

EPA administrator met with challenges

By Rebecca Plevin, staff writer

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FRESNO -- Maura Alatorre, whose son was one of at least 11 babies born with birth defects in the farmworker community of Kettleman City, traveled to the West Side Church of God last Wednesday with a simple message for U.S. Environmental Protection Agency administrator Lisa Jackson.

"No more expansion (of the hazardous waste landfill at Waste Management's Kettleman Hills Facility) no more chemicals, no more damage to the community," Alatorre said in Spanish.

Susana De Anda, co-executive director of the Visalia-based Community Water Center, had another demand for Jackson.

"We believe clean water should be a basic human right, and it is not a privilege," De Anda said.

In the Valley, hundreds of thousands of people are served water by public water systems that do not meet federal health standards, according to the Community Water Center.

Camila Chávez, executive director of the Dolores Huerta Foundation, had her own request.

"We are especially concerned about the registration of (the pesticide) methyl iodide," Chávez said. "They want to spray this on our workers. Not only will it affect the workers, it will also affect the consumers."

Alatorre, De Anda, and Chávez were just three of the many San Joaquín Valley residents who came from as far as Wasco, Arvin and Avenal to call for health and environmental justice during an unprecedented meeting with the EPA administrator last Wednesday afternoon.

For Valley residents who have been fighting for clean air, clean water, less pollution, and farmworker health protections for decades, the meeting was an historic opportunity to voice their health and environmental concerns directly to the head of the EPA.

As EPA administrator, Jackson has made a commitment to upholding environmental justice, and to protecting communities that are vulnerable to health and environmental threats.

"For so many years, we have felt like the San Joaquín Valley was a forgotten region for the nation, even for our state," Sarah Sharpe, director of Fresno Metro Ministry's environmental health program, said during a press conference before the meeting.

"For too long we have been neglected, and we really want to see that changed."

During the meeting, the health and environmental justice groups made five demands of Jackson and her agency. They included:

Do not exempt the proposed Avenal power plant, near Kettleman City, from the requirements of the Clean Air Act, as the U.S. EPA recently did. Rescind this exemption, and deny the permit for the project.

Deny Waste Management's permits to dump PCBs at its Kettleman Hills Facility. Uphold federal civil rights laws that protect Kettleman City residents from alleged racial discrimination in the permit processes for the hazardous waste landfill.

Make a finding that the Valley has failed to attain the 1-hour ozone standard -- the amount of health-endangering ozone that can not be exceeded within a one hour period -- by the 2010 deadline, and that a new plan must be developed by the Air District to attain the standard as soon as possible.

Uphold the regional EPA's disapproval of the Valley's plan for particulate matter (PM) 2.5. Require monitors near Valley roadways to provide critical data on how emissions impact people who live, work, and raise their families near major roadways.

Grant the petition to suspend and cancel all registrations for the soil fumigant methyl iodide.

Reporters were not allowed to enter the meeting. But afterward, participants said they were grateful for the chance to speak with Jackson -- though they were not confident she would agree to their demands.

"I think it was productive in the sense of putting heat on EPA and letting them know they are being held accountable and challenged," said Bradley Angel, executive director of Greenaction for Health and the Environment, which works with the residents of Kettleman City.

He added: "Did she come with tangible news to improve the health of the San Joaquin Valley? Not a word."

Sharpe, of Fresno Metro Ministry, questioned whether Jackson's policy decisions would reflect her stated commitment to upholding environmental justice.

"She wants to create a space at the decision-making table for environmental justice groups -- which is good -- but she was clearly not ready to make any commitment on any of our demands," Sharpe said.

In a statement e-mailed to the press, EPA spokesman Brendan Gilfillan said Jackson pledges to continue working with Valley residents to achieve health and environmental health.

"Administrator Jackson was pleased today to meet with citizens of the San Joaquin Valley who are deeply concerned about air quality and environmental issues facing their community," Gilfillan said.

"She and her regional staff are committed to working closely and actively, as they have, on the critically important public health issues facing the people of the San Joaquin Valley."

[Sacramento Bee commentary, Thursday, March 31, 2011:](#)

State's clean energy standard will help drive new economy

By Dan Adler

America remains the foremost innovation economy in the world, and in that respect at least, California is its capital. As we have in essential industries like aerospace, information technology and biosciences, California once again leads in developments at the next technological frontier: inventing and deploying new clean energy technologies.

This leadership pays clear dividends. California's clean energy economy is growing three times faster than the state's economy as a whole. With the passage of important new renewable energy legislation, our state will continue to lead the world in one of the only sustainable growth industries in a future of climate change, and energy insecurity. This means new jobs, new spending in our communities and increased tax revenues during these most troubled economic times.

Upon becoming law, California's Renewables Portfolio Standard, which requires that our utilities deliver 33 percent of their electricity from renewable sources by 2020, would be one of the cornerstones of our new energy economy.

It does not pick winners from the range of clean, renewable energy technologies that have emerged from our laboratories. It is a standards-driven approach to improving the security and environmental performance of our energy system, with an appropriate degree of market orientation to encourage private investment and entrepreneurship.

But it does help us to identify losers -- including those polluting, inefficient and unreliable technologies of a prior era that are so distressingly in today's news

The Renewables Portfolio Standard is California's main tool for motivating deployment of clean energy technology, which in many respects is harder than inventing it.

If you follow the public debate around clean energy, you will notice certain recurring themes. One of the most obvious is that everyone loves to say they support innovation -- an allegiance to R&D

being the industrial policy equivalent of loving one's mother. And certainly, further research and development is essential to solving the energy challenge, and plays to the great strengths of our state and nation.

At this point in the clean energy industry's development, however, we must focus on deploying technologies in the real world, proving that they work and can be scaled to meet society's burgeoning energy needs. This deployment justifies the substantial private investment in maturing these technologies to the point where they are proven, and supports public policy in setting new, more aggressive goals for clean energy production. In clean energy today, what is needed more than innovation is implementation.

Opponents of clean energy policy argue that strategies like the Renewables Portfolio Standard distort markets and rely excessively on public subsidy. But public subsidies are a fact of life in the energy business.

As U.S. Energy Secretary Steven Chu recently noted, the fossil energy industry has enjoyed extensive public subsidies for more than 90 years. These are our tax dollars, flowing behind the scenes to some of the most profitable industries in the world.

Most Californians would prefer a different approach, one that supports the clean energy technologies of the future, not the richly subsidized, polluting technologies of the past.

In truth the debate over mandates and subsidies misses two crucial points about the nature of markets and energy markets in particular: They are in every instance shaped by laws, and the most effective regulations create robust, stable markets that encourage private, not public, capital to flow into them. Without attention to this reality, California's clean energy aspirations will not be realized.

The Renewables Portfolio Standard is a path toward a clean environment and a strong economy in California, and its balance of social priorities with incentives to the private marketplace is a model for other critical aspects of our economy. Perhaps most important, the RPS is a new instance of California optimism in practice, an example of what the state can accomplish when we apply our deep technological competencies in pursuit of a more promising future.

If we continue to implement the program properly, it will be a significant source of new, well-paying, highly skilled jobs, and will open new markets for California's exports.

The world continues to watch California for leadership in balancing the environment and the economy, and with the passage of the Renewables Portfolio Standard, we once again will have delivered.

Dan Adler is president of the California Clean Energy Fund, a nonprofit venture capital fund.