of thumb is to just stay away from the dust, if possible, said Dr. A.M. Aminian of the Allergy Institute in Visalia. For those who live in neighborhoods near groves or in the wind path of the trees, he suggests staying indoors.

Those who are bothered by the dust will experience symptoms such as a stuffy nose, drainage and irritation of the eyes. Those who suffer from asthma may cough, wheeze or have shortness of breath.

Even people who don't have allergies or asthma can be irritated by the dust, so Aminian said that everyone should drink plenty of water.

More fluids in the body means more mucous, which protects the respiratory system and helps the body to flush out irritants.

There isn't medication to protect against the dust, but it can intensify other allergies or asthma, Aminian said. If patients are experiencing worse symptoms or their already-prescribed medicine isn't working, he said they should see their allergist or regular physician.

"If they're allergic to something specific we, could desensitize them by giving them allergy shots," he said. "But we can't do that for dust."

People who work in or near groves that are dusty should always wear face masks. When they get home, they should take showers and thoroughly clean their hair so they don't inhale dust particles all night long, Aminian said.

Though the particles generated by nut harvest are heavy and don't make an impact on the overall pollution of the Central Valley, the dust can still affect whole neighborhoods, said Errol Villegas, the program manager for San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's planning department.

"Any type of dust operation could pose a health hazard," he said.

If residents see what they think is an abnormal amount of dust being generated by a harvest, Villegas said they should call the district at 230-6000 and an inspector will be sent out.

Valley dealerships deal with 'Clunkers'

By Tracy Correa

Fresno Bee, Sunday, August 23, 2009

Worried they won't get their money from the federal government, several Valley car dealerships called an early end to the Cash for Clunkers vehicle trade-in program this weekend -- well ahead of today's 5 p.m. sales deadline.

At least one dealership -- Future Ford Kia in Clovis -- said it would keep selling cars as long as qualified customers showed up.

Despite paperwork headaches and worries that the program will run short of funds, Valley car dealers said the federal incentive program has been a boon to sales at a time when cars were languishing on their lots.

The \$3 billion federal program gives customers up to a \$4,500 credit for trading in a used car for a new, more fuel-efficient vehicle. Rebates for more than 500,000 cars already have been claimed for a total of more than \$2 billion.

"The program has been wonderful, everyone is selling a lot of cars," said Linda Gist, general manager at Bingham Toyota in Clovis.

However, she said, the problematic program has turned many dealers off. Bingham stopped the clunker deals Sunday afternoon. Gist said her staff needs time to submit to the federal government the 100 applications it already has accepted. "Only one has been paid and six are approved," she said.

At Hedrick's Chevrolet in Clovis, 15 Cash for Clunker customers were accepted Friday, but 35 were turned away because the staff didn't have time to process their applications. Eight were accepted Saturday before the dealership put the brakes on the program Sunday.

Brian Loyd, Hedrick's sales manager, said the dealership is backlogged with paperwork for the 50 customers it has put into new cars. And he said Hedrick's is worried it may not be reimbursed for all the clunkers it took in.

"We've only gotten reimbursed on one of them," he said.

Loyd said dealers feel pressured to let qualified customers drive off with new cars. However, he said, if the customer's application is later denied, "we can't ... get the car back."

At Future Ford Kia, sales manager Jose Sanchez said he was low on fuel-efficient cars, but would keep selling on Sunday.

Sanchez said the dealership -- part of a California network of dealers -- has been reimbursed on nearly all of its clunkers.

Behind the dealership, he showed off a "graveyard" of 90 clunkers. It includes gas-guzzling SUVs and a car the staff has nicknamed "the beast" -- a 1988 Lincoln Town Car with ripped seats and an odometer that has rolled over four times. The dealership estimates the Town Car has logged about 455,000 miles.

In the front lot, where new cars used to sit, the dealership had vacant rows.

"We knew it was gonna be big, we just didn't know it was going to be this big," Sanchez said.

The reporter can be reached at tcorrea@fresnobee.com or (559) 441-6378.

Controlled burn planned in park

From the Fresno Bee

In the Merced Sun-Star, Saturday, Aug. 22, 2009

YOSEMITE -- Yosemite National Park announced plans for a controlled burn at Big Meadow, near the community of Foresta, on Wednesday.

The total burn area will include 90 acres, subject to weather conditions and air quality. Fire crews have been preparing the meadow for several weeks. Fire engines, water tenders and hand crews will be on site during the fire.

Yosemite officials estimate the burn will take one day to complete and another few days to douse hot spots.

Local harbors going greener

ENVIRONMENT: Ports of L.A., Long Beach pioneering cleaner technology.

Daily News Wire

L.A. Daily News, Monday, August 24, 2009

The ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach have become a magnet for the testing and development of technologies aimed at moving more cargo with less pollution.

In the past two years, the ports and their partners have handed out nearly \$40 million for the development of devices and systems, such as a pollution-reducing hood for a ship's smokestack, a Los Angeles newspaper reported.

Port officials told the newspaper they have been contacted by firms in 170 countries that hope to sell ways to reduce pollution and energy consumption by ships, trucks, trains and heavy equipment.

"Individual ports are working with their vendors to try new things, but I'm not aware of another port that has a program like Los Angeles and Long Beach," said Meredith Martino, manager of government relations and environmental policy for the American Association of Port Authorities. "They have come up with a systematic way of testing new ideas."

Among the investments that port officials hope will pay off is:

A "cold-ironing" system that enables ships at port to hook into shore power and turn off diesel-powered generators;

An electric truck capable of hauling 60,000-pound cargo containers at speeds up to 40 mph, a feat accomplished by wiring together an array of forklift batteries;

And the world's first diesel-electric hybrid tugboat, built for Foss Maritime Co. of Seattle, that will work local waters using less fuel and emitting fewer pollutants.

Many of the projects were funneled through the Technology Advancement Program and started as part of the San Pedro Bay Ports Clean Air Action Plan, adopted in late 2006.

The twin ports, in collaboration with the California Air Resources Board, the South Coast Air Quality Management District and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, have agreed to fund 14 projects, many of which involve technologies developed by West Coast companies.

Other programs include the development of liquefied natural gas vehicles that would replace diesel-powered trucks at port container terminals; a flywheel technology that would capture energy from the action of yard cranes and convert it to power to reduce diesel emissions; and a high-performance truck engine that would operate at 2010 emissions standards, it was reported.

Cleaning up at the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach

The friendly rivals are attracting, testing and funding cutting-edge technology to reduce emissions and fuel consumption.

By Ronald D. White

LA Times, Sunday, August 23, 2009

The ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach are so busy that they move more cargo than the next five largest U.S. ports combined. They're so efficient that they process more international trade in one month than most North American harbors handle in an entire year.

Now the friendly rivals are leading the way into unexpected waters: attracting, testing and funding cutting-edge technology to [reduce emissions](#) and fuel consumption at the ports.

Even as their revenues declined and their budgets shrank in the worst global recession in more than 60 years, the twin ports have become accidental venture capitalists of sorts in the world of green technology.

In the last two years, the two ports and their partners have handed out nearly \$40 million to stimulate the development of devices and systems that at first glance might seem a bit wacky, such as a pollution-sucking apparatus placed over a ship's smokestack that looks a little like an old-fashioned bonnet hair dryer gone super-sized. Port officials say they have been contacted by firms in 170 countries that hope to sell ways to reduce pollution and energy consumption by ships, trucks, trains and heavy equipment.

"Individual ports are working with their vendors to try new things, but I'm not aware of another port that has a program like Los Angeles and Long Beach," said Meredith Martino, manager of government relations and environmental policy for the American Assn. of Port Authorities. "They have come up with a systematic way of testing new ideas."

Port money has helped develop:

* A system that allows docked ships to run onboard lights and air conditioning using electricity and the equivalent of giant extension cords rather than relying on pollution-creating diesel fuel.

* An electric truck capable of hauling 60,000-pound cargo containers at a top speed of 40 mph, a feat accomplished not with advanced battery technology but by wiring together an array of forklift batteries. New, longer-range diesel batteries are being tested.

* The world's first diesel-electric hybrid tugboat, built for Foss Maritime Co. of Seattle, that will work local waters using less fuel and emitting fewer pollutants.

The ports' development efforts, much of them funneled through the Technology Advancement Program, were launched as part of the San Pedro Bay Ports Clean Air Action Plan, adopted in late 2006. In partnership with other agencies, the ports, using budgets derived largely from lease payments, don't take an ownership position in the companies, instead providing seed money in exchange for guarantees that the technology will be used locally.

Experts say the two ports are putting to rest the notion that environmental regulation is bad for business, contending that green technology will provide the next leap in new jobs and revenue for the state's economy.

The ports are becoming "very important contributors for a new kind of innovation," said David Roland-Holst, a professor at the UC Berkeley Center for Energy, Resources and Economic Sustainability.

"The next knowledge-intensive technology sector is going to be energy efficiency," Roland-Holst said. "They can help revolutionize traditional practices around the world while addressing climate change, the most momentous environmental issue of our time."

The two ports have a powerful incentive to nurture new technology, said Daniel J.B. Mitchell, a UCLA professor emeritus of management and public policy.

"They were built when no one was worried about pollution," Mitchell said. "Now they are surrounded by big cities. If they are to continue to function as ports, they have to deal with the problems of air quality."

The mayors of Los Angeles and Long Beach say they prefer to view it as an opportunity.

"We believe that as we build awareness about climate change, we have to show the public that there are new economic opportunities that come with cleaning the ports," Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa said. "We have decided to focus on economic development around the port and its maritime activities, and we are moving faster than any other big city in America."

Long Beach Mayor Bob Foster said the ports "may never be as big as the movie industry or the defense industry, but when you start down the path to improve, people see that as a business opportunity. How can you meet the same goals, but in a way that is cleaner, faster and maybe less expensive?"

The development program has been maintained even though both ports have implemented some of the most severe budget cuts in recent memory because of the sharp decline in cargo traffic from the global recession. Port officials have acknowledged that long-planned expansion efforts hinge on reducing the effects of their pollution-spewing activities.

So far, the two ports, in collaboration with the California Air Resources Board, the South Coast Air Quality Management District and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, have agreed to fund 14 projects, many of which involve technologies developed by West Coast companies.

The ports are receiving international recognition for their technology investments. The best example is the system used by both ports when ships turn off their diesel engines and plug into shore-side electrical grids to reduce pollution.

The system's publicly available specifications have been approved by the International Organization for Standardization and the International Electrotechnical Commission, two standards-setting organizations based in Geneva, said Eric Caris, assistant director of marketing for the Port of Los Angeles.

"It provides a guideline. It specifies the voltage and the rating of the power cables and the connectors, the number of cables and deals with all of the safety specifications," Caris said.

Other programs include the development of liquefied natural gas vehicles that would replace diesel-powered trucks at port container terminals; a flywheel technology that would capture energy from the action of yard cranes and convert it to power to reduce diesel emissions; and a high-performance truck engine that would operate at 2010 emissions standards.

The technology development program has brought jobs. At Balqon Corp., the Harbor City company that produced the ports' first electric truck in February with \$527,000 from the Port of Los Angeles and the South Coast Air Quality Management District, employment has jumped. The company, founded in 2005, has grown from a few engineers to 15 full-time workers and three part-timers as the manufacturing operation gears up.

The L.A. port has signed on for 25 heavy-duty trucks at a cost of \$5.7 million. Balqon Chief Executive Balwinder Samra said he hoped to market the technology to railroads and others, paying the port a royalty for each truck sold to another buyer.

The process under which all new technology is considered operates so seamlessly across the various agencies that officials of both ports are in demand at seminars across the country to talk about how they transformed a nightmarish and disorganized system.

In the past, there was no formal process for pre-screening proposals, forcing port officials to sit through long, unproductive presentations, said Kevin Maggay, an environmental specialist at the Port of Los Angeles.

Now, he said, officials of both ports meet every six weeks with representatives of the South Coast Air Quality Management District, California Air Resources Board and EPA.

"It's much better to evaluate the technology before we talk to them. Now, we funnel them all through a process that is legal and transparent. We're very proud of what we have done," Maggay said.

Richard Steinke, executive director of the Port of Long Beach, said companies were responding "to the research they can get done and the funding they can get by coming to our ports. We have a developed a pretty cool tech incubator, and we're seeing a lot of exciting things come about as a result of these efforts."

**Stimulus funds in California mostly go to routine projects, study says
Critics say the money is being used for projects that would have been built anyway,
instead of on ways to change how Californians live. Case in point: Army latrines, not high-speed rail.**

By Alana Semuels

LA Times, Friday, August 21, 2009

When President Obama first outlined his stimulus plan to boost the economy, leaders across the country envisioned a burst of federal funding to build high-speed rail lines, modern classrooms and a new national electricity grid.

Latrine repair? No one mentioned that. But \$500,000 has been set aside to fix the toilets at Ft. Irwin, an Army base south of Death Valley National Park, according to data from the California Recovery Task Force.

In fact, much of the stimulus money earmarked for California so far has gone toward run-of-the-mill projects such as replacing a metal guardrail with a concrete one in the city of Orange and conducting a campus-wide elevator study at the Department of Veterans Affairs Hospital in San Francisco.

Federal officials defend the expenditures, saying they wanted to emphasize "shovel-ready" projects that would get people working. California had one of the highest unemployment rates in the nation in June at 11.6%, and economists anticipate it to remain in the same ballpark when the latest numbers are released today.

But critics say the stimulus bill is merely paying for work that would have been completed anyway. Worse, they say, the government is missing a chance to reshape the way Californians live, a failure that's being repeated in states across the country.

"We have these huge, challenging needs facing the country in infrastructure," said Steve Ellis, a vice president at consumer advocacy group Taxpayers for Common Sense. "But at the end of the day, we'll have spent \$800 billion and we'll still have some of these huge projects staring us in the face."

The \$787-billion stimulus plan includes \$499 billion in spending programs and \$288 billion in various tax cuts and credits, said Ed DeSeve, senior advisor to the president on Recovery Act issues.

Over the next three years, California is expected to get \$26 billion in stimulus funds for projects including building highways and bridges, developing education programs and stabilizing the state's finances, according to a private research group. About \$5.6 billion in spending in the state has been approved by the federal government as of July 22, according to the most recent update on the state's Recovery Task Force website.

Transportation makes up a big share of the stimulus projects already approved. About \$2 billion is going to transportation, including the building of a six-lane highway near the Mexican border.

But critics say that little of that \$2 billion focuses on long-term transportation goals such as getting people out of cars and into public transit. About 96% of the "flexible" transportation money the state had spent by mid-June went to road projects instead of public transportation or "other non-motorized needs," according to a study by Smart Growth America and the California Public Interest Research Group.

More money should have gone to "projects that would both be built quickly and achieve long-term goals such as [reducing pollution and congestion](#)," said Emily Rusch, state director of the group.

The Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority thought about applying for stimulus funds to stretch the Red Line light rail to the sea but scrapped the idea when officials realized the project couldn't be completed in the timeline the president outlined, said David Yale, MTA's deputy executive officer of regional programming.

"The president's charge was to get the economy jolted, so we needed to identify projects that could move quickly and get out to bid quickly," Yale said.

Defense projects

About 20% of the money set aside for California thus far is going to Department of Defense and Department of Veterans Affairs projects, such as replacing doors at the Golden Gate National Cemetery and renovating men's and women's restrooms at Vandenberg Air Force Base near Lompoc.

California is getting a big chunk of Defense Department money because it has so many bases, said Cmdr. Darryn James, a Defense Department spokesman. Two of the three-biggest Defense projects nationally will be completed in California: a \$563-million hospital on the Camp Pendleton Marine base in northern San Diego County and an \$86-million project to construct bachelor housing at Naval Base Coronado near San Diego.

Many of the Defense projects, including the hospital, were planned long before the stimulus was even announced, James said.

"The DOD selected projects that could be executed relatively quickly, while also focusing on mission requirements and increased quality-of-life impact for our troops and their families," James said.

Other Defense Department projects in California include \$1.3 million to replace a water main at Camp Roberts near Paso Robles and \$3 million to repair the walls, floors, ceilings and latrines at a building at Ft. Irwin, according to California Recovery Task Force data.

A fleeting benefit?

Critics say those aren't the types of projects with lasting effects on the economy.

"Whether it's talking about building a new [military] hospital or bachelor's quarters, there isn't that return on investment that you'd find on something that increases efficiency like a road or transit project," said Ellis of Taxpayers for Common Sense.

Job creation is another question. A recent survey by the Associated General Contractors of America found that slightly more than one-third of the companies awarded stimulus projects planned to hire new employees. But about one-third of the companies that weren't awarded stimulus projects also planned to hire new employees.

"While the construction portion of the stimulus is having an impact, it is far from delivering its full promise and potential," said Stephen E. Sandherr, chief executive of the contractors group.

It's unclear how many jobs will be created through the Defense Department projects. Most of the construction jobs are awarded through multiple award contracts, in which the department guarantees a minimum amount of business to certain contractors, and lets only those contractors bid on projects.

That means many of the contractors working on stimulus projects already have been busy at work on government projects.

"I don't think we've been hit as hard as the others -- 99.99% of our work is with the federal government," said Debbie Saunders, a project manager at Baldi Bros., a Beaumont company that was recently awarded a \$600,000 stimulus project for runway work at Travis Air Force Base.

She didn't anticipate that Baldi would hire any more people for the project.

Another company, Barnhart Inc. of San Diego, received \$9 million to renovate barracks at Camp Pendleton and \$11 million to build a child-care center at Naval Base Coronado. Those projects will create about 40 to 60 jobs each at the peak of construction, said Dave Roach, a Barnhart senior vice president.

Those projects will definitely benefit the residents. The apartments that Barnhart is building will include granite countertops, washers and dryers, and exercise rooms. Some include tennis courts and pools, Roach said.

And what of those light rails, universal broadband connections and smart grids?

When Obama signed the stimulus bill, he said it would put Americans to work "doing the work that America needs done, in critical areas that have been neglected for too long, work that will bring real and lasting change for generations to come."

The administration worked first to "rescue hard-hit families, businesses and state and local governments," said DeSeve, the presidential advisor. For projects such as high-speed rail and smart grids, he said, "we took the time to do it right."

Officials say California may yet get those things, but there's no guarantee.

The stimulus bill sets aside \$7.4 billion for broadband projects, for example, but competition for that money is expected to be fierce -- and large areas of California are ineligible because the money is for remote rural areas, said Sunne Wright McPeak, chief executive of the nonprofit California Emerging Technology Fund.

And though the bill allots \$8 billion for high-speed rail work, that's for the entire country. In California, the proposed high-speed rail line linking Orange County and San Francisco alone is estimated to cost more than four times that amount.

"The basic message is that unless it's something that was pretty far along in the planning, you're not going to see it as far as the stimulus," said Ellen Hanak, research director at the Public Policy Institute of California.

Demand for tariffs in global-warming legislation splits allies

Midwestern Democrats, who want duties placed on countries who don't limit greenhouse gas emissions, are at odds with Obama.

By Jim Tankersley

LA Times, Saturday, August 22, 2009

A group of Midwestern Democrats is pushing for tariffs on products from countries that don't limit [greenhouse gas emissions](#); a controversial step that the legislators say is needed to help American manufacturers survive expected emissions restrictions here.

The Democrats say the measure would level the playing field for U.S. factories, which will probably face increased energy costs due to global warming legislation backed by the Obama

administration. The legislation narrowly passed in the House in June and is pending in the Senate.

The tariff demand has placed a group of often-reliable allies for President Obama -- including Sens. Sherrod Brown of Ohio, Russell D. Feingold of Wisconsin and the newly installed Al Franken of Minnesota -- squarely at odds with the president, who has said that he doesn't want to send "protectionist" signals with the climate change bill.

But Brown said shortly before convening a climate summit earlier this month in Perrysburg that the tariff provision "has to be in" to win the votes of factory-state senators.

It's "about jobs, and it's an opportunity to fix some of our problems in manufacturing, and one of those is the way we've conducted trade in this country," Brown said.

The centerpiece of the climate bill is a system, known as cap-and-trade, which sets gradually declining caps on emissions of heat-trapping greenhouse gases.

Major industries, such as power plants and factories, would need permits for their emissions, which they could buy and sell on an open market.

That basic concept is supported by the bulk of congressional Democrats, along with some Republicans.

The conflict comes in the fine print -- particularly in efforts to protect state and regional economies from the effects of higher energy prices due to the cost of reducing emissions.

As the tariff debate illustrates, one senator's idea of protection can often be another's idea of harm.

A potential tax on imports from countries that do not adopt emissions restrictions would help U.S. factories that have shed jobs in recent decades in the face of low-wage competition, Brown and fellow factory-state Democrats say.

The move would protect existing factory jobs, the senators say, and stop companies from outsourcing production to nations without emissions limits, such as China and India.

Brown added that a climate change bill with a tariff provision offers the best opportunity in decades to reinvigorate Ohio's slumping manufacturing sector and overhaul U.S. trade policies.

Unions and environmental groups in the Midwest have supported the idea and launched a media blitz Wednesday across the industrial Midwest to tout the economic potential of the climate bill.

If done right -- with strong trade protections -- the bill would be "the most important piece of job-creating legislation in 20 years," said David Foster, executive director of the Blue Green Alliance, one of the groups sponsoring the Midwest media campaign.

Factory-state senators say the tariff could help them level the scales with foreign competitors as the states try to shift their industries toward high-tech products, such as wind turbines, solar panels and other alternative energy sources, said Sen. Bob Casey (D-Pa.).

"These clean-technology jobs I don't believe are just some future goal or something in the distance. We're creating them now," he said.

But a tariff upsets some Senate Republicans who have supported past global warming legislation.

"It's absurd for Democrats to think they're going to slap a trade tariff on China, when China is buying all our Treasury debt to keep our economy alive right now," said Mark Helmke, a senior advisor to Indiana Sen. Richard G. Lugar.

Opponents of the tariff say U.S. manufacturing would suffer under the climate bill regardless of trade policy changes.

A recent study by the American Council for Capital Formation and the National Assn. of Manufacturers, which both oppose the bill, warns that the nation could lose as many as 750,000 factory jobs by 2030 if the bill passes.

If climate tariffs are imposed, U.S. trading partners would probably respond in kind, offsetting any benefits that manufacturing would achieve from them, said Margo Thorning, chief economist for ACCF.

Some Democrats worry that tariffs could undermine efforts to win Chinese and Indian support for an international climate treaty set to be negotiated in Copenhagen in December.

"I don't think it is really possible to threaten and intimidate these two countries to a long-term commitment to reduce emissions," said Ed Gresser, trade analyst for the centrist Democratic Leadership Council, which favors free trade.

Obama said in a June interview that he opposed a tariff provision included in the House climate bill that is similar to the provision that Brown is promoting in the Senate.

Climate change campaign creates carbon crimes

By ARTHUR MAX, Associated Press Writer

San Francisco Chronicle, Friday, August 21, 2009

AMSTERDAM, Netherlands (AP) — Customs agents this week arrested nine people in the London area suspected of a multimillion dollar fraud in trading [carbon permits](#), bringing attention to a rich new field for crime sprung from the fight against climate change.

The arrest confirmed fears among law enforcement officers that swindlers — operating from the trading floors of Europe to the tropical forests of the Pacific — are being attracted to a market that has grown to more than \$100 billion.

A few years ago, carbon dioxide, for most people, was just the breath you exhaled. Today it's more likely to be seen as a pollutant derived from fossil fuels that needs regulation, making permission to produce it a commodity that can be traded like gold, oil or hog futures.

Trade in CO2 permits has expanded exponentially since the European Union required thousands of industries to limit carbon emissions to specified targets. Industries exceeding their ceiling can buy credits from companies that have held their emissions below target, acting through commodities exchanges. The average price this year for a ton of carbon is about \$15.

That carbon market will get a lot bigger if the U.S. Congress passes its own cap-and-trade bill, the central component of President Barack Obama's climate and energy policies.

And it will grow bigger still if a new international climate change agreement will include financial incentives for countries to protect their forests. Negotiators from 192 countries hope to conclude a global warming accord at a major U.N. conference in Copenhagen in December.

On Wednesday, 130 British customs agents raided 27 properties in and around London for evidence of a "carousel fraud" believed to have robbed the treasury of 38 million pounds (\$63 million) in unpaid value-added tax. Seven men and two women were arrested and released on bail.

Customs spokeswoman Sara Gaines said it was the first time the scam has been uncovered in the carbon market, expanding from the more established trade in mobile phones and computer chips.

The carousel fraud, also known as a missing trader scheme, exploits VAT-free commerce between countries. Conspirators import goods free of tax, sell it domestically with VAT to another company, which exports the products to third country. Rather than pay the VAT owed to the government, the merchants pocket the tax and disappear.

In July, France, the Netherlands and Britain initiated action to pre-empt the swindlers. France and Britain set a zero VAT rate for carbon trading, while Holland transferred the obligation to pay VAT from the seller to the buyer.

"We saw big possibilities of fraud," with a potential loss of hundreds of thousands of euros, said Marcel Holman, a spokesman for the Dutch tax authorities. He declined to say whether the Finance Ministry's financial intelligence unit had actually uncovered a carousel fraud in operation.

The British Treasury also warned last month that Britain would become a major target of tax theft in carbon emissions permits in the next few months.

The London office of global accounting firm KPMG said suspicions of VAT fraud surfaced last May when the volume of carbon trade rose on the Paris BlueNext exchange from 27.2 million tons in October, spiking six months later at 186 million tons.

Andrei Marcu, a former head of BlueNext and former president of the Geneva-based International Emissions Trading Association, said the risk of fraud can be high in any new commodities market, and CO2 is no different in the need for high regulatory standards.

When the carbon market was getting started, big companies were involved and the traders knew each other, he said. But it has grown so fast that small unknown operators are now doing big business, making self-policing more difficult.

Marcu, now a consultant for a Canadian law firm, declined to comment on the specific activity at BlueNext.

A different set of problems threaten the trade in credits derived from halting deforestation.

Forests store vast amounts of carbon, and release it when trees are cut or burned. Scientists say deforestation contributes about 20 percent of all the carbon leeching into the atmosphere.

By measuring the amount of carbon held in a forested area, a value can be placed on that carbon and owners can be compensated for preserving them. Carbon offsets, purchased by airline passengers or concert-goers who voluntarily want to cut their carbon footprint or big corporations that need to meet emissions targets, buy the credits from the forest owner.

But shady brokers already are moving into this field. They persuade landowners, especially forest dwellers with little understanding of modern commerce, to sell a share of the rights to the carbon stored in their trees, counting on a hefty profits later.

"These carbon cowboys should be rounded up," says Kevin Conrad, the chief climate change negotiator for Papua New Guinea, a Pacific Ocean nation with hundreds of indigenous tribes living in its deep forests.

In July, the head of Papua New Guinea's Office of Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability, Theo Yasause, was suspended pending an investigation for allegedly issuing some 40 tons of carbon credits for preventing deforestation. Such credits do not yet exist for governments to sell since there is no mechanism in place to measure and verify that forests are being preserved.

U.N. talks aimed at a new global warming agreement in Copenhagen are seeking ways to scale up efforts to avoid deforestation to make it worthwhile for governments like Brazil or Papua New Guinea to save their rapidly depleting rain forests.

Negotiators are working on ways to verify that logging trends have been reversed, largely through satellite imagery, and on raising billions of dollars to compensate rain forest countries — with the carbon market as one possibility.

Conrad said the climate negotiators are trying to build safeguards into the Copenhagen climate agreement to limit the opportunity for criminals. Chief among them is postponing any payment for avoiding deforestation until inspectors verify that tree-cutting trends had been reversed.

Peter Younger, the Interpol officer who deals with environmental crime and wildlife smuggling, says illegal logging and tax fraud is bound to grow as the market expands.

"Given the interest already by criminal groups in illegal logging as a business in itself, if there is money to be made in carbon credits or tax evasion ... then somebody is going to get on board with this stuff," he said.

Lead poisonings spark investigation

Two environmental officials are the focus in the sickening of children near a smelter in central China.

LA Times, Sunday, August 23, 2009

Wenping, China - Two environmental officials were being investigated Saturday after more than 1,300 children were sickened with lead poisoning caused by pollution from a manganese-processing plant in central China.

Officials seek to punish those responsible for the poisoning from the Wugang Manganese Smelting Plant in Wenping township in Hunan province. Days earlier, reports said [emissions from a lead smelter](#) in another province had sickened hundreds.

The plant in Wenping opened in May 2008 without the approval of the local environmental protection bureau, within 500 yards of a primary school, a middle school and a kindergarten.

The government of Wugang city in Hunan province said in a statement late Friday that two officials in the city's environmental protection bureau were being investigated for dereliction of duty. It did not provide details.

Zhang Aiguo, director of the Wugang environment bureau, said the agency had tried to stop the plant from operating because it had not completed an environmental evaluation.

"We sent them a notice to stop production, and they did stop," Zhang said. "But then, I guess a couple of months ago, maybe the metals industry started to recover a bit and they started production there again without letting us know."

Fears of poisoning began to spread among villagers in early July, when many children suffered colds, fevers and other ailments, state news media said.

The official New China News Agency said Thursday that 1,354 children who live near the plant, or nearly 70% of those tested, were found to have excessive lead in their blood. Lead poisoning can damage the nervous and reproductive systems and cause high blood pressure and memory loss.

The government statement said that 17 children who had high levels of lead poisoning were being treated at a hospital and undergoing further tests.

Residents say hundreds of villagers rioted Aug. 8 after news broke about the lead poisoning. One woman said a crowd of about 600 to 700 people overturned four police cars and smashed a local government sign.

Bakersfield Californian, Commentary, Sunday, Aug. 23, 2009:

Air board forced to face facts in deciding against new rule

By Lois Henry, Californian Columnist

Thanks to Skip Slayton, you can still afford a burger or slab of steak grilled to perfection at the mom and pop restaurant down the street. For now, at least.

Slayton, owner of Jake's Tex Mex, almost single-handedly (my words, NOT his) backed the San Joaquin Valley Air District down from a new requirement that would have forced any restaurant grilling 800 pounds of meat a week to spend potentially hundreds of thousands of dollars to buy and install new exhaust systems.

How'd he do it? By getting people involved, researching the issues and collecting actual facts, something the air district did not do on a rather shocking scale.

He said district staffers kept saying they had empirical data to back up their stance, but it never materialized. Someone failed at their job, he noted, and if there'd been no opposition, that proposed rule would be the law of the land.

"We sit in the logic world," he told me. "They're in a whole other world."

The issue first came to the board in with a wholehearted staff recommendation to pass the new rule back in June.

But Slayton rallied the troops, including makers of the exhaust systems being discussed, and showed the board that not only was the staff report way off on estimated costs, but the recommended system simply would not work.

At Thursday's board meeting Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the air district, recommended the board put the rule on the back burner (so to speak), study the situation over the next year, hopefully find a restaurant willing to test out one of the systems and revisit the issue in 2011.

"Ultimately," Sadredin told me, "the system worked."

In his view, it was a close call, but the district opted not to ram the rule down anyone's throat and, instead, do the leg work.

I reminded him that this proposed rule had been in the works for the better part of a year and the staff report, which I read, made no mention of questions or uncertainties.

Indeed, it listed what I assumed were actual, known costs to install and operate one of these filtration systems -- no more than \$37,000 to \$100,000, depending on the size of the restaurant.

The report also said the only thing a restaurant would need was a HEPA filter, which clears out anything down to six microns.

And, staff said, such systems are already in operation in some restaurants in Bakersfield. Zip. Zip. Zip! All neatly packaged.

Except all three assertions are flat wrong.

Slayton, and other restaurant owners explained to district staff that the systems often have to be customized to individual restaurants, upping the cost. And maintaining them can cost \$26,000 a year or more, again depending on size.

And you can't just use a HEPA filter without a two-filter system on the front end to remove grease, otherwise it clogs almost immediately.

Oh, and no restaurants in Bakersfield using under-fire charbroilers have these systems.

A couple of newer restaurants were supposed to install them per their use permits, but they never did. That's something air district staff might have known had they picked up a telephone and called one of the establishments.

Sadredin acknowledged there were shortcomings in the staff report, most notably relying on costs outlined in a similar report by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, which approved the charbroiler rule in 2007 to be effective in 2013.

"That was our big mistake," he said.

But, Sadredin laid some of the blame for the bad info on an initial lack of participation by restaurant owners. Air district staffers aren't experts in how different businesses operate, he said. They need people in the know to come forward.

That brings up a side rant, which I'll get to in a sec.

I have to disagree with Sadredin here, though I've found him to be one of the most receptive and fair-minded regulators I've encountered in the air pollution biz.

If you're about to cost an entire industry multiple thousands of dollars and you've spent months compiling a report, you ought to be pretty darn sure of your facts.

That staffers relied on numbers out of another air district's report is alarmingly similar to how the California Air Resources Board compiled the report used as the basis for the draconian diesel rules, which could cripple California's trucking and heavy equipment industries for what I believe is questionable good (yet another side rant I won't go into right now).

Sadredin stood by the district's overall track record, noting that over the past 15 years more than 500 rules have been enacted under intense scrutiny from multiple sides.

"It's not like no one's been watching the district," he said good-naturedly. "And we did the right thing here, we didn't push this through."

OK, extremely grudging kudos.

Now for my side rant:

People who stand on the sidelines and holler about "the government" as if it were some alien, brain-sucking zombie need to stop the noise and get involved the way Slayton did.

I'll agree that some government agencies are a more than a bit zombie-esque, but the fact is, government IS us unless we abdicate our power by not participating.

These days it's easier than ever. You can watch City Council meetings at home on KGOV. You can watch Board of Supervisors' meetings online in real time, or check them out later.

You can download documents on just about any topic from just about every agency. You can find the name, address, phone number and email of any agency locally on up to the federal level online. And, best of all, you can e-mail your representatives about anything big or small.

As for the "you can't fight City Hall" nay-sayers out there: Tell it to Skip Slayton.

[Houston Chronicle editorial in the Contra Costa Times, Monday, August 24, 2009](#)

Houston Chronicle on clean air standards:

City of Houston officials have wrestled for years with this dilemma: How do you prevent industrial facilities from violating clean air standards if the state agency entrusted with that responsibility doesn't do the job?

Environmental groups frustrated by that inaction are now taking polluters to court, with encouraging results. In the latest example, the Sierra Club and Environment Texas have filed a federal suit to force Chevron Phillips Chemical to reduce emissions of air toxics at its Cedar Bayou chemical plant in Baytown.

In court filings, the groups claim that since 2003 the plant has illegally released more than a million pounds of toxic, carcinogenic chemicals, including benzene and 1,3-butadiene. Most of the releases occurred during so-called "upsets," which occur during startups, shutdowns, and other non-routine activities.

The litigation is being brought under a provision of the Clean Air Act empowering private citizens affected by illegal pollution discharges to file federal suits if state and federal regulators do not take action.

This is the second time that the two groups have used the citizen suit provision against a Houston-area company. Last year the target was the Shell Oil Deer Park refinery and petrochemical complex. That resulted in a landmark settlement in which Shell agreed to reduce emissions and pay nearly \$6 million for past Clean Air Act violations.

Reacting to the latest suit, a Chevron Phillips spokesman claimed the company is complying with existing laws and has reduced emissions.

Neil Carman, a chemist and the Clean Air Program director for the Lone Star chapter of the Sierra Club, says a single discharge of emissions from the Cedar Bayou facility 10 years ago created the highest levels of ozone in Houston in the last 20 years.

The director of Environment Texas, Luke Metzger, says citizen suits are necessary "because the state of Texas has failed to stop such violations at Cedar Bayou and elsewhere and enforce the law themselves."

The support evidence filed in the Chevron Phillips suit is based on analysis of the company's own reports submitted to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. It's inexcusable that the

state agency responsible for enforcing clean air laws apparently can't be bothered to look at what's right under its nose.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses Greenpeace assures that almost 40% of electricity used in the three countries in North America- US, Canada & Mexico could be generated by renewable energy by 2020 from wind and small hydroelectric plants reducing CO2 emissions. For more information on this Spanish clip, contact Claudia Encinas at (559) 230-5851.

Norteamérica contaminante debe frenar sus emisiones

El Periódico de Mexico, Saturday, August 22, 2009

La organización ecologista Greenpeace asegura que casi 40% de la electricidad de los tres países de Norteamérica: Estados Unidos, Canadá y México, podría generarse a partir de fuentes renovables para 2020, principalmente del viento y las pequeñas hidroeléctricas, reduciendo las emisiones de CO2 per cápita de 14.7 toneladas que se emitían en 2005, a 10.3 toneladas en 2020, comparado con los niveles de 1990, y generando al menos 600 mil empleos nuevos.

“Como una de las regiones del mundo más importantes, es crucial que Estados Unidos, Canadá y México asuman el liderazgo en la lucha contra el cambio climático con medidas concretas y de corto plazo, a la vez que ponen a sus países en el camino hacia un verdadero desarrollo sustentable y protegen a los millones de ciudadanos que ellos representan”, indica.

Alerta sobre que es preciso que la región de Norteamérica trabaje desde ahora para tener acuerdos y metas para empezar a frenar las emisiones de GEI que provocan el cambio climático. Además, dice, se requiere que sean los jefes de Estado quienes asistan a la próxima Cumbre del Clima que se realizará en Copenhague, Dinamarca, en diciembre: “No deben llegar con las manos vacías”.

Greenpeace demanda a los gobernantes de Estados Unidos, México y Canadá que promuevan las siguientes demandas:

- mantener la temperatura global del planeta lo más abajo posible de los 2°C, comparados con los niveles pre-industriales;
- acordar que el pico de emisiones se alcance en 2015 para luego reducirse lo más cercano a cero para 2050, comparado con los niveles de 1990;
- que los países desarrollados como grupo, entre ellos Canadá y Estados Unidos, reduzcan sus emisiones en al menos 40% para 2020, comparado con los niveles de 1990;
- que los países en desarrollo -como México- alcancen una desviación de 15-30% de los escenarios de referencia para 2020;
- así como destinar por lo menos 140 mil millones de dólares, cada año, para actividades de mitigación, protección de los bosques, detener la deforestación y sus emisiones asociadas para 2020; y adaptación al cambio climático en los países en desarrollo.

Estamos a 118 días de la reunión de Copenhague. El tiempo para tomar decisiones para enfrentar al cambio climático es ahora y las medidas que se deben apoyar son conocidas y probadas, pero se requiere que nuestros representantes se pongan a la altura de las circunstancias y aprovechen el momento histórico que les toca. No podemos exigir menos pues está en juego el futuro del planeta y de quienes lo habitamos, según Greenpeace.

Mientras tanto, Carmen, Anselma y los suyos, junto al resto de las familias hispanas que habitan In The Pines, acaban de comenzar una nueva etapa en sus vidas, bajo un techo más que digno y, además, respetuoso del medio ambiente.