

## Anger erupts at landfill meeting

By Eiji Yamashita

Hanford Sentinel, Tuesday, Oct. 6, 2009

Emotions spilled over at the Kings County Planning Commission public hearing Monday night, when protesters came face-to-face with the decision-makers who were asked to approve a controversial plan for hazardous waste landfill expansion near Kettleman City.

The anger surrounding the project and the county's handling of the public process has been brewing for some time, but the pressure cooker exploded -- even before the public comment period started.

One man stood up and demanded Spanish translation by an independent party, not someone hired by Waste Management, and a full five minutes to speak in addition to the translation. But he was denied.

That's when anger erupted and yelling began.

As police officers looked on, the upset Kettleman City resident hollered words of protest in Spanish while holding up a picture of a baby with birth defects. Commission Chairman Mark Cartwright warned the man against further disruption, but the testy exchange went on for more than 10 minutes.

The hearing eventually began with relative calm as Waste Management supporters were first allowed to speak in favor of the project. But 60 minutes into the hearing, a raucous crowd of 50 or so protesters -- mostly Kettleman City residents -- began rallying outside the hearing room at the Kings Fair. They chanted in Spanish, "What do we want?" A replying chorus cried, "Justice!" "When," they continued. "Today!" others chanted back.

"Si, se puede! Si, se puede!" a rallying cry resounded.

This time, the man leading the rally -- Ramon Mares, who had also spoken up earlier -- was escorted out of the fairgrounds by police who were ordered by the commission to quell the crowd.

The scene was a packed, emotion-charged exhibit hall at the Kings Fair, where project supporters far outnumbered the protesters and a majority of the audience were employees of Waste Management or their friends and families.

The crowd had come to the key public hearing on the landfill expansion project in Kettleman Hills proposed by Waste Management. The hearing marked the culmination of a five-year planning process for the company.

After eight hours of marathon hearing, the commission closed the public comment period Monday night. The commission is expected to vote on the matter on Monday.

Waste Management wants to expand the existing hazardous waste landfill by 14 acres and build a new 64-acre landfill at its Kettleman Hills Facility. The company says the project is necessary and important for the region because it will extend the Kettleman Hills Facility's hazardous waste capacity by more than 30 years.

"It is a very important project not just for the Central Valley, but for the state. About 30 percent of the hazardous waste comes from the Valley, 30 percent from Northern California and 30 percent from Southern California," said Kit Cole, spokeswoman for Waste Management.

"It is because of the Kettleman Hills landfill that sites like PacBell (now AT&T) Park in San Francisco can be built, all of the lead paint from Golden Gate Bridge could be cleaned up and the Archie Crippen Tire Fire site in Fresno could be cleaned up. It is a critical resource for the state of California as well as locally for businesses."

There are only three landfills in the state, and Kettleman is one of only two that accept hazardous waste, such as batteries, lead paint and contaminated soil, Cole said.

"It makes the availability of the space at the Kettleman Hills Facility that much more important," she said.

Kettleman City, a town of 1,500, is about 3.5 miles from Waste Management's 474-acre landfill operation. The company buries the hazardous waste materials under successive layers of dirt, and landfills are lined with hard plastic to prevent leakage into the soil.

Company officials say the geology of the region is such that, if there was a leakage, it would percolate into rock layers unconnected to Kettleman City's water supply, making it an ideal location.

The environmental analysis for the project does acknowledge the proposed landfill expansion would cause significant impact on [air pollution and greenhouse gas](#) but finds no evidence of adverse impact on the community's public health.

But residents don't buy it. For years, they have complained about higher rates of asthma, cancer and birth defects.

"It's honorable that they are defending their jobs. But we are here defending our lives," said Maricela Mares-Alatorre, a Kettleman City activist leading a grassroots group called El Pueblo Para El Aire y Agua Limpio, referring to an estimated 500 Waste Management employees and supporters who came out wearing green "Waste Management" T-shirts and hats.

"My neighbor just lost a baby, and that baby was going to have a cleft palate. It would've been the sixth birth within two years of cleft-palate babies in Kettleman City," Mares-Alatorre said. "There is something so wrong there. And the fact that they'd take economic gain over the health of our people every single time speaks volumes."

Many Waste Management employees disagreed.

"As a single mother, my health and my daughter's health are the most important thing ... But there is no proof that we cause harm even though they want us to believe that," said Rosa Salazar, one of dozens of employees who spoke. "But take a look at me and all the workers who are standing here today. We're living proof."

Responding to a concern regarding birth defects, Kings County health officials said they have requested the state birth defect monitoring program to provide an updated analysis of birth defect statistics in Kettleman City.

Opponents argue the project should not be approved at least until the investigation rules out environmental exposure as the cause. They also accused county health officials of inaction.

Dr. Michael Mac Lean, county health officer, countered that the state data is a far more reliable scientific approach than a door-to-door survey approach which activists demand county officials initiate.

"If the United States doesn't know what causes most birth defects, what do you think is the probability that we're going to figure this out on four cases?" Mac Lean said. "There's no science that can be done with four cases. We will only find what might possibly have caused this. We're going to end up with the same thing we started with."

Bradley Angel, executive director of San Francisco-based Greenaction, called the public process "rigged to the core." He complained that the hearing was held 30 miles away from Kettleman City late in the evening, that proponents were given more time to speak and that Spanish translation of the hearing agenda was not provided, even though the county lost a lawsuit in 1991 over a similar issue.

"Kettleman City is the picture postcard of environmental racism in the United States today. And what we're seeing today is how it plays out," Angel said.

Angel also raised issue with Boeing's recent plan to haul radioactive waste from the Santa Susana Field Laboratory to Kettleman Hills that is being considered by the state and Waste Management.

Cole said that is nothing new. Getting a request from Boeing is "business as usual," she said.

"All the waste gets screened at state-certified labs," Cole said. "If it doesn't meet the standard, we reject it. We reject loads every day."

## **Tribe halts expansion plan at Cache Creek casino**

By Hudson Sangree

Sacramento Bee Wed., Oct. 7, 2009

Citing the economic downturn, the tribe that owns the Cache Creek Casino Resort in the Capay Valley said Tuesday it had pulled its plans for a massive expansion. The news brought relief to opponents in the rural valley and eliminated a source of tension between the Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation and Yolo County officials.

"The plans to expand the casino resort have been withdrawn," said Brent Andrew, a spokesman for the tribe, because of the "risks and uncertainties in the economic environment."

The plan had been to triple the size of the casino complex to 1.2 million square feet - adding a 10-story hotel tower with 467 rooms, a 62,500-square-foot event center and thousands of square feet for dining, shopping and gambling.

Instead, Andrew said the tribe decided to focus on the quality of its existing operations and would weigh its options going forward, depending on what happens with the gambling industry.

Casinos have not been immune from the economic downturn. Patrons are still showing up but spending less, said Doug Elmets, a spokesman for the United Auburn Indian Community.

Earlier this year, the United Auburn tribe, which owns the Thunder Valley Casino, scaled back plans for a 23-story hotel tower and event center, opting for a 15-story tower and no event center, Elmets said.

The decision by the Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation to abandon its plans came as a surprise Tuesday to residents of the scenic, winding valley in western Yolo County. Some had feared the expansion would overwhelm their almond orchards and organic farms. The casino already dwarfs all other structures along Highway 16.

"It's really wonderful news," said Paul Muller, one of the owners of organic Full Belly Farm in Guinda. "It's nice to know we won't be overwhelmed."

Muller said he hoped the decision wasn't just about economics but a sign that the tribe "is listening to the concerns of the community and rediscovering their cultural values inherent in the valley."

As the expansion plans moved forward, Yolo County officials pressed the tribe for millions of dollars in mitigation funds to offset the impacts. The two sides had reached a stalemate in contentious negotiations and were preparing for arbitration.

County spokeswoman Beth Gabor said the tribe's final offer was for \$3.5 million per year to pay for impacts on traffic, air and water quality, and county services. That would have been on top of the \$5 million a year the tribe already pays the county, she said.

Officials called the offer insufficient.

"We just didn't agree on the impacts, whose responsibility they were and what the price tag was," said Mike McGowan, chairman of the Board of Supervisors.

He said there was no longer a need for the mitigation funds - and no longer a reason for the tribe and county to be at odds.

"I look forward," he said, "to a renewed and enhanced working relationship."

## **Commuting greener to work, school, play**

By Janice De Jesus, Correspondent

In the Contra Costa Times & Tri-Valley Herald, Wednesday, October 7, 2009

Whether traveling on foot or on a skateboard, there are many commuting options besides driving a car.

To drive the point home, the Pleasant Hill Library and 511 Contra Costa will have a Travel Greener event at 7 p.m. Oct. 14, at the library, where residents can learn about options to head to school, work and activities while being kinder to the environment.

The free program isn't just for commuters, said Corrine Dutra-Roberts, the event speaker representing 511 Contra Costa.

"We're reaching out to families. It's great to educate and explain to them what 511 Contra Costa is all about and how to use a car more efficiently," said Dutra-Roberts, a senior transportation analyst.

She said she hopes the public considers the library the place to go for information about traveling greener, and that the program will be a step toward that goal.

"We're sort of a pilot test or a preview of the Green Zone in the library," Dutra-Roberts said.

Highlights of the evening include an overview of 511 Contra Costa, and green commuting options like walking, carpooling, telecommuting, vanpooling, biking and public transportation.

"We're suggesting people give up their car for just a day. If you have to use your car, use it wisely," Dutra-Roberts said. "Walking, cycling or carpooling makes a difference in traffic congestion and air quality."

She stresses that 511 Contra Costa targets people who own cars but who are looking for greener alternatives, as there are other services in the county that cater to the needs of those who currently do not own a vehicle.

"This is a program for people who own cars — we want to get them out of their cars and try to get them to understand the benefits," she said.

The program will also cover bike safety as well as the importance of parents walking their children to school. 511 Contra Costa funds skateboard and bike racks at schools. A phone call request is all a school needs to get a skateboard rack, she said.

Children's programs sponsored by 511 Contra Costa include the Walk and Roll program of bike safety tips presented at schools as well as alternatives for getting to school such as biking, rollerblading, skateboarding or riding a scooter.

"Kids have all kinds of ways to get to school, not just bikes," Dutra-Roberts said. "Skateboards are just as popular as bikes as a form of transportation for kids."

A special children's book, "Why Don't Hydrogen Cars Fly Away?" will be launched at the Oct. 14 event.

While the book is geared toward kids, it covers all modes of transportation for families.

"It's a fun way to introduce an otherwise technical topic," Dutra-Roberts said.

A user-friendly activity wheel designed to give tips on how families can make their commute greener will also be unveiled. Alternatives are biking to the grocery store and tracking weekly miles on their car and then trying to reduce that number the following month.

Dutra-Roberts said she aims to introduce new green transportation vocabulary to families.

"These are all very simple ways to educate the public," she said. "When you start the car, think about it—do you really need to make that errand today?"

Getting around green

WHO: Pleasant Hill Library and 511 Contra Costa

WHAT: Travel Greener

WHEN: 7 p.m. Oct. 14

WHERE: Pleasant Hill Library, 1750 Oak Park Blvd., Pleasant Hill

INFORMATION: Call 925-969-0841, Ext. 204, or visit [www.511contracosta.org](http://www.511contracosta.org)

## **Activists sue Texas to restrict greenhouse gases**

By John McFarland, Associated Press Writer

In the San Diego Union-Tribune, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Wednesday, October 7, 2009

DALLAS—Environmental activists sued the Texas environmental agency Tuesday in an effort to force the state to regulate greenhouse gases, asking that coal-fired power plant projects be halted until that happens.

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality issues air pollution permits that set limits on toxic releases, but the agency says there is no need to regulate carbon dioxide. Texas emits more greenhouse gases, made up mostly of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, than any other state.

The lawsuit by Public Citizen—which describes itself as a consumer advocacy organization—calls for greenhouse gas limits to be imposed as part of the permitting process, based on a 2007 decision by the U.S. Supreme Court that classified carbon dioxide as an air pollutant under the Clean Air Act.

"The time has come for the TCEQ to take its head out of the sand and begin the process to regulate CO<sub>2</sub> emission from Texas sources," Tom "Smitty" Smith, director of Public Citizen's Texas office, said in a statement announcing the suit.

Bryan Shaw, the chairman of the TCEQ, said it would not make sense for the state to regulate CO<sub>2</sub>.

"The science on global warming is far from settled," he said in a statement. "Neither Congress nor the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) have been able to promulgate final rules on greenhouse gas regulation. What is certain is that if done incorrectly, CO<sub>2</sub> regulations will impose great costs on Texas without any guarantee of a measurable environmental benefit.

Reducing CO<sub>2</sub> in Texas will do nothing to lower CO<sub>2</sub> globally, but will have the effect of sending U.S. jobs to China and India."

Smith announced the suit in Austin in front of the Travis County Courthouse and a filthy 20-foot inflatable coal plant that Public Citizen often carts to protests around the state.

The group is hoping to change the rules for the five coal- and petroleum coke-fired plants awaiting permit hearings in Texas. Smith said those plants would produce a combined 35 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> a year. In hearings for five other plants over the past few years, TCEQ has not allowed the subject of greenhouse gases to come up because they are not part of the approval process, Smith said.

The plants in the permitting process are in Nolan, Limestone, Matagorda, Goliad and Nueces counties. Smith said some of those plants have proposed to lower CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, but that formal regulation is still needed.

"Without the TCEQ putting these limits in the permits, there will be no guarantee that the power plant builders will keep their promises," Smith said.

The TCEQ also should regulate greenhouse gases based on state law, said Charles Irvine, an attorney representing Public Citizen in the case. He said under the law any gas created unnaturally, including CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from a power plant, is defined as an air contaminant.

The lawsuit comes less than a week after the EPA cited the Clean Air Act while proposing regulations that would require large power plants and other producers to cut greenhouse gases.

## **Where's the Next Boom? Maybe in 'Cleantech'**

By The Associated Press

In the N.Y. Times and other papers, Wed., Oct. 7, 2009

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) -- Our economy sure could use the Next Big Thing. Something on the scale of railroads, automobiles or the Internet -- the kind of breakthrough that emerges every so often and builds industries, generates jobs and mints fortunes.

Silicon Valley investors are pointing to something called cleantech -- alternative energy, more efficient power distribution and new ways to store electricity, all with minimal impact to the environment -- as a candidate for the next boom.

And while no two booms are exactly alike, some hallmarks are already showing up.

Despite last fall's financial meltdown, public and private investments are pouring in, fueling startups and reinvigorating established companies. The political and social climates are favorable. If it takes off, cleantech could seep into every part of the economy and our lives.

Some of the biggest booms first blossomed during recessions. The telephone and phonograph were developed during the depression of the 1870s. The integrated circuit, a milestone in electronics, was invented in the recessionary year of 1958. Personal computers went mainstream, spawning a huge industry, in the slumping early 1980s.

A year into the Great Recession, innovation isn't slowing. This time, it's better batteries, more efficient solar cells, smarter appliances and electric cars, not to mention all the infrastructure needed to support the new ways energy will be generated and the new ways we'll be using it.

Yet for all the benefits that might be spawned by cleantech breakthroughs, no one knows how many jobs might be created -- or how many old jobs might be cannibalized. It also remains to be seen whether Americans will clamor for any of its products.

Still, big bets are being placed. The Obama administration is pledging to invest \$150 billion over the next decade on energy technology and says that could create 5 million jobs. This recession has wiped out 7.2 million.

And cleantech is on track to be the dominant force in venture capital investments over the next few years, supplanting biotechnology and software. Venture capitalists have poured \$8.7 billion into energy-related startups in the U.S. since 2006.

That pales in comparison with the dot-com boom, when venture cash sometimes topped \$10 billion in a single quarter. But the momentum surrounding clean energy is reminiscent of the Internet's early days. Among the similarities: Although big projects are still dominated by large companies, the scale of the challenges requires innovation by smaller firms that hope to be tomorrow's giants.

"Ultimately IBM and AT&T didn't build the Internet. It was built by Silicon Valley startups," says Bob Metcalfe, an Internet pioneer who now invests in energy projects with Polaris Venture Partners. "And energy is going to be solved by entrepreneurial activity."

The action is happening at companies like GreatPoint Energy in Cambridge, Mass., which has developed a technique for turning coal into natural gas more cheaply and efficiently than previous methods.

GreatPoint plans to break ground next year on a power plant in Houston that will cost \$800 million and create thousands of construction jobs, says its CEO, Andrew Perlman. Dow Chemical Co. and energy giants

AES Corp., Suncor Energy Inc. and Peabody Energy are all GreatPoint investors.

"The opportunities," Perlman says, "are staggering."

A123 Systems, a Watertown, Mass., maker of lithium-ion batteries for electric cars, had one of the most lucrative public stock offerings this year, raising \$437.5 million. Its stock price jumped more than 50 percent on the first day of trading in September, with investors willing to overlook that the company has yet to make money.

The Obama administration's promises about cleantech funding have galvanized the industry, reassuring entrepreneurs that they will have paying customers. The administration has said it will focus on putting more hybrid cars on the road, boosting the amount of electricity from renewable sources and investing in ways to cut pollution from coal.

One target is "smart grids." As utilities install digital meters in homes and Americans buy appliances that can communicate with the electric system, individual power consumption can be monitored more closely. People could be cued to dial down appliances such as refrigerators and air conditioners when electricity is in highest demand. Such fine-tuning in millions of homes can reduce the need for new power plants.

At Tendril Networks Inc. of Boulder, Colo., which makes software that links utilities to smart-grid devices in homes, the staff has tripled over the past five months to 90. CEO Adrian Tuck says Tendril could grow even more if some of the \$4.5 billion earmarked for smart grids in this year's federal stimulus goes to Tendril's clients.

"What we're about to see is every bit as big as the telecom revolution that gave birth to the Internet and cell phones," Tuck says. "It's going to create as many jobs and as much wealth for this country, if they get it right. Big, Google-sized companies are going to be born in this era, and we hope to be one of them."

The government's push for these developments parallels the expansion of railroads in the 19th century, when the government granted blocks of land to companies laying track, says Jack Brown, an associate professor in the University of Virginia's Department of Science, Technology and Society.

One difference, Brown points out, is that clean energy is such a vast field that government could make the wrong choice in backing one type of technology over another.

It's not just startups getting in the game. General Electric Co. plans to string transmission lines to deliver solar or wind power. Hewlett-Packard Co. is adapting techniques for printer cartridge chips so digital sensors can send data to smart grids.

But how much of an economic boost does all this add up to? It's hard to tell -- at least at this stage, without products people actually want to buy.

The laser, for instance, was a big innovation, but it wasn't clear at first what it could be used for. That's why there wasn't an economic boom in the 1960s from the advent of lasers, even though they ended up driving everything from medical devices to CD players for four decades.

Sung Won Sohn, an economics professor at California State University Channel Islands, believes upgrading electric grids and finding new sources of power will provide steady job growth -- but won't be an economic powder keg.

Clean energy projects could simply replace old jobs and functions, like meter-readers. And there's no guarantee new jobs won't shift to countries with cheaper labor.

Some innovations take longer to reveal their economic effects. There are big booms based on specific innovations -- along the lines of railroads, automobiles and the Internet -- and then there are technologies that grow slowly, spawning offshoot industries for entrepreneurs to exploit over decades.

For example, the emergence of the integrated circuit led to the development of computer microprocessors, which enabled the PC revolution and in turn the Internet age. There's every reason to believe energy technology will fall into the same category, Brown says, but he adds: "It depends on how the bets actually play out."

## **Feds award \$2.7M for Wolverine carbon project**

By John Flesher, The Associated Press

San Diego Union-Tribune, Wednesday, October 7, 2009

TRAVERSE CITY, Mich. — An electric power co-op that wants to build a coal-fired plant in northern Michigan has received a \$2.7 million federal grant for a project designed to prevent industrial carbon dioxide from contributing to climate change, officials said Tuesday.

The Wolverine Power Supply Cooperative Inc. project is among 12 funded by the Department of Energy to test technologies that capture carbon dioxide and store it underground instead of releasing it into the atmosphere, where it traps heat and warms the planet.

Wolverine Power's carbon capture system would be tested at a 600-megawatt plant it hopes to build near Rogers City. It would use chemicals and additives supplied by Dow Chemical Co. and Hitachi Ltd. to capture 300,000 tons a year of CO<sub>2</sub>.

Construction of the plant cannot begin without an air quality permit from the state Department of Environmental Quality, which is reviewing the co-op's proposal.

"We look forward to fully exploring the many opportunities for Michigan contemplated in our grant application" after the DEQ rules, said Craig Borr, Wolverine Power's executive vice president.

Rep. Bart Stupak, a Michigan Democrat whose district includes Rogers City, said the grant should encourage the department to approve the proposed facility.

"This gives a lot of credibility to what Wolverine has been saying — they want to be good stewards of our environment, use the latest technology," Stupak said.

But DEQ spokesman Robert McCann said the grant would not influence the department's decision. Michigan does not regulate carbon dioxide as a pollutant despite its contribution to global warming. The air permit aims to control emissions of other contaminants.

"We're supportive of carbon-capture projects like this," McCann said. "But the process for evaluating the permit is laid out specifically in the law and we have to follow it."

A ruling is expected by year's end, he said.

The Energy Department plans eventually to spend \$1.4 billion in federal economic stimulus money for projects that demonstrate ways to capture CO<sub>2</sub> for long-term storage or beneficial use.

The initial dozen grants total \$21.6 million and will be combined with \$22.5 million in private funding. Other recipients include cement and chemical plants, refineries, paper mills and factories.

The Wolverine Power project would test organic compounds known as amines, which separate carbon dioxide from other gases given off when coal is burned. Instead of escaping up the smokestack, the CO<sub>2</sub> is pumped underground.

Carbon capture will not make the proposed Rogers City facility more acceptable to environmentalists who oppose more coal-fired plants in Michigan, said Lee Sprague, manager of the Sierra Club's Clean Energy Campaign.

"Even if this works, the cost is going to be staggering," Sprague said. "It was premature to award taxpayer money to a plant that hasn't even been approved."

The \$2.7 million grant was for preliminary design work that can be done without the state air permit, Energy Department spokeswoman Tiffany Edwards said. But Wolverine Power would need the permit to get more federal funding and take the project further.

Also Tuesday, hundreds of blue-collar union workers rallied at the state Capitol in Lansing for approval of the Wolverine Power plant and another coal-fired generator proposed by Consumers Energy. Many wore T-shirts saying "Put us to work."

Some legislators spoke in favor of the projects, saying they were justified under an energy bill approved last year.

"We have got to get the bureaucrats to live up to this deal so you can get back to work and we can build baseload in this state," House Speaker Andy Dillon said.

Staffers with the Michigan Public Service Commission have questioned the need for both plants.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Wed., Oct. 7, 2009:](#)

### **Removing trees is folly**

As self-appointed busy-body, I inspected the Modesto ash trees the city plans to remove along Holland Avenue east of Thorne Avenue. The trees are middle-aged, well-shaped and show no signs of anthracnose, a deadly fungal infection. The shade they cast is precious for those who wish to avoid the burning sun.

However, the roots of these air-cleaning trees extend under the adjacent sidewalk and lift many sections, posing hazards for walkers.

My suggestion is not to spend scarce money removing these trees. The city may mitigate the hazards by applying brightly painted asphalt to uneven areas in the sidewalk. Removing the sidewalk and spreading decomposed granite in its place is an equally inexpensive solution.

The city's finances will remain weak, at least for the near future; Fresno summers will remain blazing hot. Given these conditions, the plan to remove the trees is a lamentable example of folly.

*Tom Moradian, Fresno*

[Modesto Bee Commentary Wed. Oct. 7, 2009](#)

### **Wal-Mart center's benefits far outweigh negatives**

By David Bultena

Now that the Merced City Council has approved the Wal-Mart distribution center for south Merced, everyone is feeling either relieved or put out.

Relief went to those who supported the project and those with environmental concerns are on the other end of the emotional spectrum. When the project is finished, it may well prove that the supporters had it right all along and the project will be a big benefit to Merced.

Opponents should have known at the outset that their efforts would yield few, if any, results. The suggestion that the flow of truck traffic from Highway 99 to the center would increase pollution to dangerous levels gained support only from those committed to "no growth" or "green growth."

The reality is that the truck flow to the center is no greater than and probably less than the overall increase in truck traffic on the Highway 99 corridor through Merced. This is in addition to the overall increased traffic flow up and down Highway 99.

Had the respiratory problems of Mercedians living close to Highway 99 increased in proportion to the increased truck travel on 99, then the environmental opponents may have had a peg to hang their hat on, but no such information or study was produced.

The U.S. Census Bureau's 2008 Community Survey shows that Merced city and county have the highest poverty rate in the valley and the lowest per capita and median family income for the same area.

How anyone for any reason can oppose correcting this imbalance is beyond my ability to reason. If crud gets in the air, use a breathing filter or mask, but don't penalize the whole community.

Merced City Council member Bill Spriggs hit the nail on the head when he said, "Our largest health problem is poverty."

This doesn't mean Wal-Mart should be given the key to the city or free rein in Merced. They should be subjected to scrutiny to make sure their claims have validity regarding wages and working conditions.

If Wal-Mart completes its end of the deal, Merced will enjoy a modest amount of much needed prosperity. The construction phase will use local labor as well as local contractors to bid on various parts of the building project. In this slow economy, the bidding will be widespread and perhaps very reasonable, at least from Wal-Mart's point of view.

Not only does Wal-Mart sell things locally, it buys things locally. Day-to-day supplies will, no doubt, be a local purchase, again providing a direct benefit to Merced.

But what this all means is that Merced may have turned the corner on the high poverty and unemployment rates. Merced needs more of this type of industry. In view of their stance on the Wal-Mart issue, environmentalists should assume the responsibility for explaining to the unemployed in the Merced area why there aren't more jobs.

Bultena, a retired Merced County deputy district attorney, was a visiting editor with The Bee in 2005. E-mail him at [columns@modbee.com](mailto:columns@modbee.com).