

Calif. climate law could help poor, minority areas

By Samantha Young, Associated Press Writer

In the S.F.Chronicle, Modesto Bee and other papers, Wed., April 14, 2010

Sacramento, Calif. (AP) -- California's attempt to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions can have additional benefits for poor and minority communities long plagued by dirty air if state regulators take their needs into account, according to a report released Wednesday.

The findings by professors at three California universities found that oil refineries, power plants and cement kilns, which are among the state's most prolific emitters of greenhouse gases, also release other chemicals that threaten public health.

The plants that pose the highest health risks are disproportionately located in industrial communities inhabited by the poor and people of color, the report found.

"Air pollution has often been left out of the climate conversation," said Manuel Pastor, a professor at the University of Southern California and one of four co-authors. "That's a real important local issue to people."

The report was funded by a grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and done by professors at the University of California, Berkeley, University of Southern California and Occidental College in Los Angeles.

It was a follow-up to one released a year ago that found poor and minority communities will suffer the greatest health and economic consequences of climate change. For example, they are more vulnerable to extreme weather such as heat waves and will suffer more from rising costs of energy and fuel.

The report released this week examined in part the benefits of reducing greenhouse gases and what the authors called co-pollutants, or other emissions that contribute to air pollution and medical problems.

California's 2006 global warming law, which has been championed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and used as a template for national reforms, requires the state to cut emissions by 15 percent from current levels by 2020.

Oil refineries are among the biggest emitters, including those outside Los Angeles owned by Tesoro Companies and Valero Services Inc. Both companies are funding a proposed ballot initiative that would suspend the law.

Some industries and politicians say the law will burden businesses with excessive costs and lead to job losses.

State regulators charged with implementing it are considering imposing a market mechanism that would allow 600 of the state's largest greenhouse gas polluters to buy, sell and trade carbon credits.

The idea behind a market is to give industry and electricity providers more flexibility and lower their costs. For example, plants that have a difficult time reducing their emissions could buy credits from plants that can — essentially allowing them to pay a fee to continue current operations.

But the law also requires state regulators to take into account other air pollutants such as smog-forming ozone and soot-forming particulate matter, which can become embedded in lung tissue and is linked to respiratory problems, heart attacks and lung cancer.

How state regulators design a carbon market to reach California's climate goals will be especially important to low-income and minority communities because they are disproportionately located in industrial areas, the study said.

For example, if oil refineries are allowed to buy carbon permits to avoid cutting emissions, there will be few health benefits to the areas that need it most, the authors found. The same would be true if a cement plant paid money to plant trees in a forest hundreds of miles away as a way to continue current emission levels — a scenario envisioned by state regulators.

"Some polluters may maintain or increase their emissions, creating localized dirty-air hotspots even if there are regional greenhouse gas reductions overall," the authors wrote.

The report suggests California could cut harmful pollutants along with greenhouse gas emissions by doing one of the following:

- _ Require the plants that release the most greenhouse gases and other pollutants to cut their carbon emissions at that location.
- _ Limit trading of so-called carbon credits within certain dirty-air zones and neighborhoods.
- _ Impose a higher price for carbon credits in highly polluted neighborhoods so industries located there have more incentive to cut emissions.
- _ Give neighborhoods with the dirtiest air or significant socio-economic problems a share of the money generated from carbon fees. In turn, that money could be used to reduce air pollution even further, the report says.

Trolley's destination: Our history

By Dianne Hardisty, Contributing writer
Bakersfield Californian, Wed., April 14, 2010

Bakersfield's rich history will be on display Thursday during the first of three monthly street fairs sponsored by the Downtown Business and Property Owners Association.

The three-hour street fair will begin at 6:30 p.m., with exhibits, booths, food and entertainment along Chester Avenue, from 18th to 21st streets.

With the theme of the April street fair being "The Art of Downtown," the downtown trolley will drive guests on a route that will feature many historic businesses and buildings. Michael Prince, artistic director of the Gaslight Melodrama, will dress as a turn-of-the-century conductor, explaining the sights that pass by.

Prince's script begins with a loud cheer: "Welcome aboard the Bakersfield Trolley Tour. Today we will be touring Bakersfield's past, present and future as we explore her rich diverse history, hidden secrets and exciting plans for the future. So sit back, relax and enjoy."

The free half-hour ride in the 22-passenger electric trolley will begin east of Chester Avenue on 18th Street and pass by such sights as the Padre Hotel, Fox and Nile theaters, Kern County Land Co. building, Tegeler Hotel, Kress Building, Pioneer Mercantile Co., Sinaloa Mexican Restaurant, Central Park at Mill Creek, Bakersfield Museum of Art, Haberfelde Building, and many more.

Tom Saba, a member of the Vision 2020 Image Committee, helped put the historical trolley route together for last spring's opening of Central Park at Mill Creek. The trolley tour was featured again later in the year during the Greek Festival.

In addition to ferrying people around downtown on weekdays from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., Saba said the DBA and Image Committee hopes to use the trolley as a city ambassador, with onboard guides telling residents and visitors about past and present Bakersfield attractions.

"There's a lot to be proud of in this community," he said. "There's a lot to do."

Plans call for the trolley to be used during special events, including during the Bakersfield stop of the Amgen Tour of California in May. Thousands of visitors are expected to be in Bakersfield during this prestigious bicycle race.

Cathy Butler, the DBA's president, explained the trolley will be used to transport visitors to downtown attractions during the Amgen and other special events.

In 2008, Pacific Gas & Electric Co. donated the 10-year-old refurbished electric trolley to the Bakersfield Association of Retarded Citizens, a nonprofit organization that operates the trolley for the DBA. Grants from [Valley Clean Air Now](#) and the Bakersfield Redevelopment Agency help pay operating costs. In March, the staff of the PBS show "MotorWeek" was in Bakersfield filming the electric trolley, complete with Prince as the conductor. The show, which also features trolley operations in other cities, is expected to be shown on public television stations in this month.

During Thursday's street fair, free rides in a horse-drawn buggy also will take visitors around the historic route. The city's Economic and Community Development Department has updated its guide and map, which will be distributed at the street fair for those who wish to walk.

The themes for the two remaining downtown street fairs will be "Health and Safety" on May 20 and "Go Green: Summer Home and Garden" on June 17.