

UC Davis to study Valley pollution

\$8 million grant to fund research on airborne particles

By Jennifer M. Fitzenberger / Bee Capitol Bureau
The Fresno Bee, Wednesday, Nov. 16, 2005

DAVIS -- University of California at Davis received an \$8 million federal grant Tuesday to research why airborne specks of soot and chemicals make people sick in the San Joaquin Valley.

Scientists say the new San Joaquin Valley Aerosol Health Effects Center is the largest effort thus far to better understand particulate air pollution in the Valley and why breathing it can cause health problems.

Several studies have linked particulate matter to asthma, heart disease and other ailments, but researchers want to learn more about what types are most hazardous. Airborne particles include road dust, diesel soot, ash, wood smoke, nitrates and sulfates.

"We really still are lacking a basic understanding of what are the exact mechanisms that lead to the health problems that we see associated with exposure to particles," said Kent Pinkerton, a professor of anatomy, physiology and cell biology at UC Davis and associate director of the new center.

Air regulators and policy makers will consider the research results as they fine-tune rules designed to help reduce air pollution.

The UC Davis project will last five years, but new data is expected in the next couple of years.

Four other air pollution research centers exist, including one at the University of California at Los Angeles.

Over the past 15 years, the San Joaquin Valley has done a better job of meeting federal health standards for particulate matter, but its air basin still is considered one of the most polluted in the country.

At UC Davis, about 15 engineers, chemists, physicians, toxicologists and atmospheric scientists will join efforts to better understand particulate matter in the Valley.

Researchers plan to take measurements and collect air samples from two spots in the Valley, likely one in Fresno and another outside the city.

The samples will be tested on cells and tissue.

UC Davis researchers will work with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District and the California Air Resources Board.

Don Hunsaker, a plan development supervisor with the local air district, said Valley-specific data will help officials determine better ways to fight air pollution.

Said Hunsaker: "It will help us understand trends in health and air quality."

UCD gets grant to study San Joaquin air pollution

By Chris Bowman -- Bee Staff Writer
Sacramento Bee, Wednesday, Nov. 16, 2005

The federal government Tuesday granted the University of California, Davis, \$8 million to study air pollution specific to the San Joaquin Valley, a fast-developing farm belt in a losing fight against some of the unhealthiest air in America.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency award also bestows further recognition of the Davis campus as a national powerhouse in environmental health research.

We are pleased to team up with one of the premier learning institutions on the West Coast to better address one of California's most pressing environmental health issues," said Deborah Jordan, the EPA's air division director for the Pacific Southwest.

The grant also marks a significant departure from the notoriously smoggy Los Angeles basin as the home of California's large-scale air pollution studies.

Air in the San Joaquin Valley generally is not quite as bad as in parts of inland Los Angeles, San Bernardino and Riverside counties. But the Los Angeles basin clearly is winning its war on air pollution, EPA and state smog officials say. The San Joaquin Valley is not.

Although Valley regulators have adopted many of the same smog-reducing tactics as Southern California, metropolitan Sacramento and the Bay Area, they haven't seen nearly the same progress.

That's mostly because the Valley doesn't get as much ocean breeze to sweep out the filth.

The EPA money will support research on the health effects of particle pollution. That's the aerosol of fine bits of soot from vehicles, wood smoke from burning of orchard and vineyard clippings, chemicals from pesticides and fertilizers and, increasingly, emissions from wastes of dairy cows, numbering more than 2.5 million in the Valley.

A chief goal of the research is to answer scientific questions that help federal and state regulators find better ways to reduce the pollution.

"This should help us know what to attack first," said Jerry Martin, spokesman for the state Air Resources Board.

"We don't have a good understanding of how much is being emitted, how it affects public health and what we can do to reduce emissions as effectively as possible," Martin said.

Many studies have linked the windblown specks - especially from fossil fuel combustion - to decreased breathing capacity, higher absenteeism from work and school, increased hospital admissions for heart and lung problems, and deaths.

Because the particles are so small - less than 1/60th the width of a human hair - they can be inhaled deep into the lungs to aggravate asthma and worsen other respiratory disease. They also can travel from the lungs through the bloodstream to the heart, where they can trigger a stroke or heart attack.

But scientists remain perplexed as to exactly what it is about these tiny particles that causes the harm.

"We don't know what these particles are doing that is causing all this havoc," said Anthony Wexler, who will direct the campus's new San Joaquin Valley Aerosol Health Effects Center.

UC Davis will be one of five new air pollution research centers sharing a combined \$40 million in EPA grant money over the the next five years.

The Davis center will combine the expertise of more than a dozen atmospheric scientists, veterinary researchers, chemists, physicians and engineers. Wexler, a UC Davis professor of mechanical and aeronautical engineering, said he will analyze the physical traits of the particles.

Scientists plan to expose cultures of cells and tissues and laboratory animals, including primates, to Valley air pollutants, said Kent Pinkerton, a professor at the university's veterinary school and co-director of the new research center.

Together, the researchers hope to identify the precise characteristics of the particles that promote the onset of disease, especially in children, Pinkerton said.

The others sharing the grant are Johns Hopkins, Harvard, the University of Rochester and a joint center in Los Angeles run by USC and UCLA.

Bad air warnings likely this winter

Air district lowers threshold for issuing wintertime Spare the Air Tonight warnings

From Staff Reports

Tri-Valley Herald, Wednesday Nov. 16, 2005

Spare-the-air warnings aren't just for summer anymore.

Air regulators this week kicked off a revised winter air quality season with promises of a lower triggering point for the district's wintertime Spare the Air Tonight advisories.

The program, started in 1991, is aimed at curbing use of wood-burning stoves and fireplaces, which produce tremendous amounts of extremely fine particles that get trapped deep in the lungs, contributing to asthma.

As in the past, Bay Area residents will be asked not to fire up the hearth or stove on certain calm, cold nights. The lower threshold likely means the region will face more alerts this winter than in the past.

The last Spare the Air Tonight advisory came three years ago.

"Small particle pollution is so harmful, especially for children, the elderly and those with respiratory ailments," said Luna Salaver, spokeswoman for the Bay Area Air Quality Management District. "We want to be more proactive and protective."

The district will issue an alert if particulate pollution is expected to become unhealthy for "sensitive" groups - children, the elderly, those with asthma or similar ailments. The old standard, in contrast, required air pollution levels to threaten the general population before a warning could be issued.

Unlike summer Spare the Air alerts, there is no free morning commute during a Spare the Air Tonight alert. And unlike summer smog, which peaks in the late afternoon, winter pollution is highest at night and early morning. On calm nights, cold air sinks to the ground, trapping pollutants.

For more information on the Spare the Air Tonight program, visit <http://www.sparetheair.org> or call 1-800-HELP-AIR for a free woodburning handbook.

Experts fear traffic woes with raceway

By Chris Collins

Merced Sun-Star, Wednesday, Nov. 16, 2005

Traffic, noise and air pollution.

Those are the three biggest issues raised about the proposed Riverside Motorsports Park in one of Merced County's largest and most-extensive environmental reports ever.

The 3,200-page document rivals all other environmental summaries for privately funded project proposals in the county's history, said Planning Director Bill Nicholson.

Inside its two volumes, the report says the raceway, proposed for land just north of former Castle Air Force base, will likely clog traffic throughout the county during any of the eight to 10 major events the park would host each year.

Traffic north of the Atwater raceway would be hardest hit because most raceway fans would come from northern cities.

Congestion would swell in southern parts of the county as well, thanks to Fresno eventgoers, Nicholson said. It would be most noticeable in Merced, he said.

"The biggest issue is traffic," Nicholson said.

During regular events -- such as concerts or smaller-scale races -- there would still be traffic problems, but much less significant, said James Holland, a county planner.

"It would be nothing on a scale on what could occur on regional events," he said.

The traffic influx during the park's major events would violate county congestion standards, so the developers are asking the county board of supervisors to make an exception to its rule.

If it does, the raceway said it will have workers out on the streets during the main events to help direct traffic.

Still, there would be some frustration, Nicholson said.

"It's going to be somewhat controlled and managed," he said. "But we're more worried about the people who are not going to the race."

If supervisors don't make a traffic exception for the raceway, the developers will have to spend millions of dollars to improve area roads before it can open its tracks.

Nicholson said concerns about noise at the raceway are legitimate, but may be overblown by some.

"It's not as broad as the city of Atwater being overrun by noise," he said. "That's not the finding of the (environmental report)."

A high-security prison next to the proposed raceway would get an earful of cheering crowds and revved-up engines, Nicholson said.

A nearby Foster Farms ranch has also complained that the noise may disturb its chickens. There are also nine residences in the area.

The report found that air quality would suffer if the raceway is constructed -- but not because of high-powered engines blowing out combusted fuel. The increased traffic, Holland said, would be the biggest contributor.

"Race cars burn fuel very efficiently compared to passenger vehicles," he said.

Nicholson noted that any development project in the Valley contributes to air pollution.

In all, the report found 18 environmental and traffic problems the raceway would create, regardless of what it did to try and alleviate them.

Holland said any development -- even a new house -- would raise at least one or two problems.

But a 1,200-acre entertainment center that could attract up to 50,000 fans obviously generates many more concerns, he said.

Holland said of the extensive report: "I think it reflects the scale of the project."

Racetrack Backers Expect Fight

By David Chircop

Merced Sun-Star, Wednesday, Nov. 16, 2005

The fate of Riverside Motorsports Park, like so many other issues these days, could be decided in court.

For racing fans and some businesses, the proposed 1,200-acre motorsports complex represents a gold mine for the local economy, a huge gain for recreation and a magnet for tourism.

Opponents see it as a detriment to the area, potentially clogging roads and adding more smog to already unhealthy air.

A week after an exhaustive environmental impact study was released on the complex, it's still a wedge issue.

"We're in it for the long haul," said Tom Grave, a retired educator and spokesman for Citizens Against the Raceway.

Grave and several county residents formed the opposition group to fight what it calls a quality-of-life battle.

"Are we willing to sell out the health of our people for some economic gain?" he said. "Fifty years from now, somebody's going to say 'How did you let this happen?'"

Grave acknowledges that he hasn't had time to delve deep into the report's findings, but said he is distressed over significant and unavoidable impact to air quality.

"If people really knew what was in store there would be wholesale opposition to this project," he said.

The study released Monday details Riverside's potential adverse impacts on water, traffic, noise and air pollution, as well as the conversion of agricultural land.

Riverside CEO John Condren said the park shouldn't generate idling traffic because it would be served by four access roads. Staggered event times also would cut back on the amount of traffic and pollution.

"The traffic management plan will provide for a consistent traffic-free flow of vehicles in and out of the site," he said.

He also said the park would keep more people in the county on weekends, cutting back more on air pollution.

"If Mr. Grave feels different, then that's his right," he said. "There are countless studies that would prove him wrong."

Condren said his company has spent more than \$1 million on environmental studies, and doesn't plan on abandoning the project now.

In the meantime, he said he has assembled a legal team to fight any environmental challenges.

"It's good business practice and common sense that you want to be prepared for any legal challenge, and we are," he said.

Diana Westmoreland Pedrozo, executive director of the Merced County Farm Bureau, said her group should come out with a statement on the environmental report in the coming weeks.

In August, Farm Bureau members drove tractors to a county supervisor's meeting to protest a proposed 290-acre golf course and RV park in Planada.

The group said it was concerned the project would encourage leapfrog development on prime agricultural land.

Supervisors struck down that plan in a 3-2 reverse of a May ruling by the county planning commission.

Following that victory, the Farm Bureau sent a special edition of Merced County Farm News to households registered to vote in the county.

Westmoreland Pedrozo's brother-in-law, Supervisor John Pedrozo, was among those who voted to reject the project.

"Probably that's the only thing that's gone our way," said Westmoreland Pedrozo. "It's a continual battle to maintain a balance between the needs of a community and our natural resources."

Gates buys into Fresno ethanol company

The \$84 million investment will help build new plants

By Dale Kasler -- Bee Staff Writer

Sacramento Bee, Wednesday, Nov. 16, 2005

Here's more evidence there's a market for ethanol production in California: Bill Gates wants a piece of the action.

The Microsoft Corp. founder's investment company, Cascade Investment LLC of Kirkland, Wash., has agreed to invest \$84 million in Pacific Ethanol Inc., the Fresno-based ethanol-production company chaired by former California Secretary of State Bill Jones.

Pacific Ethanol, which announced the investment Tuesday, said Cascade is buying \$84 million worth of preferred stock. The shares can be converted into common stock.

The investment represents "a real endorsement of our business strategy," Pacific Ethanol Chief Executive Officer Neil Koehler said. "They decided there's a real future in ethanol."

The proceeds will be spent finishing Pacific Ethanol's first plant, in Madera, and working on four other plants the company expects to build on the West Coast.

Officials with Cascade couldn't be reached for comment.

California uses about a quarter of the ethanol produced in the United States but relies on imports from the Midwest for practically all of its supply. Pacific Ethanol is one of a small number of companies trying to create a home-state production industry.

A new federal law doubles the amount of ethanol to be used nationally by 2012. But a wrinkle in the law might decrease the amount used in California because it no longer would require ethanol use in regions with poor air quality.

Nevertheless, California ethanol advocates said they believe the state will continue to be a heavy ethanol consumer.

The corn-based product is used as a fuel additive. Some critics say it can make gasoline more expensive and, during summer months, can worsen air quality. But ethanol's backers say it's a clean-burning product that cuts the cost of gas.

In a separate announcement Tuesday, Pacific Ethanol said it lost \$922,000 in the third quarter with sales of \$26.4 million. The company lost \$784,000 with sales of \$829,000 a year earlier.

Pacific Ethanol's stock closed Tuesday at \$10.10 a share, up \$1.11, on the Nasdaq stock market.

Workshops explore ways to make walking in city easier

Experts seek out obstacles to foot traffic

By Jillian Daley, Staff writer

Visalia Times-Delta, Wednesday, Nov 16, 2005

Dorothy Osak cares about the way Visalia is planned.

And Osak cares about her health.

"For me, being able to walk, being able to move, it helps me feel better," said Osak, a volunteer with the city's environmental committee.

So she decided to go for a walk downtown Tuesday as part of one of eight Walkable Communities workshops in the county this week. Others have been held in Dinuba, Lindsay and Farmersville, and others are planned for Tulare, Exeter, Earlimart and Porterville this week.

Tulare County Association of Governments planner Scott Cochran organized the workshops, which are aimed at showing community leaders how to make their cities pedestrian friendly. Cochran invited city and county personnel, health organizations, the general public, school district officials and other community leaders.

To lead the workshop, Cochran brought in experts from the National Center for Bicycling and Walking in Bethesda, Md.

Chauncey said his group was established in the mid-1970s, but interest in creating pedestrian-friendly communities has increased recently.

"Interest has grown as more and more people are concerned about obesity, physical exercise, [air quality](#), safety, economics, urban sprawl and losing farmland," he said.

Osak said for her it's not just about feeling better.

"It's cheaper to walk," she said, rather than drive, even though gas prices have dipped down to about \$2.60 per gallon in Visalia.

It's also about safety. Children are put in danger having to walk in the street when no sidewalk is available.

Bob Chauncey, who has been involved in events like this throughout the nation, said these workshops can be catalysts.

"We get people talking, listening, and it doesn't take long before someone says: The mayor ought to know this," Chauncey said.

He'd be more than happy to come back to address the Visalia City Council, he said.

Some ideas discussed:

The need for wider sidewalks so people can walk two abreast.

Keeping parking away from street corners because a large truck parked at the corner can block oncoming traffic's view of pedestrians.

Robin Libbee of Visalia said cuts in the curbs for wheelchairs downtown don't tend to face cross walks, and instead point diagonally into the street, making it harder for the blind woman to get around and over the curb, even with her guide dog, Gittle.

"One of the things we want to make sure of is everything is disability-friendly," said Libbee, a disabilities consultant.

Cochran said downtown is an older community, so it tends to be friendlier to foot traffic, but areas like Mooney Boulevard are terrible for walking. He said access between stores in some shopping centers encourages driving from store to store rather than walking.

It's harder to alter what has already been built, he said, but there's a chance to influence future projects.

Making master plans for subdivisions provides the opportunity to connect neighborhoods, parks and markets, which improves foot traffic access, he said.

Cochran said he would like to incorporate ideas for pedestrian access into plans for the east downtown expansion. The expansion is a 20-year plan encompassing an area within Mineral King Avenue, Murray and Goshen Avenues, Bridge Street and Ben Maddox Way.

Adam Ennis, a city design engineer, said he plans to use what he learned Tuesday in future projects.

"There's a lot of little things in a design that can make a difference," Ennis said.

[\(Old River Ranch has entered into a development contract with the District\)](#)

New building projects inundate city council

Local developers propose more than 5 square miles of houses, parks, retail space

Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, Nov. 16, 2005

Two of the biggest land developments in Kern County history go before the Bakersfield City Council tonight.

The council, swamped by proposals for new building, had to call a special meeting just to make a decision on the 13 projects in the development pipeline.

Two of those projects waded to the forefront of tonight's agenda: the Rosedale Ranch and Old River Ranch projects.

Nearly everything else on the agenda is a traditional 40 to 80 acre development proposal.

But together, the two "Ranch" projects propose to cover 3,488 acres -- more than 5 square miles -- of suburban Bakersfield with homes, shops, apartments and industrial businesses.

Old River Ranch

Local builders Mike and Greg Petrini have pulled together 1,833 acres of land on Old River Road south of Panama Lane -- the southwestern edge of the city.

They want to build 7,000 homes, 1,000 apartments and 877,000 square feet of commercial space, all linked together with tree-lined streets, walking paths and parks.

Rosedale Ranch

Keith Gardiner used to play along the two palm-tree-lined avenues that are the heart of the 1,655-acre Rosedale Ranch when he was a child.

Now the northwest Bakersfield farmer is turning developer and converting the land he grew up on into a small city.

The Ranch will be between Jenkins Road and the Burlington Northern rail lines along the south side of 7th Standard Road.

It will offer area residents about 13,000 jobs as well as a pedestrian-friendly community with parks and shopping for both neighborhoods and the larger community.

Thinning the groves

LA Times, Wednesday, Nov. 16, 2005

The U.S. Forest Service's plans for the 328,000-acre Giant Sequoia National Monument in the Southern Sierra have sparked a legal battle over the best way to restore its 34 sequoia groves, which contain the largest -- and some of the oldest -- trees in the world. Critics say the Forest Service's policy of putting out wildfires has hurt sequoias by allowing a buildup of undergrowth that robs the trees of space and light and also thwarts the natural wildfire cycle they need to reproduce. The Forest Service says it must first thin the groves mechanically before it can reintroduce fire. But next door in Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks, managers have relied almost entirely on deliberately set, controlled burns to thin sequoia groves since 1964. Here is a look at the issue.

*

Giant Sequoias need fire

- Fire is a requirement for giant sequoia seed germination.
- Intense heat causes cones to release their millions of seeds.
- Fire also produces mineral-rich soil for seed protection and germination.
- Snow covering the ground waters the seeds when it melts in the spring.
- Burned areas offer a better mix of sun and moisture that seedlings need.

Fire scars on sequoia trunks are evidence of the frequent wildfires before 1905. Sequoia bark is very thick and has tannins that protect it from disease and fire.

*

Prescription for a burn

In Sequoia National Park, prescribed burns are five-year projects that build on each other like puzzle pieces. Weather conditions that disperse smoke away from populated areas are favored on the day of a burn. Moisture in plants is also monitored -- drier fuels burn cleaner and produce less smoke, but fires in dry growth may be harder to contain.

1. On a site with natural firebreaks, such as roads or a river, a down-wind backfire is set. This creates a "black line," or burned area.
2. Small fires are set in succession with torches. They burn in the direction of the wind, toward the burned area. A firefighting crew keeps fires contained.
3. The small fires meet the burned area, completing the prescribed burn. Small trees, shrubs and decaying vegetation have been reduced by at least 50%, aiding sequoia growth.

*

The controversy

- The monument bars timber production, saying trees can be cut only "if clearly needed for ecological restoration and maintenance or public safety." The Forest Service thinning plan nonetheless allows trees as large as 30 inches in diameter to be logged -- including century-old sequoias.
- Responding to a lawsuit brought by conservation groups, a federal judge on Monday halted logging on more than 1,000 acres in the monument. The same judge stopped a similar logging project in the monument two months ago. The California attorney general has also filed a suit to stop logging.
- The Forest Service says logging is necessary because growth in the groves is so dense that prescribed burns could get out of control and would add to San Joaquin Valley air pollution problems.

-- Critics say equipment could compact soil and damage groves, removing large trees would hurt the Pacific fisher, and logging would violate monument protections.

*

How mechanical thinning works

-- Heavy equipment clears brush and cuts trees. Grinding machines can reduce a whole tree to wood chips in a few minutes.

-- Downed trees and other debris are transported out of the forest on skidders to flat-bed trucks. Debris is burned to reduce fire hazard.

Excavator machine is often used to thin in plantations and stands with small-diameter trees, such as young white firs.

*

Pacific Fisher

Fisher habitat remains a contested issue in logging plans put forward by the Forest Service.

-- Nocturnal relative of the mink, otter and marten; weasel family.

-- Found in hollow trees or rotting logs in old-growth forests.

-- Fur trapping and logging shrank the range of fishers.

Sources: ESRI; TeleAtlas; U.S. Geological Survey; U.S. Forest Service; National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior: Fire and Fuels Management Plan; Florida Department of Forestry; Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks website; Giant Sequoia National Monument -- Final Environmental Impact Statement.

Owens Plan May Expand

Pollution control officials say the DWP's dust-mitigation program should grow

By Patrick McGreevy, Times Staff Writer
LA Times, Wednesday, Nov. 16, 2005

Having already budgeted \$415 million to reduce dust in a 30-square-mile area of the Owens Valley, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power has been notified that an additional nine square miles may need to be addressed, officials said Tuesday.

Amid concern over the escalating cost of the project, which was originally budgeted at \$120 million, the DWP board decided Tuesday to seek bids to replace the firm serving as construction manager, CH2M Hill.

The DWP, which is required to undertake dust mitigation to address problems caused by decades of diverting water from the Owens Valley, could face an additional \$100 million or more in costs if the area is expanded, officials said.

"Anything that involves a widening and broadening of the project is disappointing," said DWP Board President Mary Nichols, who noted the decision is not final.

Experts for the Great Basin Unified Air Pollution Control District in Bishop concluded that an additional nine square miles appear to need dust mitigation to bring levels down to those acceptable to the Environmental Protection Agency, according to Theodore Schade, air pollution control officer for the district.

"We have a preliminary determination that it is nine square miles more. It has to be mitigated," Schade said.

The DWP may present scientific evidence to show that all or part of the additional area does not require mitigation measures, Schade said, adding, "They appear to have some reasonable claims."

With two-thirds of the dust-reduction project complete, including the planting of grass and diversion of water into the valley, there has been a 70% reduction in the number of days when dust levels exceed federal limits, according to Robert Rozanski, chief administrative officer of the DWP.

Rozanski said the DWP is hopeful that it can show no additional square miles should be added, "to the extent the work we are doing brings us into compliance."

Much of the increase in the budget for the program has come from expanding the area covered by the dust-reduction measures.

Still, DWP board members have questioned change orders and contract amendments that have increased payments to CH2M Hill to more than \$100 million.

On Tuesday, board member Nick Patsaouras said it was a conflict to have CH2M Hill serve both as designer of the project and the entity making sure the project is on track.

"This is in line with industry practice where the designer is not the construction manager," Patsaouras said. "I think it's our responsibility to make it right."

The board had previously decided to conduct an audit of the firm's work.

Construction management for the fifth phase, which is about to start, is expected to cost less than \$10 million, Rozanski said. The firm was to oversee the work of Barnard Construction Co., which recently received a \$103-million contract to build additional dust-reduction systems.

"We put ourselves in a vulnerable position when we rely on the same company that designs a project to oversee the construction," Nichols said.

Environmental Report on Gas Plant Sparks Heated Debate

By Deborah Schoch, Times Staff Writer
LA Times, Tuesday, Nov. 15, 2005

Opponents of a proposed liquefied natural gas terminal in Long Beach lambasted a newly released environmental review at a public hearing Monday, calling the project too dangerous to build near the center of the region's second-largest city.

But union representatives and other project supporters contended that such safety concerns are exaggerated. And others called the plant a source of cleaner-burning fuel that would help combat air pollution.

More than 150 people attended the first of four public hearings on the project's draft federal and state environmental impact report. A total of 36 people spoke, divided almost evenly between supporters and critics.

The \$450-million liquefied natural gas terminal has been proposed by a Mitsubishi Corp. subsidiary and ConocoPhillips for a pier at the Port of Long Beach, less than two miles west of the city's newly gentrified downtown and tourist attractions such as the Queen Mary.

The terminal would handle annual imports of nearly 5 million tons of LNG, which would be delivered every three days in tankers the length of three football fields. The liquefied gas would be stored in two 160,000-cubic-meter tanks and piped inland in gaseous form to heat homes and for other uses.

LNG is natural gas consisting largely of methane that is chilled so that its volume is reduced. It is transported by tanker from gas fields in Australia, Indonesia, Algeria and other countries.

Mitsubishi struck a deal with the Long Beach port in June 2003 for exclusive three-year rights to develop the project.

The project has deeply divided Long Beach residents. Some favor it as a source of fuel and jobs while others fear it would pose too great a risk to residents, seaports and tourism.

On Monday, critics said they fear that the terminal would create a vulnerable target for terrorists within the Los Angeles-Long Beach seaport complex, the nation's largest.

Terrorists could wreak havoc with U.S. trade if they were to aim an airliner at the LNG terminal and create a catastrophic fire, Long Beach attorney William McKinnon said. "Basically, we're talking about a knife in the heart of the American economy," he said.

But some backers said that an LNG terminal could help reduce the region's dependence on trucks burning diesel fuel, which create cancer-causing emissions. Dr. James Baker, a Harbor-UCLA Medical Center pathologist, said he supports the terminal for that reason.

The project also caused a deep rift within the City Council, which voted 5 to 4 in June to continue talks with Tokyo-based Mitsubishi and ConocoPhillips despite opposition from residents of west Long Beach, where the terminal would be located. The terminal is expected to be one of the dominant issues in what are shaping up to be hotly contested April 2006 mayoral and council elections.

The controversy in Long Beach is being echoed in some other U.S. coastal cities where LNG terminals have been proposed, reflecting a surge of interest nationally in importing natural gas from overseas.

Although four plants have been proposed for the California coast, the two considered most likely to be built are the on-shore Long Beach project and one proposed by BHP Billiton, an Australian firm, 14 miles off the Ventura County coast.

A final environmental report on the proposed Long Beach plant is to be done by spring.

[Merced Sun-Star and Sacramento Bee, Editorial, Wednesday, Nov. 16, 2005](#)

Our View: Breathing a sigh of relief

Work on several fronts has helped clear out pollution to the point that we no longer have the worst air

For the first time in six years, the air we breathe was not listed as the worst in the nation.

When annual violations were counted at the end of smog season in October, Los Angeles regained that shameful ranking. Even though it had fewer air quality violations than the previous year, the South Coast Air Basin still had the country's dirtiest air.

Meanwhile, the San Joaquin Valley, the air basin that stretches down the center of the state from Stockton through Merced and down to Bakersfield, recorded only 72 violations for the year, the fewest since regulators began measuring in the 1970s. In part, weather explains the dramatic drop. A cool, wet and windy spring helped keep smog levels down. The Valley had fewer wildfires in the summer.

But public awareness and government action played an important role as well. Despite opposition from the powerful agricultural lobby, state Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, pushed through a law two years ago that allowed California to regulate pollution from farms for the first time. We're seeing the impact.

Some 6,400 farms have filed conservation management plans detailing how much pollution they generate and how they will reduce emissions. Changes in tilling practices, wetting down dirt roads and reducing speeds on those roads have cut the amount of choking dust farms send into the air. Equally important, modern motors and electric pumps replaced some 2,000 outdated, pollution-spewing diesel pumps. (Pumps work 24 hours a day, seven days a week and contribute substantially to the smog in the region.)

As public awareness grew, ordinary citizens, businesses and government helped clean the air as well. Valley smog check programs are among the most extensive in the state. As a result, cars and private truck fleets are cleaner. So are street sweepers, school buses and police cars.

And the Valley has been a pioneer in regulating wood-burning fireplaces. When weather conditions are bad, the use of fireplaces is discouraged and on the worse days banned altogether. Violators face fines of up to \$1,000.

Serious challenges remain. Our children still have among the highest rates of childhood asthma in the country. Increasing development and growing auto and truck traffic continue to add to emissions. But public awareness is high, and progress is evident.

[Modesto Bee, Letter to the Editor, Wednesday, Nov. 16, 2005](#)

Rep. Pombo is anti-environment

Rep. Richard Pombo is a Republican from Tracy, and he is extremely anti-environment. Recently, he has proposed selling 15 of our national parks, and opening up the California coastline and the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for drilling. The refuge will save you about one cent on your gas price in 20 to 30 years. He sponsored a new Endangered Species Act that essentially is pro-developer and pretty much guts the original act, and he even supports allowing more toxic mercury in the air.

Surprise, surprise, his largest campaign contributors are oil and gas and developers. He even has a political action committee that has received \$400,000 from those contributors. This same person has the backing of Japan's whaling industry. Now that's quite an endorsement. Our own Rep. George Radanovich, R-Mariposa, agrees with this person.

I hope this opens up a few eyes and people look at their representatives in a new and distinctly bad light.

DIANE KROEZE, Modesto